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Student number: 3318-245-0

I declare that

**Fundamental Concepts of Limba Traditional Religion and its Effects on Limba Christianity and Vice Versa in Sierra Leone in the Past Three Decades** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....  
SIGNATURE

(Rev. PS Conteh)

.....  
DATE

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## SUMMARY

This study is the product, chiefly, of fieldwork, undertaken in Sierra Leone, which sought to interview and experience contemporary Limba religio-cultural practices. Using a systematic approach, the goal was to provide a broader understanding of Limba religion, as well as to discover the effect of Limba religiosity, and the tenacity with which the Limba hold to their culture and religion, on the National Pentecostal Limba Church (NPLC) over the past three decades.

The study begins with an introduction, which outlines its objectives and structure, the research methods, and its general outline. This is followed by a basic introduction to the socio-history of the Limba people, their origin, environment, language, politics, economy and other socio-cultural characteristics, in order to provide an understanding of the background on which their religion is formed.

The heart of the study is a detailed examination of Limba religious beliefs and their intersection with Christianity. It includes a definition of Limba religion and its components. This seeks to identify the current state of Limba religion amidst the changes it has experienced and continues to experience as a result of internal and external influences, and to provide a template for this study, an analysis of the Limba belief in a supreme creator God whom they call *Kanu Masala*, his epithets, attributes and activities, Limba worship and worship methods, the Limba understanding of the spirit world, humankind, sin and salvation, and the roles of sacred specialists.

The study concludes with an examination of the causes of the

tenacious loyalty with which some Limba Christians hold to their traditional religious beliefs and practices, their reluctance to part with them, and the effects of their dual religiosity on the NPLC, as well as the church's response, and the resulting reciprocal effects over the past three decades in Sierra Leone. This study fills a gap in the extant literature about the ethno-theological landscape of Sierra Leone, and provides a detailed study on the intersection of African Traditional Religion and Christianity.

## KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Abortion; African Traditional Religion; Ancestral spirits; Angels; Autochthonous; Chief; Chiefdom; Christianity; Christian Limba; Culture; Dialects; Diviners; Dual religionist; Ecology; Forgiveness; Freetown; God Above; God Below; Herbalists; Limba Christian; *Kanu*; Libation; Limba; Limba Religion; National Pentecostal Limba Church; Non-ancestral spirits; Offences; Paramount Chief; Prayers; Priests; Provinces; Sacred Specialists; Sacrifice; Salvation; Supreme Being; Syncretism; Sin; Sierra Leone; Spirits; Tenacious; Western Area; Witchcraft

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Like many African Christians,<sup>1</sup> most Limba converts to Christianity are tenaciously loyal to the heritage of their traditional religious beliefs and are very reluctant to give them up for their new found religion.<sup>2</sup> Although there are Limba religio-cultural elements and values which find parallels in the Bible<sup>3</sup> and which have been adopted by the Limba Church, the church has maintained a hostile attitude toward traditional Limba practices. In sermons, teachings, discussions and songs, the Limba Church continues to dismiss Limba traditional practices as heathenism. This thesis provides a systematic study of the fundamental concepts of Limba traditional religion, their continuity into the National Pentecostal Limba Church (NPLC)<sup>4</sup> and the reciprocal effects between these systems in the past three decades. It seeks to provide a contemporary study of Limba

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<sup>1</sup>The issue of African Christians clinging tenaciously to their customs and beliefs and the reluctance to part with them and the resulting conflicts with Christianity is well documented. For example, the edited works of Fashole-Luke *et al* (1978); Olupona (1991, 2000); Olupona & Nyang (1993) and the individual publications of Taylor (1963); McKenzie (1976); Sanneh (1983) and Kailing (1994) have all discussed this issue and provided us with impressive bibliographies. In the Sierra Leonean context, Ajai Crowther's inter-religious encounters with the early settlers provide us with information about the tension between traditional African worldview and that of missionary Christianity as far back as the nineteenth century (McKenzie 1976 & Sanneh 1983: 83-89).

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:106); Ottenberg (1988a:442); Taylor (1963:20).

<sup>3</sup>See Mbiti (1977; 1986; 1989b) for the comparison of African cultural elements and values between ATR and Christianity.

<sup>4</sup>The NPLC is the newest, largest and only separatist/independent Limba Church

religion and the causes of dual religiosity<sup>5</sup> among Limba Christians.<sup>6</sup> It will also examine the attitudes of Christian Limbas<sup>7</sup> about this dual religiosity in the context of the NPLC, and the resulting positive and negative effects thereof.

In this chapter, I intend to outline the objectives, and structure of this study. I will then provide background information to the advent of Christianity into the Limba homeland and its effects leading to the present situation of the NPLC. This background study will be followed by explanations of the current academic context, my interest in, and as well as the research methods, a chapter by chapter outline, and a conclusion.

### **1.1 Objectives of this study**

This study, then, is intended to significantly advance our knowledge, in the field of systematic theology, concerning Limba religious beliefs, practices and teachings. It will also provide a detailed account of how the traditional Limba worldview persists in the NPLC, and will compare and contrast these elements with the theology of NPLC in particular, as evidenced in their preaching, teachings and songs, and with Judeo-Christian traditions and teachings in general. This approach will enable us to determine the areas of intersection between Traditional African theology and Christianity, and to map out possible

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to which the majority of Limba Christians and Christian Limbas belong.

<sup>5</sup>Dual religiosity is a common phenomenon in Africa where many converts to either Christianity or Islam tenaciously retain elements of their traditional origins (Schreiter 1985:145). Converts to Christianity are expected to put "all other religious systems aside, but in these instances significant parts or even the entirety of a second system is maintained" (Schreiter 1985:145).

<sup>6</sup>This term refers to those who practice both systems - Traditional Religion and Christianity.

<sup>7</sup>This refers to those dedicated Christians who reject traditional religious practices outright.

strategies for mutual understanding between Limba Christians and the NPLC.

## **1.2 Structure**

In chapters three through ten (the heart of the study), the introduction to each topic will be followed by a brief general view of the NPLC's position on the subject. From the view point of systematic theology and using a social-functionalist approach, each tenet of Limba religion will be examined and compared with the resulting response/teachings of the NPLC where the NPLC has a clear teaching, and in most cases the Judeo-Christian/Biblical perspective (the basis of the NPLC beliefs and practices in Sierra Leone).

## **1.3 The arrival of Christianity in Limba country and its effects**

Limba religion is the indigenous religion of the Limba people. In that regard, it could be said that Limba religion like most African Religion "emerged from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present generation" and is "being practised today in various forms and intensities" (Awolalu 1991:111) in the Limba homeland and settlements. Even long after their conversion to Christianity; Limba religious worldview persists in the lives of the Christian converts.

The beginning of Christian missionary work in Sierra Leone, by the Roman Catholic Jesuits from Portugal, in September 1605 (Alie 1990:101-02; Olson 1969:201-203)), paved the way for many later (Olson 1969:67-212; Parrinder 1969:124-26; Fyle 1981:19; Sanneh 1983:60-83; Alie 1990:101-10) and missionary endeavours, including contemporary efforts. The first Christian missionary

efforts in Limba homeland were made by the Wesleyan Methodist Society (WMS) in 1878, and failed (Alie 1990:109; Olson 1969:94; Yambasu 2002:34). Undeterred by the setback, the Society sent the Reverends Matthew Godman and Jope to the Thonko Limba area in 1879 "to explore the possibility of establishing a mission there" (Alie 1990:109). Positive prospects were discovered and the Reverend James Booth arrived in Fourecaria in March 1880 starting work with the support of the Thonko Limba king and sub-chiefs (Alie 1990:109).<sup>8</sup> By mid 1884 he had translated parts of the Bible into Limba. Although it was only a small minority of the Thonko Limba people that embraced Christianity, "their influence on the majority" of the population "was considerable" (Alie 1990:109). For example the Christians succeeded in influencing the authorities to pass a law "that anyone found working on the Sabbath should be severely punished" (Alie 1990:109). This marks the beginning of the struggle between Limba culture and Christianity in Limba country. Ironically, the Reverend Booth later married a Temne woman according to the Temne cultural rites; this led to a falling out with his superiors and his eventual resignation. Nevertheless, WMS missionary work continued in the Thonko Limba area and it was later turned over to the American Wesleyan Methodist Church (AWM) in 1937 (Olson 1969:96). This brings us now to the AWM.

The AWM's first major missionary effort in the Limba homeland was started in 1889 (Olson 1969:69, 177).<sup>9</sup> The interest of the AWM in Northern Sierra Leone was motivated by several factors. First, only a few missionary societies had ventured beyond the coast. Second, the tribes in the interior provided better opportunities for missionary work because the effects of the old

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. Olson (1969:94).

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Alie (1990:109).

slave trade and of the liquor trafficking were less, and because the people governed themselves. Third, and perhaps most important, J. A. Cole, an educated Limba and a member of St. John's Church in Freetown, also a relative of a Limba paramount chief, specifically requested the AWM to come to Limba country (Olson 1969:177).

By 1910, "seven mission stations were opened and staffed by thirteen missionaries" working among the Limba, Temne and Loko ethnic groups (Olson 1969:179). The AWM method of evangelisation included education, medical work and "wide itineration" and by 1930, "462 people were converted, and 319 of them joined the church" (Olson 1969:179). The Limba people of Kamakwie at first resented Christianity until a missionary doctor in Mobai cured a respected man in their community who was dying. This amazing medical result motivated the people to listen to the gospel. Five years later, the AWM work in Kamakwie closed because of insufficient funds, the paucity of missionary staff and the death of the chief who had been patronising Christianity. The only missionary still stationed there was then moved to the boys' school at Binkolo (Olson 1969:179). Four main AWM mission stations at Kamakwie, Binkolo, Kamabai, and Bafodea (Olson 1969: 178; Finnegan 1965:106) remain today. This indicates that the mission in Kamakwie was resurrected later.

One thing that was evident when I visited these areas during my fieldwork is that, although the missions had been established in these Limba areas many years ago, the effects of Christianity are still limited in scope. The observation of Finnegan (1965:106) almost four decades ago that not too far from these mission stations "old rituals continue" and "the results of the Mission teaching, however effective locally, are not very evident on a



wider scale in the Limba religious belief and practice" is still accurate.

On the whole, Christianity did not thrive in the hinterland of Sierra Leone. By the end of the nineteenth century, a majority of the people were still unconverted. Several factors contributed to the lack of Christian missionary success:

(a) Islam was firmly entrenched in many areas in the interior, particularly in the north. And Islam was able to present itself, though also an immigrant religion, as an African religion, whereas Christianity always suffered from being the 'white man's religion'. (b) Christianity was not adapted to African society and it made heavy demands on the convert. For instance, admission into the Christian church involved arduous teaching and spiritual preparation of the catechist, who was required to abandon completely his old religion. (c) In addition to making conversion more difficult, Christianity also attacked the African way of life. For example, polygamy, slavery, magic, use of charms and initiation ceremonies were vehemently condemned. (d) Many people regarded Christianity as a disruptive force; this was largely why many missionaries were killed and their churches destroyed during the hut tax rising of 1898.<sup>10</sup>

The notion of Christianity as a white man's religion and a disruptive force, the condemnation of and demand for the abandonment of African religio-cultural practices are factors still responsible for the ongoing conflicts between the church and Sierra Leonean traditionalists both in the hinterland and the Western Area.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Alie (1990:110).

<sup>11</sup>In the Western Area during the nineteenth century, the Western missionaries were not the only ones condemning traditional practices as heathenism or Satanism. Ajai Crowther, an African clergyman was prominent in the attempt to eradicate traditional religion from the inhabitants of Freetown and the surrounding villages through his preaching, teaching and evangelization strategies. Evidence of his "complex attitude to other faiths, drawn from his own writings extending over half a century and more" is available in the work

It stands to reason that in Limba church denominations that still have a Western missionary presence, such as the AWM and the Assemblies of God (AOG) we would expect to find a prevalence of the Western missionaries' stances and ideologies because "mission-related churches are considered to have preserved the Christian message as it was embodied in Western missionary tradition" (Kailing 1994:489-90). An African separatist or independent church, however, should be "reared on its own indigenous roots, bearing fruit under the stimulus of its own environment and sustained by the proprietary labours of those it served," (Sanneh 1983:170)<sup>12</sup> therefore we do not expect to find these same elements in breakaway or independent Limba churches.<sup>13</sup> However, the NPLC, the church of our focus, more resembles the missionary churches in this regard. We shall now examine the present NPLC position.

#### **1.4 The situation of the NPLC**

The NPLC was established in 1950 by AOG missionaries from Springfield Missouri, USA (Conteh 2002:9-10). The NPLC separated<sup>14</sup> from the AOG in March 1965 two years after the Fort

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of McKenzie (1976) and his interaction with ATR is documented in Sanneh (1983: 83-89).

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Kailing (1994:490) and see also Jules-Rosette (1991:150) for the nature of separatist/independent churches.

<sup>13</sup>As missiologists/theologians strive to find common ground between African culture and Christianity, they are also faced with the task of finding strategies as to how to deal with the divisions between the "churches which are historically mission-related and those of the African Independent Church (AIC)" (Kailing 1994:489).

<sup>14</sup>Jules-Rosette (1991:150) identified three major types of new religious movements in Africa: (1) indigenous, or independent churches (2) separatist churches, and (3) neotraditional movements. He further traced five basic sources for the growth of new African religious movements:

- (1) The disappointment of local converts with the premises and outcomes of Christianity led to the growth of prophetic, messianic, and millenarian groups.
- (2) The translation of the Bible into local African vernaculars stimulated a reinterpretation

Street Church branch (which is now the church's headquarters) was built, because the pastor was accused of "having an extra-marital affair" (Conteh 2002:24). Because the separation of the NPLC from the AOG was on account of a moral issue and not a theological issue, the NPLC did not discard the teachings that they inherited from the AOG. Even now, four decades after the AOG missionaries left, the NPLC continues to follow and enforce AOG teachings.<sup>15</sup>

We know more about the tenets of AOG teachings through their work with the Kissi people in Koindu and the Kru immigrants in Freetown (Olson 1969:190-94). Moral requirements included monogamy and abstention from alcohol, smoking, secret society membership which was considered non-Christian and non-allegiance to God, and Sunday marketing because it is the Lord's Day (Olson 1969:191). The AOG enforced "a complete break with the past through the burning of medicine and charms...a symbol of complete rejection of the old way and of complete dependence upon God through Christ and the Holy Spirit...members were prohibited from using charms or making sacrifices" (Olson 1969:192). Except for Sunday marketing, the other teachings are exactly what you would presently find in the NPLC.

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of scripture and a spiritual renewal in Christian groups. (3) The perceived divisions in denominational Christianity and its failure to meet local needs influenced the rise of separatist churches and community-based indigenous churches. (4) The impotence of Western medicine in the face of personal problems, psychological disorders, epidemics, and natural disasters was a catalyst for concerns with spiritual healing in the new African religious movements. (5) The failure of mission Christianity to break down social and cultural barriers and generate a sense of community has led to the strengthening of social ties in small, sectarian groups (150-51).

<sup>15</sup>See Appendix A for the NPLC Statement of Faith, a document modified from the AOG Statement of Fundamental Truths.

The NPLC has no Western church affiliation but their adoption of Euro-American Christian attitudes is quite overwhelming. The NPLC like its AOG forebears, stresses the "aspects of discontinuity between Christianity and African cultures and traditional religion" to such an extent that they exclude "the aspects of continuity between Christianity" (Fashole-Luke 1978: 357) and Limba culture and traditional religion. It appears that the church condemns Limba religious beliefs and practices without proper evaluation, and substitutes "Western cultural and religious practices." This makes it difficult, if not "impossible for a person to be a Christian and remain genuinely and authentically an African" (Fashole-Luke 1978: 357). On the issue of the continued presence of Euro-American culture in the church one of the NPLC elders had this to say:

Our church for many years has been independently run by an indigenous staff. The white man left when we broke away from the Assemblies of God Mission from the US. If I am correct, our mission has had no missionary or western affiliation for the past 30 years or so. Why do we still talk about western influence in our churches, when we got rid of the missionaries several decades ago? Since their departure, what have we done to indigenise our church? I think it is time we stop talking about the white man's influence on our faith as a barrier to a successful dialogue with traditionalists. A majority of the branches we have today were founded by us and not by American missionaries. We had the opportunity to make members of these churches African-Christians, but we did not have the expertise to do the job. We brought to them the same message that we received from the white man. That is why traditionalists still see our Limba church the same as it was over 30 years ago only this time with an indigenous leadership. Most of our churches bought choir robes for the choir to look like western churches. Our pastors wear expensive robes and stoles to officiate. The problem has nothing to do with Christianity being a white man's religion, it has more to do with us Limba church leaders who lack the ability

to address and find amicable solutions to our problems.<sup>16</sup>

These strong words direct a challenge to NPLC Christian Limbas to stop blaming the white missionaries who have long since left the church to its own devices.

Apart from the continuation of Euro-American religious lifestyle, there is also the problem of the transmission of the Biblical message and theology as put forward by an interviewee:

Another thing I did not like was the reading of the Bible in English. Who is English in Limba church? Is there not a Limba Bible to read from? In fact, now that we have educated people who can write Limba very well, they should team up with specialists on biblical translation to retranslate our Limba Bible. If I went to the Limba Wesleyan or Limba Assemblies, and they were reading in English that would not have been difficult to understand, because they still have missionaries who attend their churches. But that is not the case with NPLC.<sup>17</sup>

It is, then, a positive indication that some of the NPLC leaders have begun to recognise the issues that are plaguing the relationship between Limba Christians and the church and to speak out about them.

The NPLC situation is analogous to that of the Christian Nigerians (Idowu 1965:22) in the sense that after forty years of

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<sup>16</sup>David Kallon (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown). This position was also buttressed by the head of the mission the Reverend Koroma when he said "We are guilty of promoting western type of Christianity in our churches. Our Freetown churches still make our choristers wear cassocks and surplices to sing. We have electronics organs and other western musical instruments. If we can interpret the gospel to include our people's culture like what the Muslims are doing, we are sure to resolve this problem at least half way through.

<sup>17</sup>Hamidu Mansaray (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown)

independent Christianity, the church has still been unable to develop a theology which bears the distinctive stamp of Limba thought and meditation. The theology of the NPLC, like that of the Nigerians is "book theology" (Idowu 1965:22); the church reads and accepts Euro-American theologies without critique. This approach shows that Christian Limbas "have not yet begun to do their own thinking and to grapple spiritually and intellectually with questions relating to the Christian faith" (Idowu 1965:22).

The strongest opposition to the persistence of traditional practices in the NPLC comes mostly from the spiritual leaders and the youths/young adults who strongly believe that traditional religiosity is satanic and must be condemned. One of the youths had this to say:

One thing that has become a stigma to us Limba church youths, is the idea that some of our church members still hang on to traditional religious worship. Many evangelical churches believe we are lost souls searching for salvation. The Bible tells that, "When anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creature, all the old has passed away and everything has become new." Our grandparents and parents should have been told during conversion what accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour meant.<sup>18</sup>

There is some mixed reaction regarding the handling of traditional practices within the NPLC. A majority of church elders and leaders hold themselves responsible for preventing traditionalists from making a full commitment to Christianity because of their maintenance and promotion of Euro-American brand of gospel, and lack of ability to find a solution to the tension between the church and traditionalists. The youths/young adults,

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<sup>18</sup>Hamusa Kargbo (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

however, are pressing very hard for the church to maintain a conservative Biblical standard, and to uphold the teachings that were inherited from the AOG.

Let us now turn our attention to more of the extant literature relevant to our study.

### **1.5 Present academic context**

Neither a systematic study of Limba Traditional Religion nor a publication on Limba Religion amid Christianity has ever been undertaken until now. The paucity of written sources on Limba Religion, and the complete absence of documented information on the duality of religion among Limba Christians in the NPLC, and the resulting conflicts between dualists and the Church, posed a challenge in pursuing this study. While the religious beliefs of certain Sierra Leonean ethnic groups<sup>19</sup> and many other African groups<sup>20</sup> have received significant amounts of attention from anthropologists, ethnologists and theologians, none of these groups have written much about Limba Religion. The observations of Finnegan (1965:107) about the dearth of published works on Limba religion almost four decades ago remain true.

Documented information found in historical, anthropological and ethnological works regarding Limba religion is limited in both quantity and scope. Finnegan's works on Limba religion, although they require some updating and more detail, are presently the best background resources for a general study on the Limba. In a general socio-economic study of the Limba Finnegan (1965:106-22),

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<sup>19</sup>For example Mende (Harris 1968 and Gittins 1987) and Kono (Parsons 1964) religions are fully published.

<sup>20</sup>Likewise, other African ethnic religions like Yoruba (Lucas 1948; Awolalu 1979); Nupe (Nadel 1954); Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1956); Tiv (Downes 1971) and

wrote a chapter on Limba religion in their historical homeland. Two years later, she published an abridged version of Limba religion (1967:19-24).

Ottenberg (1984:437-54) analysed the similarities and differences between the impacts made by Islam and Christianity on the Wara-Wara Limba people of Bafodea. In another work on the same people, Ottenberg (1988a:437-65) examines their major visual and performing arts and explores changes they have undergone over the past century as a result of external religious and ethnic forces.

A common thread in the above publications is their focus on Limba religion as practised in the hinterland. Because of their own unique focuses, little or no attention is given to the large number of Limba living in metropolitan areas like Freetown the capital city of Sierra Leone, which has the largest settlement of Limba outside their historical homeland, and where all the various dialects of Limba are found.

On the issue of the persistence of Limba religion into Limba Christianity and the reciprocal effects thereof, my information is based exclusively on fieldwork data. The situation may be different from culture to culture, but inter-religious encounters between Christianity and traditional culture is not unique to the Limba. For many centuries now, the gospel has been encountering different cultures of the world. This was the challenge in the life and theology of the early church. For as the church was "led to universalise (Acts 1:8) and extend the gospel message to all nations (Acts 10:34-35; 15:7-11), the apostles encountered, as a matter of course, peoples of different religious backgrounds

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several others are fully documented.



(Acts 10-15; 17:16-32)."<sup>21</sup> The relationships between Christianity, its Jewish heritage, and Gentiles were a point of major controversy in the early church. This struggle is also evident in the Pauline epistles. Many centuries later, the relationships between the gospel and cultures of the world are still a matter of intense debate.

In Africa, the Euro-American missionary brand of Christianity and its insensitivity to traditional practices has provoked diverse reactions from both Africans and non-Africans alike. It is the main cause of the rise of African/black theology<sup>22</sup> and the call by African Christians for a moratorium.<sup>23</sup> In the past three to four decades, several books, edited works and articles about the relationship between African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Christianity have been published,<sup>24</sup> most of which are products of several ecumenical conferences held to discuss the continuity and conflicts between ATR and Christianity.

We may conclude then, that although there exists a dearth of publications on the interaction between Limba religion and the NPLC, there are numerous publications on similar issues as they relate to other groups. I will now proceed to discuss the

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<sup>21</sup>Conteh (MA Thesis 1999:1).

<sup>22</sup>Parrat (1995:13); Mbiti (1972:51). There is divergent reaction between African theologians in finding a lasting solution to the tension between ATR and Christianity. Young (1987) in his brief essay divided eight well renowned African theologians into two groups. Theologians like Fashole-Luke, Idowu, Mbiti and Sawyerr whose Christian understandings were influenced by missionary based theology, he described as belonging to the "Old Guard." Young theologians with a liberal approach contrary to their predecessors i.e. "Old Guard", he categorised as "New Guard." Cf. Fashole-Luke's (n.d.) work on "Christianity and the Non-Western World."

<sup>23</sup>Fashole-Luke (1978:358). A similar call has been issued by Asian Christians reacting to a similar situation on their continent Nacpil (1971:360).

<sup>24</sup>Some of these works have already been noted on page 1 and several more are made use of in the course of this study.

factors that created my interest in this study and provided the inspiration for it.

### **1.6 The Origin of this study**

This thesis emanated from a desire to understand Limba religion, and the causes of the tenacious loyalty shown by Limba Christians in the NPLC to their traditional beliefs and practices, and to thereby seek answers to the following questions: "What is the power behind Limba religion that makes Limba Christians very reluctant to relinquish it for Christianity?" "What is lacking in Christianity that is preventing Limba Christians from making a full commitment?" and "What is so evil about Limba traditional practices that NPLC does not want anything to do with them?" My desire to understand and my quest for answers to the above questions were occasioned by my experiences of Limba traditional practices, both in my own home and in the lives of other church members. I will now proceed to explain these experiences.

In my childhood home in Freetown, Sierra Leone, as in many other Limba Christian homes, the veneration of ancestral and non-ancestral spirits was occasionally practised (cf. Ottenberg 1988a:442). Sacrifices and offerings to the supernatural were offered when necessary. Charms were hung on our door post for protection against witchcraft and evil spirits, and other traditional religious beliefs were practised to various degrees. On auspicious occasions, our father would lead the worship while the rest of the family sat and observed. I remember him pouring libations and saying brief prayers before we left on trips, when we children were taking exams or when a member of the family was undertaking a new or challenging task. Our mother's role, on these occasions, was to explain to the children the importance of

Limba culture and practices with which we, who were being raised in the city, were unacquainted. Long before the death of our mother food, prepared for the dead was on occasion placed, on a plate on the floor by the bedside. Following our mother's death, as a means to stay connected with her, the frequency of ancestral veneration (through sacrifice, offerings and libation) in our home was increased. However, when our father died, Limba religious practices came to an end in our home because none of the children was equipped to continue the tradition. This did not mean that we forgot what we had been taught about Limba culture and beliefs, but that we were not able to continue the practice thereof.

After completing secondary school, I got the opportunity to work as a helper in the NPLC. There I realised that I was not the only one that emanated from a dual religionist family. For at the annual adult baptismal services, candidates were asked to give up their traditional charms and objects and those who felt convicted of 'sin,' brought them to be destroyed by fire before they were baptised. The leaders of the church did their best to discourage members from practising Limba traditional religion, but their efforts were to no avail. To date, candidates for baptism still bring their 'objects of worship' to the church for destruction. My experience with Limba religious tenacity both at home and in the NPLC intensified my desire to pursue detailed research in Limba religion in order to investigate the causes for its persistence in Limba Christianity and the refusal of Limba Christians to completely give it up and embrace Christianity whole-heartedly. Because of the dearth of published materials on Limba religion and the complete absence of documented information about NPLC relationship with Limba Christians, it became apparent

that if I intended to fulfill these intentions fieldwork would be necessary.

## **1.7 Fieldwork**

Fieldwork was necessary in order to obtain firsthand experience and, from a grass roots perspective, information that would update the very few extant publications and provide a comprehensive study of Limba religion, and investigate its persistence and the resulting conflicts with Christianity. Clearly, in order to obtain such an experience, it was necessary to be in Africa, where the subjects of my study reside.

The bulk of the fieldwork was carried out in Sierra Leone between June and September 2002, in the capital city Freetown and its surroundings, and in the headquarter towns of the five main Limba chiefdoms: Binkolo town in the Safroko Chiefdom, Kamabai town in the Biriwa Chiefdom, Bafodea town in the Warawara Bafodea Chiefdom, Kamakwie town in the Sella Chiefdom and Madina town in the Thonko Chiefdom.

### *1.7.1 Interviews and Consultant Data*

My research used a dialectical approach to gather data. This was accomplished through a number of structured tape-recorded interviews. The data was later reviewed by a number of consultants who provided feedback on the responses of my interviewees. For my pool of interviewees, I selected a cross-section of the Limba people with respect to both generation and lifestyle. This includes adults, young adults, and a few teenagers all from different walks of life namely: tribal chiefs and leaders, pastors, school and college teachers, students,

herbalists, sorcerers, academics, politicians, administrators, artisans and civil servants.<sup>25</sup> Consultants included scholars who have done remarkable work on the Limba and ATR in general, members of ecumenical organisations and Sierra Leone government employees.

### *1.7.2 Interview Protocol*

In central Freetown and in the five provincial towns, dialectical discussions were carried out in groups in a conference-like setting. This approach was chosen because a group possesses more skills than the individuals who comprise it and prevents exaggeration and self-pride from distracting the focus of the research. However, in rural Freetown a few personal interviews were conducted. In Freetown, representatives of the five major Limba dialects were divided into five teams according to their backgrounds. The same questions were posed to each team and each team took turns in responding. Respondents were allowed to address each question based on knowledge, experience and personal opinion. Because it was a qualitative study and because most practices are quite similar from dialect to dialect it was often unnecessary for each group to respond individually. Thus subsequent groups sometimes chose to accept the contribution of a previous speaker when there was a consensus among the five teams. However, each group responded individually when there was a difference of opinion or of understanding on the issues being discussed.

In the provinces because each of the five towns visited belongs to a separate dialect, the same questions were posed directly to all the interviewees who took turns in responding.

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<sup>25</sup>See Appendix B for interviewees and consultants profiles.

### 1.7.3 Research Questions and Rationale

A questionnaire based on the scope and objectives of this thesis was drawn up before travelling to Sierra Leone. The choice of questions was primarily determined by the studies on Limba Religion, ATR and other religious cultures that I had conducted before commencing my fieldwork. Each question was discussed, clarified and approved by the five aforementioned teams in Freetown. The final questionnaire comprised of eight questions. The responses to these questions provided the information presented in chapters three through eleven. The questions and my rationale for choosing them are as follows:

Question 1: "How can you define Religion from a Limba Traditionalist view?"

In order to compose the first comprehensive work, it was necessary at the outset to know the nature of Limba Religion from the practitioner's own perspective. This approach is different from those used by previous works on Limba Religion,<sup>26</sup> and from that used by most other works on ATR.<sup>27</sup>

Question 2: "Can you describe in detail your Religious beliefs, practices and teachings?"

Not only was it necessary to understand the nature of Limba Religion, it was also vital to understand the extent of it. This question solicits an in-depth explanation of the elements and tenets of Limba religion, while allowing the practitioners to define for themselves what constitutes "religion."

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<sup>26</sup>See Finnegan (1965; 1967) and Ottenberg (1988a).

<sup>27</sup>Most ATR publications do not find it necessary to define African Religion. Magesa (1997:1-34) provides a chapter on "Defining African Religion." For Mbiti (1989a:15), "Religion is a difficult word to define," so he did not

Question 3: "How are your beliefs reflected in everyday life?"

I wanted to know, not only about Limba religiosity in relation to the supernatural, but also about "the religious journey of the individual from before birth to after physical death" (Mbiti 1989a:4). In ATR, religion "accompanies the individual from long before" he/she was born to long after his/her physical death (Mbiti 1989a:2). The answers to this question provided an understanding of how religion pervades the life of the Limba on account of their belief in the supernatural.

Question 4: "What is your view on the civil war that just ended?"

After a decade of brutal civil war, the lives of those who lived through it are forever changed. Even before I left Sierra Leone for Canada, I knew that the then head of state had encouraged Limba hunters and medicine men to form a traditional defence force to combat the advances of the rebels by magical means. With the assumption that religion plays an active role in the life of the African, I wanted to know the position of the Limba Christians about the war, and the part that traditional religious powers played in it.

Question 5: "Which stance do you take on social issues like, ecology and abortion?"

Ecology and abortion are issues that have drawn religious attention because the earth and its environment,<sup>28</sup> and human life,

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"attempt to define it."

<sup>28</sup>A series of books has been published on world religions and ecology. The series "World Religions and Ecology" has been sponsored by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWFN) to publish "Buddhism and Ecology," "Christianity and Ecology," "Hinduism and Ecology: Seeds of Truth," "Islam and Ecology" and "First Nations Faith and Ecology." The Harvard Divinity School's Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) in their series "Religions of the World & Ecology" has already published edited works on six religions and there are upcoming volumes on five more religions.

born or unborn,<sup>29</sup> are considered God's gifts. I wanted to know the position of the interviewees on these issues.

Question 6: "What are the reasons that some Limba Christians still practise traditional religion?"

This question sought reasoning for Limba dual religiosity from the viewpoint of the practitioners themselves, as well as from representatives from the Limba church.

Question 7: "How are these practices affecting the church?"

I wanted to know to what extent the persistence of Limba traditional practices has affected the church.

Question 8: "What impact has Christianity on traditional religion?"

Likewise it was appropriate to know the extent to which Christianity has impacted Limba traditional practices.

Side questions were also asked during the interview process to ask for clarity and elaboration. These include:

"Can you tell me about that?"

"Can you give me an example?"

"What other experiences have you had?"

"Can you explain that to me?"

"Why?"

"Could you expand on that?"

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<sup>29</sup>The subject of abortion has become one of the most widely debated ethical issues of our time. The Roman Catholic Church (RC) has been the most vocal religious faith on the issue. The RC church in the USA started an organisation "Priests for Life" in 1991 to help priests around the world spread the Gospel of Life to their parishioners. In the West, the issue has taken on both religious and political dimensions.



During the interviews, other forms of communication, such as head nodding, facial and hand gestures indicated that I was listening served as cues for the interviewees as they continued their stories.

#### *1.7.4 Language*

The dialectical discussions in Sierra Leone were conducted in either the Limba or the Krio language according to the area. Limba, being the indigenous language of the Limba people, was the language of communication used in all Limba settlements in rural Freetown and the five Provincial towns. Krio, the country's local parlance, was only used in central Freetown. I personally facilitated all of the Krio discussions. Because I am not very fluent in the Limba language, I used locals to facilitate discussion in rural Freetown and in the provinces. In all cases I took notes and tape recorded the discussions.

#### *1.7.5 Editing the Data*

After the dialectical discussions were completed, the recordings were played, and the notes taken were reviewed. All difficult Limba terminologies were spelt linguistically, simplified and explained. All the Limba words used in this thesis are the general accepted words used by all the dialects. Where there is more than one accepted word, all accepted terms appear, separated by back slashes.

### **1.8 Outline**

Following this chapter which serves as an "Introduction" to the study is Chapter Two entitled "Socio-History of the Limba," which

provides background information on the Limba people within the Sierra Leonean context. Chapter Three, "Definition and Components of Limba religion," provides a working definition of Limba Religion and its elements from which the framework for Chapters four to ten is built. The fourth Chapter, entitled "Supreme Being" focuses on Limba belief, in teachings and worship of God. Chapter Five, "Angels" provides an understanding of the position, nature and role of Angels. In Chapter Six, "Ancestral Spirits," the position, role and veneration of the Ancestors is discussed. Chapter Seven, "Non-Ancestral Spirits" describes the categories of spirits, their roles and how they are venerated. The eighth Chapter presents Limba beliefs about "Humankind" our origins, relationship with the supernatural and life cycle. Chapter Nine addresses "Sin and Salvation". It focuses on the different categories of sins and crimes, their consequences, the procedures for forgiveness and absolution, the importance of salvation and the attainment of salvation. The tenth Chapter, "Sacred Specialists" presents the different categories of these human intermediaries and describes their roles. The study concludes with Chapter Eleven, "Conclusions," which reiterates my findings, discusses the causes of the Limba Christian tenacity and the reciprocal effects, and makes reconciliatory recommendations for establishing a productive dialogue between Limba Christians and the church.

### **1.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter, it was stated that this study is a systematic theology of the tenets of Limba traditional religion, their persistence in the lives of the Limba Christians, the reaction of the NPLC and the resulting reciprocal effects in the past three decades in Sierra Leone. Like many African converts to

Christianity, the Limba Christians "continue to revert to their old beliefs" (Mbiti 1989a:3). This has resulted in a dual religious system that has created problems between the Limba Christians and the NPLC which although it has had no connection with Western missions for the past three decades strongly upholds and promotes the laws and teachings inherited from the AOG missionaries.

Like many missionaries before them, the AOG church was insensitive and intolerant to African culture and religious beliefs. This approach was taken up and continued by the Sierra Leonean leaders of the NPLC and is shared by many of its youths/young adults.

Limba Christians are fighting to keep their religious heritage despite their acceptance of certain tenets of Christianity. Limba religion continues to play "an important role in shaping the character"<sup>30</sup> of Limba society. Yet, it "continues to suffer from lack of acceptance and inadequate understanding of its central tenets and essence"<sup>31</sup> in the hands of the NPLM, their own kith and kin.

From published materials and the fieldwork, which I carried out in Sierra Leone between June and September 2002, this study fulfills our objectives as stated earlier. Before moving to a discussion of the religiosity of both the Limba and Christianity, it is appropriate to first provide a socio-historical background of the Limba people in the next chapter.

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<sup>30</sup>Olupona (1991:1).

<sup>31</sup>Olupona (1991:1).

## CHAPTER TWO

### Socio-History of the Limba

#### 2.1 Introduction

Like their religion, very little has been written about Limba history and culture (McCulloch 1950:51; Finnegan 1965:14). Finnegan (1965:12) has attributed the cause of this problem to the spite shown by other ethnic groups towards the Limba that resulted in little interest in the Limba from European writers and researchers. While this spite may have been a valid reason for the paucity of Limba research over thirty years ago, it does not explain the continued lack of research since the disappearance of this stigma brought on by Limba ethnopoliticization.<sup>32</sup>

The most extensive accounts of Limba history and culture to date are Finnegan's (1965; 1967; 1988). In her 1965 work, she traced their socio-economic history to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and dealt extensively with prominent cultural characteristics of the Limba to the early 1960s. Her 1967 work provides a brief background to Limba socio-economic history and dealt extensively

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<sup>32</sup>Regarding Limba ethnopoliticization, Kandeh (1992:94) writes:

Limbanization of political and bureaucratic appointments, the security forces and mobility opportunities in Sierra Leone, a practice that dates back to the Siaka Stevens era, has undoubtedly meant greater access to state offices and resources for Limba elites.

with the cultural importance of Limba story and story-telling. Her 1988 publication includes a chapter on Limba speech, language and non-literacy. Fyle (1981) and Allie (1990), both Sierra Leonean historians writing on the history of Sierra Leone, wrote little about the Limba. Fyle (1979) wrote a biography of Chief Almamy Suluku a ruler of Pre-Colonial Biriwa Limba. Several non-Sierra Leoneans have also written about the Limba. McCulloch (1950) in an ethnographic survey of the peoples of Sierra Leone gave a brief account of the socio-cultural aspects of the Limba. Fyfe (1979) in his "Short History of Sierra Leone," touched on various aspects of the Limba. Fanthorpe (1998a:558-84) wrote on the political structure and the 'Deep Rural Strategies of the Biriwa Limba (1998b:15-38). He also gives a general overview of the historical and cultural background of the Limba (1998b:15-26). Ottenberg wrote about the Bafodea Wara-Wara Limba regarding artistic and sex roles (1983:76-90), art and indigenous psychology in weddings (1989:57-78) and the production of the cultural beaded bands (1994:64-75). Hart (1989:44-53) described Limba woodcarving and the features it shares with the woodcarvings of other ethnic groups.

In this segment, I will provide a brief general overview of the Limba within the Sierra Leonean context and discuss historically their origin, traditional homeland and outside settlements, language, political and administrative structures and other social and cultural characteristics.

## **2.2 Sierra Leone and the Limba**

The Limba are one of seventeen ethnic groups<sup>33</sup> within Sierra

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<sup>33</sup>The other 16 are: Krio, Mende, Temne, Kono, Kuranko, Loko, Sherbro/Bullom, Kissi, Vai, Krim, Fula, Mandigo (or Mandika), Soso, Yalunka, Kru and Gola

Leone. The country is located in West Africa,<sup>34</sup> is bounded on the North-West and the North-East by the republic of Guinea, on the South by Liberia, and on the West and South-West by the Atlantic Ocean (Alie 1990:1; Fyle 1981:1; Bondi 1976:1). It occupies a total area 27, 925 sq. miles (73,326 sq km) (Alie 1990:1) and is fairly circular in shape: the distance from north to south is 210 miles (332 km), and from west to east is approximately 204 miles (328 km) (Alie 1990:1). There are two main seasons in the country, the Dry, from mid November to April, and the Wet, from May to early November.<sup>35</sup> Sierra Leone became an independent state within the British Commonwealth on April 27<sup>th</sup> 1961, and subsequently attained republican status on April 19<sup>th</sup> 1971 (Bondi 1976:5). The capital city is Freetown and there are four administrative divisions: the Eastern, Northern, and Southern Provinces, and Western Area (Fyle 1981:3. cf. Bondi 1976:6). As a former British colony, Sierra Leone retains English as the official language, although it is used primarily by the literate minority, while Krio is the lingua franca.

According to the National Census and Central Statistic offices in Freetown, the estimated population of Sierra Leone as of July 2002 is 5,614,743. The Limba account for approximately 500,000 people, making them the third largest ethnic group, smaller than the Mende and the Temne.<sup>36</sup> Courses in the culture and languages of these three largest ethnic groups, as well as those of the Krio are offered in the country's schools, colleges and University.

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(Alie 1990:6-9). Fyle (1981:3) excludes the Kru and puts the number at 16.

<sup>34</sup>See Appendix C for a map of Sierra Leone within West Africa.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Hargrave (1944:40); Alie (1990:1); Fyle (1981:1).

<sup>36</sup>It has been that way for several decades now (Finnegan 1965:10; Fyle 1981:3;

### 2.3 Origin

After several decades of research, the issue of the Limba's origin and traditional immigration into Sierra Leone is still a mystery (McCulloch 1950:51; Finnegan 1965:14; 1967:3; Fyfe 1979:3; Alie 1990:10). Although other peoples of Sierra Leone have traditions about their own origins,<sup>37</sup> the Limba have no such tradition. They believe simply that they have always lived in their present homeland, and sometimes assert that "God must have created them there in the beginning" (Finnegan 1965:14). In other words, the Limba claim to have no outside origin, and in that regard have "been considered deep autochthones" (Fanthorpe 1998b:18). While there are some traditions pertaining to the origins of specific ruling families, "these usually only go back 4 or 5 generations" (Finnegan 1965:14). Because evidence from the Limba's own tradition is lacking, scholars have attempted to construct an early history out of the few extant stories about the Limba found in the traditions of other tribes. However, even these attempts have been largely unsuccessful, as they are admittedly conjectural and based on very little evidence. The earliest verifiable account of the Limba in their current position is on the map of a sixteenth century navigator (Finnegan 1965:14). However, little else is known about Limba history until the nineteenth century.

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Alie 1990:10).

<sup>37</sup>McCulloch (1950) traces the history and traditions of origin of eleven ethnic groups. Among the four major ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, the Limba was the only group whose origin could not be traced (McCulloch 1950:51; Finnegan 1965:14; Alie 1990:10). The Mende presumably originated from the Liberian hinterland (Alie 1990:9; Fyfe 1981:15, 49; cf. McCulloch 1950:7; Yambasu 2002:46). The Temne claim to have immigrated from Futa Jallon, which is present day Republic of Guinea into their present day Temne-land (Alie 1990:9; cf. McCulloch (1950:50-51). The Krio are descendants of freed slaves from England, Nova Scotia, Jamaica and West Africa arrived in Freetown between 1787 and 1863 (Fyfe 1981:71-74, 34-35; Wyse 1989:1-5; Alie 1990:78).

Tracing the earliest societies in Sierra Leone, Fyle (1981:10) offers proof that the Limba may have been the first group in the Sierra Leone hinterland, stating that a little over two decades ago some stone tools believed to have been left by the Limba and dating to the eighth century were found in Wara-Wara Limba country near Kekoia in the Northern Province.<sup>38</sup> Thus, while it is not currently possible to determine an exact date for the Limba migration to Sierra Leone, it is known that they have been in their current location since at least the sixteenth century and may have been there as early as the eighth century.

#### **2.4 Traditional Homeland and Outside Settlements**

Although, for economical and social reasons,<sup>39</sup> pocket settlements of Limba can today be found throughout the country, the historical homeland of the Limba is in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone. According to the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development (MLGCD), Limba settlements in their homeland are now found in five Districts<sup>40</sup> namely: Bombali, Kambia, Koinadugu, Tonkolili and Port Loko. The Limba share common borders with the Soso on the north-west, the Yalunka and Fula on the north-east, the Kuranko on the east, the Loko is on the south-west and the Temne on the south and south-west.<sup>41</sup> Limba country extends over about 2000 sq. miles which begins east of Tonkolili up to the Guinea borders north of Bafodea, and in the extreme south-west reaches a point just north of Kambia (cf. Finnegan (1965:10)). The Limba homeland is mainly comprised of

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<sup>38</sup>Cf. Alie (1990:10).

<sup>39</sup>Banton (1957:48) states that the Limba are one of the hinterland people who have the heaviest emigration rate both long term and seasonal. Finnegan (1965:123-43) informs us that for economic and social reasons, migration has long been a feature of Limba social strategies.

<sup>40</sup>Finnegan (1965:11) lists three.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1988: 46; 1965:10); Alie (1990:8). See Appendix D for a map of the present Limba homeland.



savannah, with occasional areas of farm bush and grass. It is bounded on the north by two large rivers, the Little Scarcies and the Rokel. Small rivers and streams flow through the area. In the northern and eastern areas there are hills between 300 and 2000 feet high, "interspersed with low plateaus of savannah and grass land, with some inland swamps. With the exception of the flood plains along the Little Scarcies in Thonko Limba in the west, most of Limba country is over 400 feet above sea level" (Finnegan 1965:10).

Outside the Limba homeland, the second largest population of Limbas are found in the Western Area. Like other ethnic groups in the hinterland, migration by Limba people to Freetown in the past three decades can be attributed to economic, political, educational, social, and religious (cf. Fyfe 1979:83), including conflict, jealousy, excommunication, witchcraft and adultery. The rebel incursion into Sierra Leone, via the hinterland in 1991, also forced thousands of people to flee from their homeland to Freetown which is heavily protected by military personnel and civil defence units.

In the Western Area, most Limba settlements are found in mountainous areas e.g., Dwarzak Farm, Tengbeh Town, Malamah/Kaniko, Red Pump, Sorie Town, Sumaila Town, Kuntolo, Malimba Town, and on the shores of Congo Town, Ascension Town, Kingtom. An interviewee told me that the Limba in Freetown deliberately settle in mountainous areas because it reminds them of home. These isolated and bushy areas bring a sense of belonging because the Limba do not like to mingle with other groups. One suggested reason for the Limba preference for keeping to themselves is that they do not wish to upset others with the offensive smell of *poyo*.

## 2.5 Language and Nomenclature

The Limba speak a "prefix language," (Finnegan 1965:10; 1988:46; SLDE 1993:82) which is classified as part of the West Atlantic family languages (Westermann 1952:13; Finnegan 1965:10; Migeod 1971:33; Fyle 1981:5; Fanthorpe 1998b:18). The generally accepted term, *Limba* comes from the root "Limba", which may refer to anything about the ethnic group depending on the prefix added to it.<sup>42</sup> The Limba language contains five regional dialects (SLDE 1993:83).<sup>43</sup> Biriwa Limba is spoken mainly in the Biriwa and Kasonko chiefdoms in the districts of Bombali and Koinadugu. Safuroko Limba is the dialect of the Safuroko and Paki Massabong chiefdoms in the Bombali District, and the Kafe Simira and kalansonkoya chiefdoms in the Tonkolili District. In the Sela chiefdom in the Bombali District, the dialect is Sela Limba. Thonko Limba is spoken in the Kambia District and in the Sanda Magboloton chiefdom of Port Loko District. Finally, in the Koinadugu district, in the chiefdoms of Bafodea and Yagala, Wara-Wara Limba is spoken. Because many Limba from all over have migrated to the Western Area, all of the Limba dialects are found there. All five Limba dialects are very similar with only slight differences between them (SLDE 1993:83; Fyle 1981:52).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>For example, *hulimba*, an abstract noun can refer to the Limba language, the Limba ethnic group as a whole, or a Limba person, singular (Finnegan 1988:46; cf. SLDE 1993:69). *Malimba*, is an adjective which means "in the manner of the Limba" (SLDE 1993:71) or "the Limba way." For example, when a Limba wants something to be done culturally, he/she would say *Miŋ niyaŋ malimba maŋ* ("let us do it the Limba way").

<sup>43</sup>Properly, there are 12 dialects: Biriwa, Gbonkobo, Kalanthuba, Kamuke, Kelen, Safuroko, Sela, Sonkon, Thamiso, Thonko, Wara-Wara Bafodia, and Wara-Wara Yagala (SLDE 1993:83). However, the five regional dialects were identifiable as early as the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century (Alie 1990:10) and have been generally accepted ever since.

<sup>44</sup>Limba dialects are very similar with slight differences between them. In fact, most individuals who speak one dialect are also able to understand and communicate with individuals who speak another dialect (SLDE 1993: 83). Overall, the similarities outweigh the differences. For a brief history of the development of the Limba language, sound system, word contraction,

## 2.6 Political and Administrative Structures

Limba country is divided into eleven chiefdoms:<sup>45</sup> Biriwa, Safuroko, Sela, Thonko, Kasonko, Wara-Wara Bafodea, Wara-Wara Yagala, Kafe Simira, Kalansonkoya, Paki Massabong and Sanda Magboloton. Although ethnic divisions existed in Limba country before colonisation, the current borders are a British invention intended to harness local politics to colonial rule and facilitate tax collection (Fanthorpe 1988a:558-59).<sup>46</sup> They were set through a clear re-definition of ethnic borders, which codified chiefdoms with well-defined ethnic boundaries.<sup>47</sup> What the British did was attempt to set the boundaries by defining ethnic borders, codifying chiefdoms with well-defined boundaries.<sup>48</sup>

Since 1946, each Limba chiefdom has been ruled by a Chiefdom Council, a system inherited from the 1937 British "Native Administration" scheme.<sup>49</sup> This administrative structure was an

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grammatical structure, type of sentences, tenses, language mechanisms and orthography, see SLDE (1993:61-82).

<sup>45</sup>Several earlier works enumerate only seven chiefdoms (Finnegan 1965:11; Opala & Boillot 1996:8 and Ottenberg 1988a:437); however, the current statistics provided MLGCD names eleven.

<sup>46</sup>On the issue of political control by European Powers, Sanneh (1996:86) has this to say: "The existing state boundaries of Africa, for example, were created by Western colonial powers and inherited by the independent governments. These boundaries still provide the context of state jurisdiction in modern Africa. Through the artificial colonial creation of tribes as an amalgamation of ethnic groups and nations as the fusion of tribes, states were established as the vehicle by which Africans could enter the twentieth century."

<sup>47</sup>Divisions that existed can be described as a dialect cluster with fuzzy edges. This was due to the movement of peoples, inter-cultural intermarriage, trade, warfare, and other social factors.

<sup>48</sup>The British were very conscious of ethnic differences in Britain (e.g., English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish and India) and applied much of the same model of governance in Africa. They also had the idea that the mixing of the "races" as they called them in early days, was in general undesirable and might lead to conflict and disorder. For this reason, they sometimes tried to set up separate areas for each ethnic group in the cities, although this was often unsuccessful.

<sup>49</sup>The Chiefdom Council system within this plan was originally patterned after

attempt by the British to modify and transfer the considerable economic and juridical powers that was vested in the Paramount Chief (PC) to a Tribal Authority,<sup>50</sup> which was later renamed the Chiefdom Council,<sup>51</sup> the body charged with responsibility for the welfare and oversight of the chiefdom (Finnegan 1965:43; Fyle 1981:117-18; Alie 1990:156-57).

In the Chiefdom Council system of an independent Limba chiefdom, first in the chain of command is the Paramount Chief (*Bathanpi*),<sup>52</sup> whose position is more supervisory, as the head of his people. In this regard he should be informed of occurrences and developments in his chiefdom or jurisdiction as the case may be (Finnegan 1965:23). His approval and blessing must be sought before certain things may happen. In Limba practice, the role of a Paramount Chief or Head Chief is reserved exclusively for men. However, in the 1970s, government sanction reinforced the participation of women in ethnic politics (Ottenberg 1983:77) and today in most Limba chiefdoms and settlements there is a female chief called 'Ya Almamy' who works under a male counterpart called 'Pa Almamy.' Almamy is an Islamic term meaning "headman" (Fyle 1981:29). The Ya Almamy is responsible for settling certain disputes among females and arranging for the feeding of visitors as well as certain other duties (Ottenberg 1983:77).

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the Nigerian model (Alie 1990:152; Fyle 1981:114, 116-17).

<sup>50</sup>Finnegan (1965:43, 47-48).

<sup>51</sup>Cf. Fanthorpe (1998a:563).

<sup>52</sup>As all chiefs are called, *Gbaku*, a term which should be only used when referring to the Paramount Chief, many Limba now use the term *Bathanpi* ("one with the staff" or "staff carrier") to distinguish the Paramount Chief from the junior Chiefs. According to the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development (MLGCD), chiefdom rulers and officials are considered "natural rulers". Paramount chiefs and other ethnic rulers in Limba land are designated "natural rulers" because the land they rule is their natural home. By divine providence, these leaders descended from the first families that inhabited the land. As the first families that God placed on the land, they are considered the owners and custodians of it. Therefore, it is customary to have the ruler come from one of those homes. Ethnic Limba rulers outside Limba land cannot be designated "natural rulers" because they do not fit the above profile.

Before the government sanction, these duties were carried out by the chief's head wife. Unfortunately, the Ya Almamies are still not as powerful as male leaders.

A government provision made in the mid 1950s and continuing to be effective to date, dictates that twelve Paramount Chiefs each representing one of the twelve districts in Sierra Leone, are elected on a non-Partisan basis through an electoral college, comprised of Councillors and other Paramount Chiefs, to sit in parliament.<sup>53</sup> This system enables the representation and participation of ethnic groups in national policy making. The downside of this system is that it takes away the relationship and bond between the elected parliamentary Paramount Chiefs and their people, because they are required to leave their respective chiefdoms and stay in Freetown during parliamentary sessions.

During my fieldwork in June 2002, the MLGCD list of Limba Paramount/Regent Chiefs in Sierra Leone is as follows:

<i>Paramount/ Regent Chief</i>	<i>Chiefdom/ Jurisdiction</i>	<i>Chiefdom/ Jurisdiction headquarters</i>	<i>District/Area</i>
Alimamy Kawala II	Biriwa	Kamabai	Bombali
Alimamy Dura II	Safuroko	Binkolo	Bombali
Kandeh Luseni II	Sela	Kamakwie	Bombali
(Vacant)	Paki Massabong	Mapaki	Bombali
Komrabai Turay*	Thonko	Madina	Kambia
Alimamy Hamidu I	Wara-Wara Bafodea	Bafodea	Koinadugu
A. B. Mansaray*	Kasonko	Fadugu	Koinadugu
(Vacant)	Wara-Wara	Gbawuria	Koinadugu

	Yagala		
Sanda Sori II	Sanda Mabolon-	Sendugu	Port Loko
	ton		
(Vacant)	Kafe Simira	Mabonto	Tonkolili
Momodu Mansaray*	Kalansonkoya	Bumbuna	Tonkolili

\*Regent Chief<sup>54</sup>

Second in the administrative line-up is the Chiefdom Speaker (*Bagboŋkoli wo*). As the name implies, he acts as spokesman both to and on behalf of the chiefdom and is the PC's confidant. Because the PC is no longer required to participate in the judicial system, the Chiefdom Speaker represents him at court sittings and later reports to him. The Court Chairman (*Bagbodo wo*) who follows the Chiefdom Speaker is a government employee and the official representative at the chiefdom level and presides over chiefdom court proceedings. With the assistance of other appointed court officials (*kot membeŋ*), the chairman presides over several kinds of cases including, land disputes, theft, witchcraft, adultery, some divorce cases, loans of money or other goods and treachery. These matters are judged according to chiefdom bylaws and customary laws. Capital offences such as murder, cannibalism and rebellion are beyond the jurisdiction of the tribal court and are transferred to the national government through the police. Divorce cases concerning marriages that were contracted in the church or mosque are also beyond the jurisdictional limits of the tribal courts, and are therefore referred to the national courts. A person who has a complaint or wants a redress takes the matter to the chiefdom court clerk and pays the required fees. A court summons is then sent to the defendant stating the complaint and the scheduled date for the

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<sup>53</sup>Alie (1990:213).

<sup>54</sup>Regent Chiefs are caretaker chiefs until new chiefs are elected and

court hearing. After the Court Chairman is the Court Clerk (*Bagbali wo*) also a government employee, who records proceedings and performs all court clerical and secretarial duties. Each chiefdom has a chiefdom police force to keep the peace and enforce the law (Fyle 1981:119).

The British further divided the chiefdoms into section towns and villages (Finnegan 1965:21). The section towns are ruled by Section Chiefs (*Bathagba ben*) and the villages by Village Headmen (*Bamεthiη/Bayahεη*).<sup>55</sup> The positions of section and village chiefs are analogous to that of the Paramount Chief. Unlike the Paramount Chief, the Section and Village chiefs still preside over cases. They handle cases similar to those handled by the chiefdom courts. On the village level, the complainant goes to the village headman (*Bamεthi/Bayaha*) with a small token gift to open a case. After questioning by the headman, a writ of summon is then sent through a court messenger to the other party regarding the complaint and date for the hearing. In chiefdom/section and village levels, in most cases the guilty party pays a very heavy fine and in some instances restitution is required e.g., theft, destruction of farm and cattle. Most often, a person convicted of witchcraft is flogged publicly, and banished.<sup>56</sup> The Paramount Chief, Chiefdom Speaker, Section and Village Chiefs form the Chiefdom Council and are responsible for electing chiefdom leaders.<sup>57</sup>

In the Western area where there is no chiefdom policy, all of the ethnic groups settled there are ruled by the Tribal

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installed.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:21, 31-32).

<sup>56</sup>Formerly, a witch was banished after three offences.

<sup>57</sup>Cf. Fanthorpe's Chiefdom Council structure of the Biriwa Limba (1998a:563-65).

Administration Act which was legislated in 1905 (Banton 1957:14; Alie 1990:161). The equivalent of a Limba Paramount Chief in Freetown is the Limba Tribal Headman. B.S. Bangura is the Limba Tribal Headman for the Western Area. His administrative headquarters are in Wellington, Freetown. Tribal Headmen for the individual hinterland ethnic groups living in Freetown first appeared in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These government officials functioned in an unofficial capacity until they were given legal recognition in 1905 (Alie 1990:161). As an elected official, the Limba Tribal Headman, like any other Tribal Headman, is the official liaison between the provincial chiefs and their people in Freetown and often provides direct assistance to the central government. He provides the initiative for many of the ethnic group's activities and provides a bridge for the newcomer in Freetown to his former life the Provinces (Alie 1990:161). At the Tribal Headman's administrative headquarters, he is assisted by the Court Chairman who with the assistance of Court Elders (a group made up of between five and seven members), presides over cases in the central court. The court handles most socially-based cases as well as certain criminal cases. Land disputes and major robbery cases are beyond the jurisdiction of a tribal court. In the Western Area, as in the chiefdoms, divorce cases concerning marriages that were contracted in the church or mosque are beyond the jurisdictional limits of the tribal courts, and are referred to the national courts. Non-literate Limba in the Western Area take their cases to either the tribal head's court in Freetown, or the closest local Limba head. Most literate Limba likewise, often begin with the tribal heads, but sometimes prefer the Westernised legal system instead. The Court Clerk's job is analogous to that of his chiefdom counterpart. Apart from the aforementioned officials who work in his administrative headquarters, the Tribal Headman is also assisted by Section/Area



Chiefs called Pa Almamy, and sub chiefs called Pa Alikali.<sup>58</sup> The Section Chiefs and sub-chiefs fill a socio-political role which is part chief, part judge (Alie 1990:161).

## 2.7 Economy

### 2.7.1 Agriculture

Historically, the Limba have primarily been subsistence farmers (SLDE 1993:85). Agriculture is the backbone of their economy with rice (*pakala*) as their main crop (Finnegan 1965:10-11; 81-6; Opala & Boillot 1996:5). Finnegan (1967:8) states that, "the growing and eating of rice is, in Limba eyes, one of the main characteristics which differentiate them from the other peoples with whom they have come into contact." This perception cannot be accurate, because neither the growing nor the eating of rice has ever been unique to Limba. Rice is the staple food of Sierra Leone and all ethnic groups in the country grow it (Fyfe 1979:4; Fyle 1981:68).

The Limba practice two systems of growing rice: the more popular upland farming and the less popular swampland farming. For many, the farming season starts in March with brushing (*mahi*) of the bush.<sup>59</sup> Brushing is the cutting and clearing of smaller trees, undergrowth, shrubs and branches from the spot where the farm is to be made.<sup>60</sup> The felled trees, branches and shrubs are then piled up into a big heap and burnt.

Because the brushing is very hard and time consuming work, it

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<sup>58</sup>Alkali is a Temne title from the Islamic word, *al quadi* meaning "a judge" (Fyle 1981:32).

<sup>59</sup>A few starts earlier in January and February.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1967:8).

will be difficult for a single family to do it alone, a group of hard working men known as *Kunεko*<sup>61</sup> will come and help in exchange for food and drink. This group is made up of young men often from each household. Any household that does not have a member in the group pays to compensate the group for the day they worked. *Kunεko* is divided into several units, each of which is responsible for one stage of farming. *Kunεko katha Mahasɿ* does the brushing. *Kunεko katha kariya* clears and burns the material that has been brushed out. Hoeing and sowing is the responsibility of *kunεko katha yɔla*. *Kunεko katha puruna* works at weeding time and *kunεko katha ɿɔna* brings in the harvest.

As *Kunεko* and the other helpers brush the bush, they are be entertained with music, drumming and singing. In some areas, these entertainers are referred to as the *Kalla Band*. Other areas they are called *Bira*. The older men in the *Kalla Band* are called *ɿkali* and the younger men and boys are called *kɔthɔbede*. These two groups are each identifiable from their distinct attire. The music is meant to keep the workers from getting tired until the end of the day.

Rice is sown in May and June just as the rains begin. This is followed by the making of fences (*kuɿku ba/kufiya*) to prevent animals such as grass cutters (*Sumbuɿ*) and other rice-eating animals from destroying the rice when it grows. Usually, each family/household fences their own farm without the help of *Kunεko*, although some families employ people to help them. Fencing is usually followed by the weeding (*hu puruna haɿ*) of

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<sup>61</sup>This custom is similar to that of the Mende people who have two major groups - the *kugbe* and the *bembe*, that provide assistance during the farming season. The *kugbe* is made up of both young men and women, and the *bembe* is a group of about a dozen or so young men (Alie 1990:22).

grass with the help of *Kun&ko katha puruna* who are assisted by a group of women called *Ba Gbeŋdeŋ/Ba fani Gbeŋdeŋ* who weed with small hoes.

Children play an important role in the stage that follows: the scarring/driving away of the birds (*hu pama haŋ*). To many Limba, this is the most important part of the farming process. If the birds are not driven away they will eat the rice, and there will be hardly a grain of rice left to harvest. This task is not exclusively for children. The wives and any young man or woman in the household that is under the care of the husband or head of the house also participate. A farm hut (*ku wera*) about 10ft high with a podium is erected for the bird scarers to stand on as they work. The height of this structure gives the worker an advantage in seeing the destructive birds. Slings (*Lathi/Lathu*), which are used to throw objects at the birds and scare them away. At harvest, the *Kun&ko* unit called *kun&ko katha ŋona* will be present to work and musicians will also be around to entertain them. Millet, groundnut, cassava, and sweet potatoes, some maize are also grown as secondary crops for food and cash along with various garden crops such as onions and fruits (Finnegan 1965:18; SLDE 1993:89; Hart 1989:46). Rice is also grown on a very small scale on the outskirts of Freetown.

Palm trees (*hotala*) grow wild all over Limba country, from its fruit, red palm oil is made for cooking, and from the palm tree trunk, palm wine is extracted for drinking. The Limba are known all over the country for the fondness "for palm wine and their skill in tapping it" (Finnegan 1965:95). At home and away the Limba are sought as professional palm wine tapers (SLDE 1993: 89; Finnegan 1965:123). Palm tree products are also sold for cash. These include medicines, wood, fiber, broom, material for making

shoes, soap, rope, and leaves for roofing huts (Finnegan 1965:95).

Chiefs and affluent people often have a few cattle. Some sheep, goats and poultry can be found in all villages.

### 2.7.2 Micro Business

Craftspeople also contribute greatly to the economy and are the livelihood of some families.<sup>62</sup> Blacksmiths provide and repair most of the important implements for farming, such as hoes, axes and cutlasses, as well as various kinds of knives for harvesting and cooking, and guns for hunting (Finnegan 1965:98). Sculptors make wood carvings and iron sculptures.<sup>63</sup> Leather workers cure and dye skins and use them to make various items. Native cloth (*lankono*) making is also popular (Finnegan 1965:98). Small scale fishing, hunting and trapping are also common in Limba country,<sup>64</sup> and in the Western Area.

All of the above generate income for individual Limba families as they are marketed and exchanged at village, town and chiefdom levels (Finnegan 1965:102-4). These products are also found in many ethnic communities in the country and are vital to provide for their socio-economic needs (Hargrave 1944:88-96; Alie 1990:25-26).

Although community self-help (*mamasiteke*) development projects are carried out through communal labour, the village or chiefdom generates funds through fines and taxes. All adult males in the

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<sup>62</sup>See Ottenberg (1988a:442-59), for visual and performing art forms in Bafodea.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. Hart (1989).

<sup>64</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:81).

hinterland are expected to pay an annual local tax at the beginning of every year. In Freetown and urban areas, men and women alike, who receive a salary pay income tax. Most non-literate Limba men, in Freetown work as house servants, office messengers, sanitation officers, while a few have tailoring and carpentry shops or own businesses. Women engage in small scale businesses usually termed as "petty trading." Literate men and women work in offices and national establishments.

In the hinterland, some people who do not have families and who due to circumstances beyond their control cannot fend for themselves, are looked after by the chief (Finnegan 1965:26). In the Western Area relatives and friends help with financial and material contributions.

## **2.8 Other Socio-Cultural Characteristics**

### *2.8.1 Household and Gender Roles*

The basic social unit of the Limba is the household (*ban̄ka*) or family (*Kubori*).<sup>65</sup> This unit as in other ethnic groups of Sierra Leone, comprised of a husband, a wife or wives, their children, "and frequently also blood and affinal relatives - for example, junior brothers and their wives, and unmarried sisters - as well as dependants..." (Alie 1990:20; cf. Finnegan 1965:56).

The household is usually under the charge of the husband or a responsible adult male. Two decades ago the husband, as head of the home, was considered to be the sole bread-winner and everyone in the home depended on him to provide for their needs. In the hinterland, it was in turn, the assumed responsibility of the

wife/wives to help on the farm, prepare meals, nurse infants, nurture and instruct the children in the norms of the society (cf. Ottenberg 1983:78). When there are not grownup children capable of doing chores, the cleaning, gathering firewood, and laundry fall on the wife or on the junior wives if there is more than one wife in the home. In the Western Area, the wife/wives assume similar responsibilities (with the exception of working on the farm) and women who work outside of the home take maternity leave in order to raise their children.

Today, as a result of social and economic changes, some gender roles have been altered. As well as general living expenses, families now have to pay head and income taxes, and children who show academic promise have to be sent to college or university after secondary school. As these expenses increased, in many cases, one income was not enough to make ends meet. In rural regions, produce from the farm often was not enough to meet the financial demands of the household. For many of those with jobs, in both rural and urban areas, a single salary was often not enough to pay the monthly bills and to provide other necessities. In the hinterland, most married women became involved in petty trading to supplement their husbands' farming income. In the urban areas, non-educated women are also engaged in petty trading while educated women either took jobs in offices or began their own businesses. Thus, bread-winning has become a responsibility which was shared between husband and wife, often with the wife managing the finances of the home.

Although bread-winning is now a task shared between husband and wife, traditionally the husband is still seen as the provider. Even if the wife's income is greater than that of the husband, it

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<sup>65</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:56).

is still seen as the responsibility of the husband to provide the family with necessities. For this reason, if the husband requires his wife's assistance in providing for the family, he should be very kind and polite to her, because if the family is not provided for, society will hold only the husband accountable for the failure to provide, regardless of his wife's financial status. This change in gender roles has positively affected the lives of many Limba women and has made a significant impact on the status of women within Limba society. Some women have taken over as much as 70% of the household responsibilities and this has earned them immense respect and appreciation from their families and society associates.

### 2.8.2 *The Compound and Beyond*

Family relations are traced through both clanship (*humpo/mpo*) and kinships (*nthela*).

Kinship differs from clanship in that if people are kin the exact genealogical links between them are actually or potentially known, whereas the relationship between clan co-members is not known in this way even though they are loosely spoken of as all being "brothers".<sup>66</sup>

Kinship is primarily traced through the mother and father and is identifiable by household, compound and village. Clanship on the other hand is a more ethereal relationship that indicates a common ancestry. Finnegan (1965:52) was able to identify "eight or nine clans" scattered throughout Limba country. The number of identifiable Limba clan is currently fifteen. Formerly, because Limba society was predominantly chauvinistic, clan membership was solely acquired through patrilineage. Today, the custom varies from dialect to dialect. Some societies, like the Bafodea Limba

Wara-Wara chiefdom, are not heavily patrilineal and clanship may be acquired from either parent.

Some are strictly exogamous,<sup>67</sup> but in others<sup>68</sup> clan descendants as close as first cousins may marry (Fanthorpe 1998b:29), and in Freetown where clanship is not well recognized clan-based exogamy is not noticeably practiced.

### 2.8.3 Respect

In most Sierra Leonean cultures, the elderly are accorded a great deal of respect (Alie 1990:23; Fyle 1981:64)). Limba culture teaches that, to gain long life; to be wise; to be blessed and protected; you must respect not only the elders of your own family but also those of the society. In general, older people are addressed by a title of respect and not by their ordinary names. For example, *yapo* (Fyle 1981:64), *pa*, *ƙtho*, *hsmo* ("old man"), *inja*, *moyo*, *ma* ("old woman"). The words and counsel of the elderly are held in very high regard.<sup>69</sup> In most Limba homes, as a sign of respect, a child should not sit in the company of visiting adults or older people. When an adult enters a home for a visit, all the children are asked to either go outside and play or go to their rooms until the stranger leaves. A young person kneels down slightly to greet the elderly. Children and young people are expected to greet their parents, and any other elder around, each morning on rising (*h&ri bahure*), and each evening when going to bed (*masanka*). When eating with an adult, it is

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<sup>66</sup>Finnegan (1965:54).

<sup>67</sup>Finnegan (1965:52) stated that clans are strictly exogamous. This may have been the case for all clans at that time, as it is still true of the clans of the Wara-Wara Limba (Ottenberg 1988b:43; 1989:59).

<sup>68</sup>Such as the Conteh clan of the Biriwa to which I belong.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. Alie (1990:23).



considered disrespectful for a younger person to take a piece of meat or fish and eat it without first having the consent of the older person. This type of disrespectful behaviour is called *wutebede*. Once in awhile, in most homes the father will eat together with his son(s) and the other men in the house. Likewise the mother will eat with her daughter(s) and the other women in the house. This is not a hard and fast rule, especially in Freetown, but, the Limba like to eat in this manner so that the adults will teach the young proper table manners. More often, the younger children will eat together, while their parents watch them reprimanding anyone caught doing any uncustomary thing. The traditional Limba prefers to eat with his/her hand. It is Limba custom not to talk while eating. Outside of the home in general, when there are two or three people of the same sex, the Limba prefer to share a meal of rice and soup from the same dish. Often, at gatherings, a group of women will be in one corner eating, a group of men will be in another doing the same, and a group of youths will be eating in their own area.

#### 2.8.4 Social Courtesies

Greetings (*mande/nsekε/nsε*), with appropriate gestures, show respect and good relationship. Thanking (*kalaŋaŋ*), someone for a good deed shows appreciation for the efforts of others, and makes way for future considerations. A person who does not "thank you," is considered an ingrate. Gift-giving is another way to express one's appreciation and respect. Travelling guests carry gifts called *mutɔpti* ("what I brought for you") for friends and host/hostess. Hosts/hostesses and friends also give gifts called *mudɔŋ* ("what I kept for you") to visitors when they are returning. Reporting (*toŋ danthεkε*), apologising (*theteke*) when one is in the

wrong or is presumed to be in the wrong, story and parable (*mboro/ngbaŋ*), telling of riddles (*nloŋ*) and music (*mathuroko/muluŋ/yakali*)<sup>70</sup> are also considered essential to Limba culture.<sup>71</sup> Drumming, dancing, singing and story-telling are considered to be "cultural inheritances-sometimes referred to as 'Limba things' or 'Limba times' (*malimba ma*) (Finnegan 1967:25).

## 2.9 Conclusion

Although there is an ongoing religious conflict between them, Limba Christians and Christian Limbas share the same ancestry. They are all Limba people. Historically, the Limba are considered deep autochthones. Although this is impossible to prove or disprove, it is believed that they may have been the first people in the Sierra Leone hinterland and have definitely been in their current location since at least the late sixteenth century. The largest population of Limba outside of the Limba homeland is now in Freetown.

The Limba speak, a "prefix language" which is part of the West Atlantic family of languages, and has twelve dialects which have been categorised into five regional dialects. Politically, the Limba are governed by the Chiefdom Council system in their homeland, and the Tribal Administration in Freetown. Both systems were adopted from the British and given slight modifications. Judicially, the tribal courts governed by Court Chairmen deal with most basic cases, excepting capital offences and divorce cases. Economically, Limba communities make their

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<sup>70</sup>Ottenberg (1989:57-78; 1988b:42-64; 1988a:437-65) portray the importance of Limba music in weddings, secret societies and other social activities.

<sup>71</sup>See Finnegan (1965:79-80; 1967:25-28) for a detailed understanding of some of these cultural traits.

living through rice farming, the harvesting of palm tree products, animal husbandry, fishing and hunting, petty trading, craftsmanship, and in Freetown, office employment.

Socially, the household or family is the basic unit. Families are connected to each other through kinship and clanship, the acquisition of which varies from dialect to dialect. In Freetown clanship is not encouraged because of fear that it will create division in a 'foreign' land.

Other notable cultural qualities of the Limba are respect for elders, table manners, an appropriate manner of greeting, thankfulness, and the giving of gifts.

With this background in place, we now move to chapter three, for an understanding of the nature and components of Limba religion.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Definition and Components of Limba Religion

#### 3.1 Introduction

There are several reasons why it is necessary to define Limba Religion. Limba religion, like many other African religions, has undergone many changes due to influences both external (Alie 1990:31-46)<sup>72</sup> and internal. Externally, the intrusion of comparatively new religions,<sup>73</sup> and the complexities of modern changes have both affected Limba traditional beliefs. Modernisation in Africa has "come upon religious societies, affecting their religious attitudes and life..." (Mbiti 1989a:211).<sup>74</sup> It is reasonable to say that, "through modern change these traditional religions cannot remain intact..." (1989a:2). "But though it cannot be denied that changes in thought and, perhaps, attitude to life are taking place, the past is not dead; it has very strong clinging influences on the emotions of the people" (Downes 1971:6-7). After three decades the words of Mbiti (1970:xiv) are still applicable:

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<sup>72</sup>See SLDE (1990:205-06) for a discussion on the impact of foreign influence on the traditional life of the Temne people of Sierra Leone. Parsons (1964:226-40) addresses the effects of external influences on Kono Religion. See also discussions on the impact of external influences on Tiv (Downes 1971:1-2) and Yoruba (Awolalu 1979:183-96) Religions.

<sup>73</sup>See Ottenberg (1984:437-54, 1988a: 437-65) for the external religious impact on the Wara-Wara Limba. Magesa (1997:4-14) discusses the Christian negative approach toward African Religion and the latter's continuity irrespective of degradation.

<sup>74</sup>See Mbiti (1989a:211-22) for a detailed discussion on the causes and effects of modernisation on African religions.

Africa is going through a tremendous and rapid change in every aspect of human life. Many individuals are becoming increasingly detached from the corpus of their tribal and traditional beliefs, concepts and practices. On the other hand, these concepts have not all been abandoned, nor are they likely to be wiped out immediately by these modern changes.

Awolalu (1979:183-96) describes the intrusion of Islam, Christianity, Western imperialism and modernisation as militating factors against traditional rites. This is largely because of their dedication to ordered views and fixed ideals, and their criticism and even condemnation of anything different from themselves.

Another external factor is the Post-modern ideologies of the educated elite, who are proud to maintain their traditional practices irrespective of their westernisation. This has promoted the freedom of personal expression of opinions and thoughts that view religion differently from long established norms.<sup>75</sup> The expression of personal opinion is common among the young and the educated elite. In similar regard, Parrinder (1962:12) writes, "all modern peoples...may hold beliefs very different from those of early man." Within this climate, it does not matter how logical or rational the view is, every opinion should be respected and accepted.

Internally, the settlement of other ethnic groups within and around Limba country, and the settlement of Limbas within the Western Area have brought, not only religious, but social, political and economic changes to the Limba worldview.<sup>76</sup> There is

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<sup>75</sup>Cf. Parrinder (1962: 21).

<sup>76</sup>Several decades ago Nadel (1954:1) pointed similar situation about the Nupe people whose religious beliefs and practices differ considerably from region to region: "Nupe are internally divided in various ways - by ethnic descent, by tribal segmentation, partly by political allegiance, by the cleavage

a constant dialogue between the Limba and their neighbours, about issues including culture, behaviour and practice. Another factor that should be taken into consideration is the dialectal divisions which dictate the adoption and promotion of personal identities. Each dialect within an ethnic group possesses a uniqueness that contributes to the whole and, just as there are minor variants in the dialects, so also in religion.<sup>77</sup> This is true because people "hold differences of opinion on various subjects; and the myths, rituals and ceremonies may differ from area to area" (Mbiti 1989a:3).<sup>78</sup>

On account of the external and internal factors discussed so far, one can justifiably say that the concepts of religion among the Limba of today are somewhat changed from those of their forebears. Like many ethnic groups in Africa, the Limba are aware that their "traditional ideas are being abandoned, modified or coloured by the changing situation" (Mbiti 1989a:x). Limba religion "like all religions has had to accommodate itself to the process of social change and the effects of modernisation" (Opoku 1993:78). This does not imply that "everything traditional has been changed or forgotten so much that no traces of it are to be found. If anything, the changes are generally on the surface, affecting the material side of life, and only beginning to reach the deeper levels of thinking pattern, language content, mental images, emotions, beliefs and response in situations of need" (Mbiti 1989a:x).

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between urban and peasant population, and by the barriers of social class."

<sup>77</sup>This is similar to the ideas presented by Cultural Anthropologists Plog and Bates (1980:16): "While the culture of any society is by definition shared by all members of that society, culture is also differentially shared within the subgroups of the society."

<sup>78</sup>When talking about what is unique or different about a particular ethnic group, the Limba commonly make the statement "my people practice so and so..."

For the aforementioned reasons, before these changes progress deeper, beyond the material side of life, it is necessary to analyse the traditional beliefs of the Limba while it is still possible to do so.<sup>79</sup> Further, it is hoped that by defining Limba religion we will be equipped to evaluate those elements that constitute Limba religion, and that through this process we can map out Limba religion for the study of its function within the ethnic group.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to achieve an understanding, from a Limba traditionalist perspective, of what religion is, and what its components are.

It is the official position of the NPLC that the traditional religion of the Limba represents a false system of beliefs that is controlled by evil forces. Limba Christians are discouraged from having anything to do with traditional religious practices. Like their forebears the AOG, the NPLC enforces "a complete break with the past" (Olson 1969:192) as a preventive measure against "syncretism and nominalism" (Olson 1969:206).

Before defining Limba Religion and its components, we shall first examine the definitions of Religion (in general) and of African Religion (in particular) in order to discover how Limba Religion fits into the wider (general) and immediate (ATR) contexts.

### **3.2 What is Religion?**

It is difficult to define what exactly constitutes religion.

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<sup>79</sup>Similar concern has been earlier expressed by Downes (1971:1) when he wrote: "As Western influence increases with education, changes in religious thinking are taking place and it is of some importance to put what little is known on record before the rapidly changing customs and habits of the people render their own recollections more hazy, and the task of filling the many inevitable gaps becomes less likely of even partially accurate achievement."

<sup>80</sup>See Parsons (1964:173).

Tremmel (1983:3), in trying to find a good working definition of "Religion," states at the outset that, "a good definition of religion is hard to come by, mostly because it must incorporate an enormous array of beliefs and activities all the way from magic to mysticism, from private prayer to sacred community." To remedy the situation, scholars of differing interests have come up with their own varying definitions of religion.<sup>81</sup> Tremmel (1983:4) identifies two aspects that constitute religion, namely: the "functional" which deals with the purpose, content and benefits of religion, and the "sacred" which deals with "the experience of something mysterious and magnificent" that happens to religious practitioners. In other words, "religion is both something that people do to deal with certain elements of their own finitude and something that happens to them that is mysterious, tremendous, and wonderfully renovating...a definition of religion must include both the functional and the sacred experience aspects of religion" (Tremmel 1983:7).

### **3.3 What is African Traditional Religion?**

African Religion is even more difficult to define (Mbiti 1989a:15). Scholars interested in the study of ATR have used several terms in their efforts to define ATR, namely: 'Primitive/Tribal Religion', 'Animism', 'Dynamism', 'Totemism', Fetishism and Naturism. These terms have been strongly challenged as inadequate, derogatory and prejudicial (Mbiti 1989a:7. Cf. Parrinder 1962:20-23; Magesa 1997:19-22). When closely studied, it is apparent that elements of each of these

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<sup>81</sup>For example, the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Immanuel Kant, the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher and the sociologist of religion J Milton Yinger (Tremmel 1983:3,7), the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropologist Edward Taylor (Tremmel 1983:3; Mbiti 1989a:7)



designations<sup>82</sup> are found in ATR, but any of these terms address only a minute fraction of African religious beliefs and should not be therefore considered adequate on its own as description of ATR.

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<sup>82</sup>African Religion is described as 'Primitive/Tribal Religion' (Cf. Lucas 1948:33; Parrinder 1962:18; Mbiti 1989:8) because there is often no written history or scripture in ATR (Parrinder 1962:18; Magesa 1997:22). Unlike Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or Judaism, Limba Religion like other African religions has no sacred writings or documented theology for guidance in their spirituality. Magesa (1997:22) arguing for a universal recognition of ATR opposed liberal Western scholars who:

Could neither conceive nor allow that a religion dependent on oral traditions, such as African Religion is, could be regarded as an equal... These scholars failed to consider that Judaism, for example, was an orally-based religion for many centuries before its oral story was codified in writing. The same is true for Christianity and Islam, although for a shorter period of time. Other things being equal, orality alone cannot disqualify a religious system from qualitative greatness. In fact, the existence of written scripture must be seen as only one criterion among many.

ATR theology is written on the hearts, minds, words, actions and symbols of the African people (Mbiti 1989a:3). This is one of the factors responsible for the survival of African Religion and so long as those who follow ATR are alive, it will never be extinct (cf. Mbiti 1970a:xiv), and they are proud to discuss it and to live it out.

"Animism" is the belief that beings and objects like trees, stones, snakes or wild beasts may possess spirits to be worshiped (Trowell 1947:126). Although many African groups do hold religious beliefs about nature spirits, Parrinder (1969:26) argues that ATR "is more than a personification of nature, and some of its most important beliefs are in a Supreme Being and in the departed ancestors, neither of which is a strictly animistic belief." See also Sawyerr (1970:1-2); Parrinder (1962:20-23); Mbiti 1989a:7-8) and Magesa (1997:14-15).

"Dynamism" is the "belief in, and the practices associated with the belief in hidden, mysterious, supersensible, pervading energy, powers, potencies, forces" (Smith 1966:16). Cf. Parson (1964:163).

"Totemism" is "a complex system of ideas, symbols, and practices based on an assumed relationship between an individual or a social group and a natural object known as a totem. The totem may be a particular species of bird, animal, or plant, a natural phenomenon, or a feature of the landscape with which a group believes itself linked in some way. The term totem is derived from the language of the Ojibwa, a Native North American tribe" (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2003).

"Fetishism" is a "form of belief and religious practice in which supernatural attributes are imputed to material, inanimate objects, known as fetishes (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2003). See also Parrinder (1962:15); Mbiti (1989a:10) and Magesa (1997:14-15).

"Naturism" applies to "religious devotion paid either to nature as a deified collective entity or to all things in nature, including the elements, celestial bodies, plants, animals, and humanity (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2003). Cf. Mbiti (1989a:10).

African scholars have also encountered problems in seeking an appropriate definition for ATR. One major reason for this difficulty is that African religion is not universal; rather it is tribal or national (Mbiti 1989a:4). On the basis of the multiplicity and differences of ATR, Mbiti (1989a:1-5) has argued that we should speak of ATR in the plural and not in the singular. He argued that African beliefs are so entwined with tribal structure that they are virtually indistinguishable. There are about 1000 tribes, each of which has their own religion, and each religion is limited to the tribe in which it evolved. Because there is no system of dogmas in ATR, each person assimilates ideas and practices from his/her own family and community. In the absence of founders,<sup>83</sup> reformers or scriptures, African Religions have no identifiable standard and there is no evidence of a common origin. This said, Mbiti was unable to ignore the overwhelming similarities between these "religions" and proposed that the unifying force was a single underlying "African Philosophy" (1989a:1).

Idowu (1973:104) has responded contrary to Mbiti's position on the grounds that African people have a common racial origin and therefore all African culture and religious beliefs have evolved from a common source. He describes these common factors as "negritude" an expression of their common Africaness. More importantly, Africans have similar concepts about God and the names of God and the meaning of those names are also similar.<sup>84</sup> Because the belief in a Supreme Creator God is the basis of all African Religion,<sup>85</sup> it is proper to speak of ATR in the singular.

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<sup>83</sup>See also Mbiti (1989a:59).

<sup>84</sup>For a detailed study and comparison on these issues, see Mbiti (1970).

<sup>85</sup>In ATR: "The supremacy of God above all created order is the starting point. "African Religion never questions nor debates God's ultimate importance"

Recently, Magesa (1997:14-18) has also argued for the homogeneity of ATR in the sense that African Religion is one in its essence. He argues that there is a "basic world-view" which is fundamentally the same throughout Africa. The varieties that exist within ATR cannot be taken to mean a diversity of fundamental belief.<sup>86</sup> The differences within African Religion are the result of the distinctive life styles of the peoples of African peoples. Such varieties are also found in many of the major religious belief systems of the world. For example, there are varieties of expression within Christianity in the form of denominations nonetheless they remain Christian. This is also true of Islam with its different sects (Shia, Suni, Sufi) nonetheless they remain Muslim.<sup>87</sup>

African Religion generally consists of a belief in the Supernatural and the practices by which the African relates to the Supernatural. There is a hierarchy of Supernatural forces which consists of a Supreme Being, Ancestral and Non-Ancestral spirits, as well as Deities or Divinities. The practices employed by African Religion include both those showing reverence to these beings (e.g. sacrifice) and those intended to control supernatural forces (e.g. magic and medicines). While the various African cultures, and resultantly various scholars, hold differing views on the interrelationship of these elements,<sup>88</sup> they

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(Magesa 1997:40).

<sup>86</sup>In similar vein, Taylor (1963:27) writing over three decades earlier stated: "there is not one homogeneous system of belief throughout Africa ... Nevertheless anyone who has read a number of anthropological works dealing with different parts of Africa must be struck not only by the remarkable number of features that are common but by the emergence of a basic world-view which fundamentally is everywhere the same."

<sup>87</sup>The argument of the varieties in Christianity and Islam was also earlier taken up by Parrinder (1962:10-11).

<sup>88</sup>Parrinder (1962:25) represented the relationship between spiritual powers by a triangular formula. At the Apex is the Supreme God, on one side of the triangle is the Ancestors, and on the other side of the triangle are the gods or nature God, and at the base is the earth where the dead are buried and

form an identifiable core. By this core, we are able to define ATR as the institutionalized beliefs, teachings, practices and behaviors of various African societies in relation to the Supernatural, in the context of their respective societies and experiences. This definition addresses both the sacred and functional aspects of religion.

### 3.4 What is Limba Religion?

In the words of an interviewee, "Religion is what we call *Dina* ("a way of life"). It is our culture (*dina/namu/maboro*)."<sup>89</sup> In Limba the word *Dina* means both "Religion" and "Culture". This makes it hard to draw a dividing line between the sacred and the secular. The Limba believe that God not only created them, he also instituted their culture and showed them "how to grow rice, tap palm wine, make sacrifice, exercise their strength, and cook food; it was he who travelled around to find a wise and kind man to be the first chief ... He was and is behind all the institutions and values of Limba society" (Finnegan 1965:108). In this regard, Limba Religion is typical of ATR, "there is no sharp dividing line between sacred and secular such as is usually assumed in Europe. Material and spiritual are intertwined, the former as a vehicle of the latter" (Parrinder 1962:27). In Limba Religion as in other African religions, "there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life" (Mbiti 1989a:2). The inseparability of

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where humankind lives and its intermediaries. Idowu (1977:139) states that the beliefs in God, in the divinities, in spirits, in ancestors and practice of magic and medicine are the five components that make African Traditional Religion. In Mbiti's opinion, the beliefs in God, Spirits and Divinities are part of the elements of African Religious beliefs (1989a:7). According to Magesa (1997:35-36), "God, the ancestors, and the spirits are all powers or forces that impinge on human life in one way or another."

<sup>89</sup>Brima Kargbo (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

the sacred and the secular in African Religion is another factor that ensures that the longevity of ATR, will match that of the culture. Every part of African society is thoroughly religious and each "society is maintained by its religious outlook" (Sawyer 1996:10). The pervasive nature of religion makes it an inevitable component of everyday life. As another interviewee put it, "life is religion and religion is life."<sup>90</sup> Life cannot be divorced from "Religion" and "Religion" likewise cannot be divorced from life. This worldview was clearly echoed by Magesa when he said that African religion is "quite literally life and life is religion" (1997:25-26). Religion permeates the whole life of the African - "their personal, family, and socio-political life" (Mulago 1991:127). It is a living organism, so to speak, that regularly operates in the life of the society. Because religion is the life-blood of the society, the Limba believe that life must be lived "holistically." Although religion gives them spiritual and physical strength during times of distress, hardship and disappointment which, without a doubt, helps them to understand the reality of life and provides significance to the mystery of life, these are not the factors that compel them to stay connected to the supernatural. In other words, religion is not practiced only in times of need, or so that they can deal with life's troubling and challenging experiences. *Kanu* is served not merely for what he can do, but for who he is. As Erickson (1992:83) a Christian writer puts it, God "is of value to us for what he is in himself, not merely for what he does." Limba Religion is an ongoing process in times of joy and of sadness.<sup>91</sup>

Limba Religion is a way of life that is expressed both personally

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<sup>90</sup>Bagbon Samura (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>91</sup>This is reminiscent of Paul's exhortation to the Romans (Rom. 8:35, 37-39).

and corporately through "belief (*kulaniya*) in a Supreme God (*Kanu Masala*), Angels (*malekɛŋ*), Ancestral spirits (*fureni be*) and non-ancestral spirits (*mbaalin*), in religious objects (*sɛbɛ, kudori*), sacred places (*ŋkaniyki*), in social institutions (*kahu*), in religious officials and leaders, in the observance of ceremonies and festivals (*kahuin*) and in the teaching and practice of morals and ethical values."<sup>92</sup>

Although a precise definition of Christianity is hard to come by, like Limba religion it has been described as "a total way of life..." (Mbiti 1986:7). While it may be argued that this is not an accurate description of the lives of many Christians in other parts of the world, it is an accurate description of the lives of Christian Limbas within the NPLC. To them Christianity is "a total way of life." This is due at least in part, to the traditional religious upbringing of church members:

With all the evil we have attached to traditional religion, I believe without that heritage our church would not have been the fastest growing ethnic church in the whole country. Without it the Limba would not have been renowned as the most religious group in Sierra Leone. All of us here were born into homes that practiced these beliefs. The idea of bringing religion to social functions was gotten from our heritage...In our day to day discussions; we use the religious phrases we inherited from our people. Devout Christians developed religious devotion from their cultural roots. Because we grew up in a culture that sees religion as an everyday event that is the tradition we have brought with us to the church...<sup>93</sup>

Looking through the NPLC's supplementary song book entitled, *Buku*

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<sup>92</sup>Brima Kargbo (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>93</sup>Rev. MacFoday Kamara (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown). In similar vein, "we can rightly say that African religion has prepared the religious and spiritual ground for many of its adherents to listen carefully to the teachings of the Bible..." (Mbiti 1986:11).

*Wo Ka ɲaiŋɛɲ ɲaɲ woɲ* ("The Book of Christian Songs") this devotion is immediately apparent. The very first song is an exhortation to religious devotion and church attendance:

<i>Sa ka sɔnde woɲ</i>	Come for Sunday
<i>Sanka iɲ hɔnɔkɔlɛ</i>	Morning and evening
<i>Tuside iɲ wɛnside</i>	Tuesday and Wednesday
<i>mɛnɛ fraide</i>	also Friday

Limba religion is a way of life based on their beliefs, practices and teachings. Let us now look at these three components of Limba religion.

### 3.5 Components of Limba Religion

The Limba believe in four types of spirits: the Supreme Being, Angels, the Ancestors, and Non-Ancestral Spirits. A majority of the Limba have categorised these spirits according to a scale of preference.<sup>94</sup> At the top of the scale is the Supreme Being. Next are the angels, and the ancestors. Most Limba place the angels just above the ancestors, but a few reverse this order (cf. Finnegan 1965:107-16; 1967:19-22).<sup>95</sup> Non-ancestral Spirits are ranked fourth in the Limba worldview.<sup>96</sup>

Outside of this ranking, the Limba also believe in certain other powers of a spiritual nature. These include artifacts/objects for protective purpose like amulets, objects on farms and door

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<sup>94</sup>This formula is similar to most African worldviews where "the spiritual powers are ranked in hierarchies and approached according to need" (Parrinder 1962:26).

<sup>95</sup>It is only the positions of angels and ancestors which are disputed and whichever a person considers second, the other is third.

<sup>96</sup>Other Sierra Leonean groups, like the Mende consider three strands in the concept of the supernatural: a belief in the Supreme or High God, veneration of the ancestors, and belief in nature divinities (Sawyer 1968:3; cf. Gittins 1987:40-41). The Kono believe in a Supreme Being, followed by lesser gods, ancestral spirits and impersonal powers (Parsons 1964:9).

posts; objects used for ordeals like 'swears', traditional clothes, medicines, and sacred places, like shrines, caves, trees where the supernatural could be present and venerated. These powers are also manifest by the secret societies of *Gbangba* and *Bondo*.

Limba religion is not limited to a belief in Supernatural entities and abstract powers. There is also a strong belief in sacred specialists/officials<sup>97</sup> as God's mortal agents who are gifted with spiritual abilities for the good of individuals and of the community. Sacred specialists are believed to have a special relationship with God, humans and spirits of all levels. Although sacred officials are not worshipped, they are trusted and respected as intermediaries and people gifted with spiritual prowess to maintain harmony between the community and the supernatural.

Limba belief in the supernatural is expressed through practices including sacrifice, offering, prayer, libation and cleansing rites,<sup>98</sup> all of which are seen as means to stay connected to the Supernatural. God is worshipped mostly through sacrifice and prayer. The ancestors are venerated, through the same means as God, for their interest in the living as mediator between the individual, the community and God, and for the guidance and instruction they provide for better living, both physical and spiritual.<sup>99</sup> Offerings are made to both malevolent spirits and benevolent spirits.<sup>100</sup> The practice of participating in the

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<sup>97</sup>See Finnegan (1965:115). Sacred Specialists also play a vital role among Sierra Leonean ethnic groups: Kono (Parsons 1964:69, 81). Mende (Sawyerr 1968:54-87; Gittins 1987:179-202). Temne (Shaw 1985:286-303; 1996:30-55). ATR Parrinder (1962:100-09) and Mbiti (1989a:162-82).

<sup>98</sup>See Finnegan (1967:21). Cf. Parsons (1964:68-78); Parrinder (1962:79-100); Mbiti (1989a:58-71) and Magesa (1997:201-09).

<sup>99</sup>See Finnegan (1965:110-13; 1967:21).

<sup>100</sup>See Finnegan (1967:22).



annual priestly celebrations is an expression of the belief that the Limba have in the work and office of the priesthood.

Limba religious and ethical teaching is primarily a result of their belief in the supernatural. Apart from their teachings concerning the components of the supernatural, worship and veneration; they teach about evil and its consequence.<sup>101</sup> They teach that sin is both anti-spiritual and anti-social, and includes offences against God, spiritual agents, humankind, animate things or inanimate things. These may take the form of witchcraft, or any other anti-social deed or intention. Because sin, of any kind, offends the Supernatural, it forms an important part of Limba teaching and must be dealt with in order to restore a healthy relationship with the Supernatural and with the society. The process of eradicating evil and restoring harmony through the courts, or through 'swears'<sup>102</sup>, ordeals and curses is seen as justice. God is believed to be behind all the moral and ethical values held by the Limba (Finnegan 1965:108). On moral issues, the Limba refer to God "as being responsible either for everything or for some feature under discussion" (Finnegan 1965:109). You frequently hear statements like "Kanu does not like tale-telling" or "It was Kanu who gave us the custom that Limbas don't steal - that's what we're like" (Finnegan 1965:109). These values play an important role in the Limba worldview. Moral and ethical teaching is done at home and in secret society bushes, and is accomplished through story telling and discussion. There are many stories about God and about ethical relationships with both animate and inanimate objects because all of creation comes from the same spiritual force (Finnegan 1967). Everything that exists (animals, birds, reptiles, plants, rocks, the land,

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<sup>101</sup>Cf. Mbiti (1989a:199-219); Magesa (1997:161-91).

<sup>102</sup>See Finnegan (1964:8-26).

the sea, the sun, the moon and the stars, and people) possesses the same spiritual qualities. We all share the same origins; therefore all of God's creation should be treated with appropriate reverence and attention.

In their descriptions of all these beliefs, practices and teachings, "the Limba explain and interpret the world around them and the place of humans in society" (Finnegan 1967:22). At the centre of all these religious phenomena is humankind. The Limba believe that humankind is created with a spiritual entity which enables him/her to relate to a higher power or powers as a means of keeping in balance the supernatural, self, family, clan and the society. Humankind then is a spiritual agent that makes the sacred functional by transmitting what is on the heart and mind into words, actions and practices. As Nyamiti (n.d.:11) points out: "African religious behaviour is centred mainly on man's life in this world, with the consequence that religion is chiefly functional, or a means to serve people to acquire earthly goods... and to maintain social cohesion and order."

Christianity is also composed of beliefs, practices and teachings. Not unlike Limba traditionalists, Christians believe in and teach about four kinds of spirits: God (John 4:24), the ancestors/saints,<sup>103</sup> angels (Heb. 1:14) and non-ancestral spirits (Eph. 6:12). Christian belief in God and in the communion of saints is enshrined in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. There is also a common belief in spiritual leaders as God's agents.<sup>104</sup> In the practices of the church, as in ATR worship plays a vital

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<sup>103</sup>The NT refers to Abraham (Matt. 3:9, Acts 7:2); David (Matt. 11:10, Acts 2:29) and Jacob (John 4:12) as ancestors. The church especially the Roman Catholics venerates the saints.

<sup>104</sup>The activities of the Apostles in the Book of Acts are testaments to this belief. A similar leadership is accorded to Judges, Prophets and Kings in the Old Testament.

role. In their teachings, ethics, as well as sin and its consequence are important. If the description of Christianity and its components that we have outlined, and the earlier general definition of religion are acceptable, then it is right to say that although the two systems bear different frameworks, Christianity and African Religion share affinities in terms of description and components.

### 3.6 Conclusion

Like most African Religions, external and internal influences continue to affect Limba Religion. In spite of the changes and challenges, Limba Religion continues to thrive<sup>105</sup> because of its organic nature as a way of life that is deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of its believers and is expressed through their words, actions and symbols as a way to maintain a cordial and healthy relationship with the supernatural, the community, and the self. The fundamental concepts of Limba Religion are vested in their belief in the Supreme Being, Angels, Ancestral and Non-ancestral Spirits; in religious objects, in sacred places and social institutions, in religious officials and leaders. Their Religion is also vested in their practice/observance of ceremonies and festivals, and in their teaching and practice of morals and ethical values.

The expression of their belief through practice and teaching makes Limba Religion both sacred and functional. Religion can, of course include a wide range of beliefs, practices, and cultural behaviours, and each religion, whether organised or organic consists of different amounts of each of these elements.

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<sup>105</sup>Finnegan's (1967:19) discovery that Limba religious "beliefs are not contradicted" by the influences of Islam and Christianity is still valid,

Although Christianity and African Religion are different in several ways, they share many of the same characteristics. We now move to the study of the highest Being in Limba religion the Supreme Being.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Supreme Being

#### 4.1 Introduction

The Limba hold, "as an integral part of their world view" (Parrinder 1969:39) a belief<sup>106</sup> in a Supreme Being called *Kanu Masala*. The existence of this being is not a point of discussion among the Limba, it is simply known. "God is no stranger" (Mbiti 1989a:29),<sup>107</sup> and he looms large in the consciousness of the people. Limba "speech, proverbs, prayers, and worship are all imbued with man's awareness of God and an ardent desire to enter into intimate communication with him" (Metuh 1981:viii). "But what is He? What is His role in the life of the average human being?" (Sawyer 1970:x). Is he the same as the Judeo-Christian God?

The NPLC does not dispute the fact that Limba traditionalists have a belief in a God: the church's contention is that the traditionalists do not serve the one true God. The God who has

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<sup>106</sup>Smith (1966:v) provides us with references of scholars that have collected evidence that most Africans have a belief in a Supreme Being. While working as a missionary in Africa, Smith was asked by Emil Ludwig, "How can the untutored African conceive God?" Ludwig was surprised when Smith responded that it was irrelevant to persuade "Africans of the existence of God: they are sure of it..." In disbelief he asked, "How can that be?" He went on to say "Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing" (Smith 1966:1). While it is likely that Ludwig's statements simply express a gross misunderstanding of the African nature, if they were ever applicable, it is clear that they are now outdated.

<sup>107</sup>In African traditional life, even to a child the Supreme Being needs no

"revealed himself as the eternally self-existent 'I AM', the Creator of heaven and earth and the Redeemer of mankind. He has further revealed himself as embodying the principles of relationship and association as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10-11; Matthew 28:19; Luke 3:22)" (Statement of Faith: Doctrine 2). In that regard, the Christians do not equate the traditional God with their own. However, although the vital Christian teaching of the Trinity is not part of Limba religious concept, the traditionalists, continue to argue that the God of the Christians is the same God they serve. There is a familiar saying among the traditionalists that they "serve the same God; there is no difference between the Christian God and *Kanu*."<sup>108</sup> Hargrave (1944:63) writing about the three main religions (ATR, Islam and Christianity) of Sierra Leone said that "the belief in God, the Creator, all powerful, invisible...is accepted by all religious groups."

In this chapter, we shall study Limba notions about God as they are expressed in his names, his attributes, his works, and his relationships as well as through the worship he receives.

#### **4.2 Names of God**

Among the Limba, great importance is attached to names. In most African cultures, names function not merely as "identification marks" applied to people (Metuh 1981:19), but they "often express qualities for which the owners are conspicuous" (Smith 1966:4). Usually a name either portrays or denotes a defining characteristic of its bearer. In other words, a name, in Limba worldview, is often an indication of a person's character,

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pointing out' says an Ashanti proverb (Metuh 1981:viii).

<sup>108</sup>Dura Conteh (Interviewed July 2002: Binkolo Town).

nature, or rank, or an expression of some peculiar quality. A name denotes essence, identity and power. It is upon these premises that the Limba traditionalists base their understanding of God.

In Judeo-Christian tradition, as in Limba tradition, the meaning of a name is crucial (Packer 1980:445-47; Erickson 1992:83). In Biblical times, names were significant because "they revealed character and identity and signified existence" (Achte-meier 1996:736). Names indicated who people were, their conduct, and the way they lived their lives. Care and attention to significance were very important in the choice of names (Erickson 1992:83; Houtman 1993:71). For the Israelites, the revelation of God's name and its continued use were of great significance because it was the means by which God could be reached and known (Achte-meier 1996:736). Theophoric personal names are a valuable guide to qualities associated with God, and the personal names containing God's divine name *Yahweh* depict his nature, character, and peculiar qualities (Achte-meier 1996:734).

The tradition and terminology of God's names in the NT was "inherited from the OT and Judaism as mediated by the Septuagint (LXX)" (Achte-meier 1996:734). However, this inherited tradition was greatly modified both by the "understanding of the teaching of Jesus" and by the "understanding of the person of Jesus as the definitive expression of God" (Achte-meier 1996:734).<sup>109</sup> The names and titles of Jesus, tell us about his character, peculiar qualities, rank and power. For example, the name "Jesus" (= Heb. "Joshua") means "Saviour." The instruction of the angel to Joseph was that the child Mary bears should be named "Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). The name

"Emmanuel" (Heb.) "means, God is with us" (Matt. 1:23). The title "the Christ" (= Heb. "Messiah") means the "anointed." Jesus was the long awaited Saviour and Deliverer. The "Lord" means "master."

Let us now discuss the names of the Limba Supreme Being to discover what light they shed on their concept of God.

#### 4.2.1 *Kanu Masala*

The origin and meaning of any name in Limba culture is crucial.<sup>110</sup> The personal name of the Limba Supreme Being is *Kanu Masala*. The first word, "*Kanu*" is believed to have come from the Biriwa and Safroko Limba peoples (Finnegan 1967:107).<sup>111</sup> Two theories exist about the origin and meaning of the name *Kanu*.

The first theory is a story about a caring king (God) who was living side by side with humankind, and who fled because of the increasing demands of his people:

There once lived a king who had a few subjects. He one day called to assure them that they could come with whatever problems they had and he would help to solve them. The king indeed kept his word by solving all degrees of problems that were brought to him. He used to meet with his subjects in person to fulfill their requests. As the people began to increase in number, their problems also increased. The king, who lived in a place where he could be easily reached, then said to himself: "Now that my subjects are increasing rapidly, and their problems and requests continue to rise immensely. They have left me with no time and privacy of my own. If things continue this way, these people

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<sup>109</sup>Cf. the name "Emmanuel" (Heb.) "means, God is with us" (Matt. 1:23).

<sup>110</sup>This perspective is shared by many African peoples (Metuh 1981:19-21; Awolalu 1979:10).

<sup>111</sup>Cf. Ottenberg (1988a:441).



will send me to my grave before my appointed time." So one evening when most of his subjects had gone to bed, the king moved from his usual place to an unknown location. The following day, some of his subjects went, as usual, to meet him with their problems. Unfortunately this time, their king was not there to help them as usual. As they were returning home disappointedly, they came across other subjects who were also going to see the king with their problems. Likewise the second group could not find the king. Later, when both groups were together in the town, they all said, "Kanu niŋ ka dethiya" ("let us go and find him"). Then the search for the lost king began. The people looked on tree tops, caves, deep streams, thick bushes and forests. Occasionally, offerings and sacrifices were made to plead with the king to return. All their efforts went in vain. The king never returned. Therefore, the subjects called the invisible king "Kanu" ("the one we all continue to search for"). The Limba believe that God is hidden in some place where he cannot be easily seen or reached.<sup>112</sup>

This story is also one of the stories that some Limba use to explain *Kanu's* transcendence.

The second theory is theological. The name *Kanu* is:

A lengthened word for *Kan* which means the sun. This does not imply that Limba worship the sun. It is just a matter of comparison between God and the sun. As the sun is felt during the day by everyone, so also is the presence of God felt in every life. Whether you like it or not, the sun shines during the day on good and bad people alike, likewise God's goodness is to all people, to believers as well as unbelievers. As the sun is bright and clear so also is God's magnificence and glory. Nothing is hidden from the sun, this is also true with God who sees and knows all. Literally, the name *Kanu* means "like the sun."<sup>113</sup>

This theory about the origin of the name *Kanu* begins with the

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<sup>112</sup>David Kallon (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>113</sup>Hamusa Kargbo (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

etymology of the word *Kanu*.<sup>114</sup> God is likened to the sun which is above.<sup>115</sup> The Limba are careful to specify that they do not worship the sun as a deity.<sup>116</sup> The likening of God to the sun is rather a way of explaining their perception of the nature and activity of God using a familiar human experience. If then, the sun is not a manifestation of *Kanu*; it is rather used as a type. Hence the literal meaning of *Kanu* is "like the sun." The Limba call God *Kanu*, because of the striking similarities between God and the sun. Some of the attributes of *Kanu* are found in these comparisons.

Just as the existence of the sun is not disputed, the same is true of God's existence. Attempts to prove God's existence<sup>117</sup> are rare in Limba society. As with other African peoples, the existence of God is taken as a matter of course<sup>118</sup> by the Limba. It is rare to find a Limba who does not believe in the existence

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<sup>114</sup>Smith (1966:3) has cautioned that "Etymological methods are not invariably helpful and indeed may lead astray." As truthful as this statement may be, the etymological explanation is of theological importance to the Limba and throws light on some of the attributes of God.

<sup>115</sup>Finnegan (1965:107) argued that the Limba do not "have any explicit theology about *Kanu*." The theological ideas expressed in this etymological explanation prove otherwise.

<sup>116</sup>Similarly, Parrinder (1962:34) states: "An apparent identification of God with the sun has been thought to exist among peoples in the northern parts of Ghana and Nigeria. However, although they use a word for the Supreme Being which means "the sun", they are not sun-worshippers..." The same can be said in many African cultures. Among some East and West African peoples, the sun "is such a potent representation of God that" he is "simply named after it or in reference to it" (Magesa 1997:59).

<sup>117</sup>Theologians have tried to prove God's existence through the following arguments: *cosmological*- that because there is wisdom and order in the universe there is a first Cause who planned it; *teleological*- that because there are significant ends and not accidental conclusions there is Master Design; *rational*- that because the universe moves with reasonableness there is a Mind behind it; *moral*- that because man feels there are some things he "ought" to do there is a law Giver who put that moral sense in us; *ontological*- that because the idea of God exists there must be something behind the idea; *human*- that because humankind seeks to strive upwards often with considerable sacrifice there is a God who is Lord of this history. Although these arguments do have a cumulative effect and may bolster the reasonableness of faith, they are not sufficient to prove God's existence.

of God. The existence of God is, to Limba traditionalists, unquestionable<sup>119</sup> and should not be debated.<sup>120</sup>

Further, the Limba sees the indiscriminate attribute of the sun as a portrait of God's character. The sun does not discriminate. It shines on everyone irrespective of his/her status or beliefs. In the Limba view, God gives his blessing and grace impartially.

Finally, as the light of the sun makes it possible for one to distinguish things, so God shows the Limba how to discern between right and wrong. *Kanu* is the light that guides the Limba on the right path. Discerning between right and wrong is important for the harmony and continuation of the community.

In the OT, like in Limba tradition, God is likened to the sun: "For the LORD God is a sun and shield" (Psalm 84:11). In the NT, the basic assumption of God's existence is shared by scripture (if not always by Christians). On the basis of Hebrews 11:6, Erickson (1992:82-83) states "that scripture does not argue for his existence. It simply affirms it or, more often, merely assumes it...Thus existence is considered a most basic aspect of his nature." God's indiscriminate character is also a vital Christian teaching, for he "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good" (Matt. 5:45).

Let us now move on to discuss the other half of the Limba name

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<sup>118</sup>Cf. Awolalu (1979:3).

<sup>119</sup>Sawyer (1970:8) states: "God's existence is never questioned" by the African.

<sup>120</sup>My attempts to question some of my interviewees about their belief in the existence of God were met with strong resentment. One of my interviewees remarked, "If you do not believe that the sun exists then you are out of your mind. Worse than that, if you do not believe that God exists you are a *"kaf'ri"* (Kalawa Conteh Interviewed July 2002: Kamabai). *Kaf'ri* is an Arabic word to denote an unbeliever or Atheist.

for the Supreme Being "Masala".<sup>121</sup> This part of the name is believed to have come from the Thonko and Sela Limba peoples. There are three theories about the origin of the word *Masala*. One theory is that the word *Masala* is a Limbanised form of the word *Allah* (the name of the Muslim God). Another theory is that *Masala* is borrowed from the Kuranko<sup>122</sup> word *Mansa* ("Chief"). The final theory is that *Masala* is a Limbanised form of the Temne word *Masaba* ("Supreme").<sup>123</sup> This is perhaps the most probable origin; the generally accepted meaning of *Masala* is "supreme." Therefore, *Kanu Masala* means "God Supreme."

The AOG missionaries to the Limba adopted the use of the name *Kanu Masala* for the Judeo-Christian God. As a result, it is still used by the NPLC. In songs,<sup>124</sup> prayers, preaching and conversations, Christian Limbas continue to use the name *Kanu Masala* for God. It is because of God's supremacy that NPLC members in one of their original choruses sing: *Kanu Masala yan thon dungu dayina yah* ("God Supreme I give all of myself to you"). Most Limba Christians and Christian Limbas simply use *Kanu* for short and it is the name used commonly in Limba circles.

A majority of "Christian missionaries in their teachings and translations of scripture have adopted African names of God"

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<sup>121</sup>The Nuba people of Sudan also refer to God as *Masala* ("the great Mother") (Smith 1966:215; Mbiti 1970a:334).

<sup>122</sup>The Kuranko are another ethnic of Sierra Leone. As the closest neighbours in their homeland, they are also one of the ethnic groups with which the Limba have intermingled.

<sup>123</sup>The Islamic, Kuranko and Temne sources show how foreign influences have impacted Limba culture. The Temne full name of God is *Kuru Masaba* ("God Supreme"). Like the Limba, the Yoruba refer to God as *Olokun* "Supreme" and the Akan also call him *Nyame* "The Supreme, Omnipotent Being" (Setiloane 1986:49).

<sup>124</sup>The title of the Limba hymn book is *ɲaluɲa ɲa ka Kanu Ka Hulimba Ha* "Songs of God in Limba."

(Smith 1966:34).<sup>125</sup> They "proclaimed the name of Jesus Christ. But they used the names of the God who was and is already known by African peoples..." (Mbiti 1980:818). Sanneh (2001:114) writes that "the adoption by missionaries of African names for God was key to the effective transmission of the Gospel. It implied the abandonment of arguments of European ascendancy and, too, of the moral logic of permanent colonial and missionary tutelage."

In the LXX, the often used word *Theos* ("God") a translation of the Hebrew word *Elohim* ("God") was also used for the gods of other nations, "just as it was the standard word for the gods of the Greeks and Romans of NT times" (Achteemeier 1996:735).

#### 4.2.2 *Kanu kabekede/wobekede/kathinthi*

*Kanu Masala* ("God Supreme") is believed to live above the sky<sup>126</sup> just as the sun, and in that regard he is also called *Kanu kabekede/wobekede/kathinthi* ("God above").<sup>127</sup>

There is a story about "Why Kanu is now up above in the sky."<sup>128</sup> In the old days *Kanu*, humans and animals lived together on earth.

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<sup>125</sup>Missionaries to the Katonda and Banganda peoples adopted the local names for God (Parrinder 1962:35).

<sup>126</sup>In some African culture the name for God is sometimes the same as the word for sky. For example the Temne God Kuru Masaba the prefix *kuru* means "sky" (Sawyer 1970:4). The Mende God *ŋgewo* is likely derived from the words *ŋgele wɔlɔŋgɔ* "the sky is great" (Sawyer 1970:4) or *ŋgele* "sky" *wɔɔ* "long ago" a combination that means "In the sky, from long ago" (Sawyer (1968:6). See also Gittins (1987:49). The Supreme Being among the Tiv people is *Aondo* which is the name for the 'above and firmament' (Downes 1971:17). The Nupe refer to God as the *Etsu na da sama* ("The God who is in the sky"). In Nuer Religion, the Supreme Being *Kwoth* is the Spirit who lives in the sky (Evans-Pritchard 1956:5). In Yoruba, *Olorun* means "Lord of the sky or of the heavens" (Lucas 1948:35-36).

<sup>127</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:107).

<sup>128</sup>The "withdrawal theory of God" is common among the Africans. Some ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, "Ivory coast, Ghana, Togo, Dahomey and Nigeria, at least, say that God was formerly so near to men that they grew over-familiar with him" (Parrinder 1969:31).

Because the animals and the elements (such as fire and water) kept quarrelling and involving God in their disputes, and because they refused to heed his advice to stop, *Kanu* became angry and went to live above (Finnegan 1965:107). This is how the story goes:

The deer and python were in search of food in the forest when they bumped into each other. The python asked the deer "What are you looking for?" The deer replied that it was looking for food and the python said you will be to me the food that you have come to look for. The deer pleaded for its life to no avail. Then it ran to *Kanu* for help. The python went after it and they both presented their cases to *Kanu*. *Kanu* accused the python of starting trouble and advised the python to let the deer go free. The python refused to listen to *Kanu* and seized the deer and swallowed it. Some time later the python disturbed an army of ants and the ants followed it to eat it up. Like the deer the python ran to *Kanu* again *Kanu* could not prevent the ants from eating the python. In like manner, the fire claimed that the ants disturbed it and it licked them all up. The water claimed that fire disturbed it and it ate up the fire. Because of this unending fighting *Kanu* became upset and went to live above the sky.<sup>129</sup>

The belief that God lives above in the sky, out of reach of humankind suggests that "He is obviously a transcendent Being" (Sawyer 1970:9).<sup>130</sup> The transcendence of *Kanu* portrays his supremacy over any other spiritual being (Finnegan 1965:107).<sup>131</sup> *Kanu* is not only transcendent in terms of time and space, but he also transcends human understanding. He is conceived of as being "incomprehensible" (Finnegan 1967:19).

The Limba believe that God's transcendence is appropriate and necessary so that God can effectively watch over his creation and

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<sup>129</sup>Finnegan (1967:231-33).

<sup>130</sup>See also Finnegan (1965:108).

<sup>131</sup>Cf. Mbiti (1970a:15).

seek the interests of his people. It is also necessary so that his people might, in turn, focus on him: "...he lives far off in the sky overseeing the everyday activities of every individual on the earth below. God is in the sky so that we can focus on him and not be distracted by the troubles of the world around us."<sup>132</sup> It is a generally accepted concept that *Kanu* "lives in the sky, and his spirit is present everywhere to influence the activity of his creation, especially the activities of the Limba."<sup>133</sup> His transcendence is not a concern to Limba traditionalists because they maintain a strong belief that God takes part in everyday human affairs. In other words although God is conceived as being physically out of reach, he is accessible through worship, natural manifestations and his establishment of and participation in human activities. Thus *Kanu* is both transcendent and immanent.<sup>134</sup> God's transcendence "is a difficult attribute to grasp, and one which must be balanced with God's immanence. The two attributes are paradoxically complimentary: God is 'far' (transcendent), and men cannot reach him; but God is also 'near' (immanent), and he comes close to man" (Mbiti 1970a:12). However, the association of God with the sky and the fact that although God is far away from humankind, he is still reachable are two vital components of the African concept of God (Sawyer 1970:ix).

In Judeo-Christian theology the transcendence of God is displayed in the concept that God dwells in heaven (Erickson 1992:27). *Shamayim* ("heaven(s)/sky"), *ouranos* ("heaven/sky") is the abode

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<sup>132</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>133</sup>Kabba M. Bangura (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>134</sup>In ATR, the transcendence of God is considered in several ways: In terms of Time, Space, Distance, and Outreach, worship and exaltation, God's limitlessness, human's understanding of God and God's supreme status in relation to other beings, divinities, objects, and human institutions (Mbiti 1970a:12-16). God's immanence is generally conceived of as God's involvement in the affairs of the African (Mbiti 1970a:16-18).

of God. Rehab talking about Israel's God says: "The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above" (Josh. 2:11). Moses encouraged Israel to acknowledge and take to heart that "the LORD is God in heaven above" (Deut. 4:39). At Jesus' birth the angels praised God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven" (Luke 2:14). When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, a voice came from heaven (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11). Jesus taught his disciples to pray "Our Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:9). He spoke of "your father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16, 45: 6:1; 7:11; 18:14).

Like the Limba, Christians balance their belief in God's transcendence with their belief in his immanence. Although the Judeo-Christian God lives in heaven he "is not far from each of us" (Acts 17:27b).

#### 4.2.3 *Kanu Wopothi*

It is no longer a fact that all Limba traditionalists believe only in a single high God that lives in the sky.<sup>135</sup> Some juxtapose their belief in *Kanu Wobekede* with a belief in a God below, whom they call *Kanu Wopothi* ("God below").<sup>136</sup> *Kanu Wopothi* is not perceived of as a personal being, but is used as a general category to describe any evil spirit.<sup>137</sup> In other words, there is

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<sup>135</sup>As suggested by Finnegan (1965:107).

<sup>136</sup>The Bakuta people of the Congo speak of two Supreme Gods: *Nzambi* above and *Nzambi* below who are often regarded as twins and they act heroic roles in many stories (Parrinder 1969:43).

<sup>137</sup>Cf., Finnegan (1967:274-75). Finnegan states: "Limba do not generally speak of *Kanu below*, but occasionally this term is used (especially in Kamabai, I think) to cover all the spiritual agencies other than *Kanu* (above)—i.e. spirits, the dead and, especially, witches. This terminology may possibly be an effect of mission teaching" (1967:274-75. Cf. 236). The statement that "Limba do not generally speak of *Kanu below*, but occasionally" may be true in the 1960s and perhaps in the early 1970s. This is no longer the case in the past three decades. As a Limba growing up in Sierra Leone, I was familiar with the phrase *Kanu below* before even starting my secondary schooling. The concept played a vital role during my fieldwork as will be shown in the discussion of Non-Ancestral spirits.



a Supreme God who lives in the sky and who is considered to be the good God, and there is a God who resides on earth, who is held responsible for all the evil and mischievous occurrences in the universe. There are stories that make references to both *Kanu* above and *Kanu* below for example, "Kanu gave food to the Limba" (Finnegan 1967:235-38) and "Kanu above and Kanu below" (Finnegan 1967:274-76).

The Judeo-Christian God is acknowledged as being "God in heaven above and on earth below" (Deut. 4:39; Josh. 2:11). This speaks not so much of a perceived residence, but of God's domain. God controls both "heaven above" and the "earth below" (Gen. 24:3; Luke 10:21; Isa. 66:1; Matt. 5:34-35 and Acts 7:49). While Christians do not acknowledge a "God below" they do identify a personal force responsible for much of the evil in the world: Jesus referred to Satan as the prince and ruler of this world (John 12:31, 14:30).

#### 4.2.4 *Kanu Masaraka*

Another name of *Kanu* that is used somewhat less frequently is *Kanu Masaraka*<sup>138</sup> ("God of Sacrifice" or "God who accepts Sacrifice").<sup>139</sup> This name is probably derived from the word *saraka* ("sacrifice"), and is often used to distinguish between *Kanu* above and *Kanu* below. *Kanu Wobekede* is *Kanu Masaraka* who accepts sacrifice (*saraka*) while *Kanu Wopothi* does not deserve sacrifice.<sup>140</sup> Sacrifice is the primary means through which the Limba stay connected with *Kanu*. An in depth discussion of this

<sup>138</sup>Cf. Mbiti (1970a:332). However Mbiti misspells the word as "Masaranka". The correct spelling is "Masaraka".

<sup>139</sup>Similarly, because the Abaluyia sacrifice to God, they refer to him as "the One to whom sacred rites and sacrifices are made (or paid)" Mbiti (1970a:179).

<sup>140</sup>Rev. MacFoday Kamara (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown). Gifts offered to *Kanu Wopothi* are referred to as *kudamaŋ* ("offering").

issue is found below under the topic "Worshipping *Kanu*."

While it seems that this aspect of God's character may be a point of contact which might build much understanding between traditionalists and Christians, it has instead become one of the most contentious issues between the two groups. On the one hand, the NPLC condemns sacrifices made by traditionalists on the basis that they are offered "to demons and not to God" (1 Cor. 10: 20a). On the other hand, they preach the death of Christ as a sacrifice made by God for the redemption of humankind. Limba traditionalists, in turn, find Christian teaching about the sacrificial death of Christ to be strange and contradictory:

They tell us that Jesus was offered by God as a sacrifice for our sins. Then the very missionaries were the ones who were condemning the olden practice of human sacrifice. If human sacrifice is ungodly, why did God kill his son for us? I will find it very difficult to believe that Jesus died for our sins.<sup>141</sup>

Like in Limba religion, God is also presented as a God of sacrifice in the Judeo-Christian tradition. God requires sacrifice as a form of worship (Exod. 20:24) and requires blood sacrifice for the propitiation of sin (Heb. 9:22)<sup>142</sup> In the OT, both requirements were met through the sacrificial system in the Temple. In the NT, the propitiation of sin was accomplished through the sacrifice of Christ (1 John 2:2) and believers are called to offer their lives as "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1) as an act of worship.

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<sup>141</sup>Yelie Conteh (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>142</sup>Thompson (1974:34) argues that the OT prophets express an attitude that "sacrifice had never been part of Yahweh's original requirement" and that this attitude leads to the conclusion "that sacrifices were not originally offered to Yahweh in Israel" (1974:35). His arguments, though interesting, are incomplete.

### 4.3 Attributes of Kanu

An attribute is a quality regarded as a natural or typical part of someone or something. The attributes of God then are the qualities which constitute his nature and are characteristic of who God is. These attributes comprise his intrinsic, eternal and moral characteristics,<sup>143</sup> and should not be confused with his activities.<sup>144</sup> God's attributes are not humankind's conceptions projected upon him (Erickson 1992:79), but are eternal and cannot be separated from his being and essence. We have already dealt with the attributes of transcendence and immanence in our discussion of the names for *Kanu*. We shall proceed to deal with the rest of *Kanu's* attributes.

#### 4.3.1 Omnipotence

The Limba use two ascriptions to describe the omnipotence of God: *Basɛmbɛ wo* ("The Powerful One")<sup>145</sup> and *Womandi wo* ("The Great One/The Almighty").<sup>146</sup> God is the one to whom absolute power and might are attributed.<sup>147</sup> *Kanu* is who he is, and can do what he chooses because of his omnipotence. Ultimate responsibility for everything that happens from birth until death is attributed to God.<sup>148</sup> *Kanu* is considered the ultimate cause of a person's fortunes or misfortunes in life and death, the determiner<sup>149</sup> of

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<sup>143</sup>See Mbiti (1970a:xiii; 1989a: 30-38).

<sup>144</sup>Some scholars have discussed God's activity of Creation as an attribute (Awolalu 1979:13-16; Metuh 1981:33-34, 40).

<sup>145</sup>The Akan and the Ashanti, describe God as "the Powerful One" (Mbiti 1970a:9); the Yoruba call God "*Alagbara gbogbo*" which means "All-powerful" (Parrinder 1966:228) and the Ngɔmbe elders say "Anjombe" is "All-powerful" (Davidson 1966:167).

<sup>146</sup>In Yoruba *Olodumare* means "the Almighty" (Mbiti 1970a:8).

<sup>147</sup>Sawyerr (1970:5) says that the African God is "a God of Power and is the ultimate source of all power."

<sup>148</sup>Kabba Bangura (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>149</sup>Another meaning for God's name *Nyame* in Akan is "Determiner" (Setiloane 1986:46).

the number of children born in a household, of all events and even of the existence of the world (Finnegan 1967:19). Therefore, the Limba depend on *Kanu* for every aspect of their daily endeavours and for their welfare.

In the Limba worldview, every plan is made and every human achievement is reached "*thoko ba Kanu*" ("by the grace of God"). Humankind lives and exists "by the grace of *Kanu*" (Finnegan 1967:19). No human effort will ever succeed *mεmε Kanu tha mε* ("If *Kanu* does not agree"). His "stamp of approval is indispensable to make any activity effective. Even when all necessary actions have been taken "to have a good farming season, to hunt many animals and to rise to positions of prominence, if *Kanu* is not consulted for his approval and blessing..."<sup>150</sup> human efforts are in vain.

Anything that happens in a person's life is attributed to the will of God that is why the Limba say, "*mani moka Kanu*" ("it is God's doing").<sup>151</sup> This does not imply that God is held responsible for evil or for unfortunate happenings it simply infers that God has allowed these situations to happen. Therefore during times of serious problems or disappointments the Limba say "*yaŋ piyɔ mafey ma ka Kanu*" ("I will leave everything in the hands of God"). There is a cause behind every problem or disaster that befalls humankind. When something out of the ordinary happens, the Limba often say *bagbontε* ("not for nothing"), which means that there is something responsible for the problem. God's overriding power surpasses that of any being,

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<sup>150</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown). A similar ideology is found among the Yorubas: things that receive *Olodumare's* approval are easy to do and the things that do not receive *Olodumare's* sanction are difficult to do (Awolalu 1979:14).

<sup>151</sup>Cf. Magesa (1997:41).

natural or supernatural. He "has no equal."<sup>152</sup> He knows what is right for the Limba. *Kanu* is ultimately responsible for each person's "life and status... for everything in creation."<sup>153</sup> He is "the ultimate cause and justification of all things" (Finnegan 1965:107). The Limba traditionalist sees the omnipotence of God as the source of all his other attributes. God's omnipotence is the basis upon which his other attributes are discussed.

God's omnipotence is also evident in Judeo-Christian tradition. In Genesis 17:1, the Judeo-Christian God is called as *El-Shaddi* ("God Almighty"). It is seen in human life and personality,<sup>154</sup> in his ability to overcome apparently insurmountable problems<sup>155</sup> and in his control of the course of human history<sup>156</sup> (Erickson 1992:85-86). There are overwhelming Biblical references to God as the possessor and source of power.

It is also clear that Christians share a belief that humankind lives by God's grace. Grace is God's unmerited favour and we are what we are because of that favour. Paul says "But by the grace of God I am what I am" and he attributes his success to "the grace of God that is with" him (1 Cor. 15:10). This all-powerful God calls for humankind's total submission to his will. Even Jesus submitted to the will of God (Matt. 26:42; Mark 14:36 and Luke 22:42).

#### 4.3.2 Omnipresence

The Limba say *Kanu kin kamε kamε* ("God is everywhere"). He is

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<sup>152</sup>Rev. MacFoday Kamara (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>153</sup>Hamusa Kargbo (June 2002: Freetown). For many Africans, "life, and the power that is life or existence, flows from God" (Magesa 1997:47).

<sup>154</sup>Cf. Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15.

<sup>155</sup>Cf. Jer. 32:15-17; Matt. 19:26.

<sup>156</sup>Acts 17:26.

like the Kono God *Yataa* ("the one whom you meet everywhere").<sup>157</sup> The Limba believe that *Kanu* manifests himself to them during times of worship and religious gatherings. They strongly assume his presence at all sacrifices. He is there with them. The omnipresence of *Kanu* is also seen in connection with "natural occurrences such as thunder and lightning."<sup>158</sup> The Limba, like many other Sierra Leonean people are especially afraid of curses/"swears" relating to thunder and lightning.

Similarly, in the Judeo-Christian tradition God is not subject to the limitations of time and space and "there is no place where he cannot be found" (Erickson 1992:84). God declares "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (Jer. 23:24). Christians also believe that God is especially present when they gather to worship him. Jesus said "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:20) and later commissioned his disciples saying "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

#### 4.3.3 Omniscience

Because *Kanu* is omnipotent, he is also omniscient. He is "The One Who Knows All"<sup>159</sup> (*Wo kothɛ wo / Wo hakiyando*). He knows and "understands the thoughts of everyone on earth...and he knows what is right for us."<sup>160</sup> God's omniscience means that his wisdom and knowledge are limitless and that even if we may know "some things, it is only God who knows all. No one else is worthy of, or is given, the attribute of omniscience" (Mbiti 1970a:3). Often it is because of our imperfect and incomplete knowledge

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<sup>157</sup>Parsons (1964:165; 1966:261).

<sup>158</sup>Kabba Bangura (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>159</sup>Other African peoples like the Akan refer to God as "He who knows all' and the Bacongo say "God knows all" (Mbiti 1970a:3).

that we affirm God's omniscience. There is a common view in West Africa that originated from Nigeria that says: "No one knows tomorrow." You can make your plans ahead but from a human point of view you cannot tell exactly how things will turn out; in the final analysis only God knows. As a result of this limitation of imperfect and incomplete human knowledge, the Limba are accustomed to making decisions and plans "by the grace of God" (*"thokɔ ba Kanu"*). Because of God's omniscience, he knows what is right and suitable for us. *Kanu* not only knows, he also sees, for "nothing is hidden from the sun, this is also true with God who sees and knows all."<sup>161</sup> There is nothing hidden from God. Everything is under God's observation. "God sees whatever we do" (Parsons 1964:165). Like the sun, God "beams into the entire universe" (Mbiti 1970a:4; 1989a:31). The Limba, like the Kono and Yoruba, believe that "wrong-doers cannot escape the judgment of God" (Mbiti 1989a:31). In this regard, the Limba when they have been wronged and are unable to discover the person who has wronged them, say "*Kanu kɔtena yi koni pɛnki*" ("God sees you, you will meet him) which idiomatically means, "I did not see you doing the act but God saw you and you will meet him in judgment."

The omniscience of God is also central to Judeo-Christian theology. "We are completely transparent before God...He sees and knows us totally" (Erickson 1992:85). There is nothing which escapes God's knowledge. Man cannot hide himself from God (Psalm 139:7, 13; Jer.23:24) and even what may be hidden from humankind is laid bare before God (Heb 4:12-13).

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<sup>160</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>161</sup>Hamusa Kargbo (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

#### 4.4 Activities of Kanu

##### 4.4.1 Kanu the Creator

Like most Africans, the Limba "attribute the creation of the universe to God" (Sawyers 1968:13). In that respect *Kanu* is known as, *Wolehins Kafay wo* ("The One Who Made The Universe"). To the Limba there is no one with such power to have created the world except *Kanu*.<sup>162</sup> The Limba word *lehinia* ("creation") "means not so much "creation from nothing" as "fixing or ordering" (Finnegan 1965:107). Apart from the belief that they "are created by God"<sup>163</sup> for which reason they refer to him as *Wolehins wo/wamsti/ mina* ("The One Who Made Humankind/Us"), the Limba believe that they were God's primary creation, followed by the different clans and races of the universe<sup>164</sup> (Finnegan 1965:107; 1967:259). For the Limba God did not only create them he owns them in that respect *Kanu* is further referred to as *Wobilis mina* ("Our Owner").<sup>165</sup>

*Kanu*, as creator, is "the ultimate cause and justification of all things" including "animals, the palm trees, and the bushes" (Finnegan 1965:107). Limba traditionalists believe that "God is the source of all life, human and non-human" (Sawyers 1968:12), everything seen and unseen, animate and inanimate.<sup>166</sup> In some prayers God is thanked for the creation of the river, forest,

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<sup>162</sup>In most African societies, "creation is the most widely acknowledged work of God" (Mbiti 1989a:39).

<sup>163</sup>Samuel Koroma (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown). See also Finnegan (1965:107; 1967:238, 259).

<sup>164</sup>In Africa, myths and accounts about the order of creation vary widely (Mbiti 1970a:48-52).

<sup>165</sup>Similarly the Nupe refer to God as *Tsoci* "The Owner of us" (Setiloane 1986:49). The Tonga refer to God as, *Syatwaakwe* "The Owner of his things" (HopGood 1966:74). Similarly, the Ngoni call God "the Owner of all things" (Mbiti 1970a:72).

<sup>166</sup>Cf. Colossians 1:17. In ATR there is abundant information about God as the



mountains and trees, and for the benefits which come from them. In such prayers, God is thanked for the fish in the river, for wild food and medicine in the forest, for the awesomeness of mountains and hills. The Limba see nature as representing God's creative power and provision for their needs. The belief that God is the creator implies that God exists and that he is "the fount and apex of all existence" (Sawyerr 1968:12). That is why in both African religion and Christianity, God is "the object of worship, praise, and obedience" (Erickson 1992:125).

In the Bible the creative work of God plays a prominent role (Erickson 1992:121). In Genesis 1:1 "God created the heavens and the earth." Unlike the Limba belief, the Biblical account of creation shows God creating *ex nihilo*<sup>167</sup> ("creation out of nothing"). "God created humankind...male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). In Genesis 3:19, God declares "I made the earth, and created humankind upon it" (Isaiah 45:12). Moses told Israel "that God created human beings on the earth" (Deut. 4:32). John 1:3 asserts that "All things came to being through" God. In that regard, we can say "there are a connection and an affinity" among the creatures of God (Erickson 1992:125). We are "at base, one with nature, for we are members of the same family" (Erickson 1992:125). Therefore, we should have concern for all of creation "to preserve and guard and develop what God has made" (Erickson 1992:127).

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creator and his relationship with his creatures (Mbiti 1970a:48-177).

<sup>167</sup>The concept of creation *ex nihilo* is also reported among several African groups (Mbiti 1989a:39-40).

#### 4.4.2 *Kanu the Chief and Judge*

Because of his outstanding power and his ability to rule well and to dispense justice without prejudice,<sup>168</sup> *Kanu* is referred to as *Gbaku* ("Chief"),<sup>169</sup> *Gbaku wunthe* ("The Only Chief")<sup>170</sup> and *Gbaku Womandi* ("The Great Chief").<sup>171</sup> Chieftaincy is the greatest institution and "most Limba would find it difficult to conceive of social life" without it (Finnegan 1967:9). It is by the chief's authority that the people in his jurisdiction "carry on their daily lives or hold their respective position" (Finnegan 1967:9-10). As in the case of the human chieftaincy, the Limba would find it very difficult "to conceive of social life" and "carry on their daily lives" without God's rule and provision. As a chief, *Kanu* is always thought of as "a political head who performs the functions of a judge, and maintains justice and equity."<sup>172</sup> Among other things, a Limba chief<sup>173</sup> must be able to "cool people's hearts," "Know everything that happens in the country" and should be kind, "generous and continually helping people" by looking "after orphans and those with no relations and help those who are poor." It is implied in one story that the purpose of the chieftaincy is to look after orphans and the sick (Finnegan 1967:239). For this reason God has been referred to as *Kanu Wolɔ hoy* ("God is good"). *Kanu* does not only do good to the poor and needy, he is also the one to whom the marginalized and the victims of injustice turn in times of distress. When taken

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<sup>168</sup>For information on the governing work of God as chief/king and judge, see Mbiti (1970a:71-78).

<sup>169</sup>The Mende refer to God as *Maha-Ngewɔ*, "God the Chief" (Harris 1966:278). The Nupe call him *Etsu*, "chief" (Sawyers 1970:6). One of the titles the Ambo used for God is *Pamba*, "chief" (Dymond 1966:141).

<sup>170</sup>The Mende refer to the Supreme Being as *Maha-yilei*, "The one Chief" (Harris 1966:278).

<sup>171</sup>Another title for God in Mende is *Mahawa*, "the Great Chief" (Sawyers 1970:5; Harris 1966:278).

<sup>172</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>173</sup>See Finnegan (1965:20-35) for details.

advantage of, the Limba are quick to say *Yaŋ pɛnɛni ka Kanu* ("I leave my case with God"). God as a chief fits this profile. Most Limba chiefs I have met are not shy to tell you that the ability to rule well is a task that only God can handle perfectly. The village/town and section chiefs who, as well as ruling, also judge cases will tell you that interpreting the traditional by-laws and giving right judgements is not easy without a conscious dependence on God's wisdom.

The role of Kanu as Chief and Judge is similar to that of the Judeo-Christian God. In the OT, God is the Everlasting King (Ps. 10:16) who rules over creation (Ps. 47:7). As ruler of the universe, God cares for people (Ps. 145) and for other creatures (Ps. 147). In the NT, Jesus is described with royal terminology (Rev. 2:5; 3:21; 4:14; 17:14; 19:15-16).

God is not only the ruler of the earth, he is also the Judge (Isa. 33:22; Heb. 12:23). God is the righteous and indiscriminate judge (1 Sa. 24:12, 15) who grants justice to the poor and needy (Jer. 22:16; Luke 18:7). In the NT, God has ordained Jesus as judge of the "living and the dead" (Acts 10:42).

#### 4.4.3 *Kanu the Teacher and Adviser*

The Limba believe that the skills and abilities they possess and by which they make their livelihood or perform religious requirements are learned from God, *Bathanani iŋ Bamaŋ wo* ("The Teacher and Adviser").<sup>174</sup> Traditionalists believe that the trade skills that their forebears passed on to them and the present skills and abilities that they now have were all given by God.

In stories,<sup>175</sup> it was *Kanu* who "showed the Limba how to grow rice, tap palm wine, make sacrifice, exercise their strength, and cook their food" (Finnegan 1965:108).<sup>176</sup>

Like Limba traditionalists, most NPLC members attribute their knowledge and skills to God. In the Bible, God is a Teacher and Adviser (Ps. 25:4-5). God is the one who imparts knowledge (Ps. 94:10; Isa. 40:14c) good judgement (Ps. 119:66), and skills (Ps. 144:1b).

#### 4.5 Anthropomorphic attributes of *Kanu*

The concept of *Kanu* as father is currently popular among the Limba. It appears that this may be a recent development, as Finnegan earlier observed that "*Kanu* is never addressed as 'father'" (Finnegan 1965:107).

*Kanu* is seen as a male figure and is now often referred to as "Our Father" (*Fandantu/Handantu*).<sup>177</sup> The Limba understanding of God's fatherhood is influenced by the role of the father in their family structure. The father is looked upon as the ultimate authority and there are several ideal qualities that belong to him, for instance, the giving of life, love, faithfulness, continued care, and protection, and the wisdom that guides and instructs.<sup>178</sup> The notion of God's fatherhood indicates an intimacy that can be compared to that which exists between a

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<sup>174</sup>Samuel Koroma (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>175</sup>Finnegan (1967:235-39, 246-47) contain the stories of *Kanu* teaching and advising the Limba how to cultivate their culture.

<sup>176</sup>Likewise the Tiv, the Kakwa and the Acholi consider God as the "Teacher" who showed humankind how to cultivate food and all the essentials of life (Mbiti 1970a:74-5).

<sup>177</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>178</sup>In ATR, "God is father in terms of his position as creator and provider" (Mbiti 1970a:92). See also (Mbiti 1989a:48-49).

parent and child.<sup>179</sup> The Limba strongly believe that God has "parental compassion for his creatures"<sup>180</sup> and "if disobedient children as we are, make the appropriate ceremonial sacrifice for restoration, pardon and forgiveness, no doubt, God will have pity and restore us."<sup>181</sup> In that regard God is known as *Kanu wo pɛnɛni biya* ("God who forgives people") and *Kanu kin kinikini* ("God has pity"). Because Limba society is still dominated by male chauvinistic ideals, the consideration of God as a female figure seems very remote. *Kanu* as a male or father figure is comfortably accepted without reservation in Limba communities.

In the Bible, as in Limba tradition, the father's love and blessing (Gen. 27:27-40; 49) are the basis for the image of God, the Father of Israel (Exod. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; 32:6; Hos. 11:1; Jer. 3:4, 19; 31:9; Ps. 103:13). In the NT, "father" is used in most cases to refer to God (Achte-meier 1996:333). "This Christian practice probably derives from the intimate term for father that Jesus used to address God (Heb. and Aram. *abba*; Mark 14:36; cf. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6)" (Achte-meier 1996:333). Jesus did not only refer to God as "Father," but he also taught his followers that God was their father (Matt. 5:16, 45; 6:1; 7:11 and 18:14), and to address God as father (Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2).

#### 4.6 Worshipping *Kanu*

Worship is the way in which the Limba "stay connected with the Supernatural"<sup>182</sup> and continue their existing intimate relationship with God. The Limba also worship to achieve *hu/kuthɛbɛɔ lima* ("a

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<sup>179</sup>Cf. Mbiti (1970a:93-94, 212).

<sup>180</sup>Rev. MacFoday Kamara (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>181</sup>Rev. MacFoday Kamara (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>182</sup>Rev. MacFoday Kamara (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

peaceful heart")<sup>183</sup> because living at peace with the Supernatural and the world around you, requires inner peace. A mind that is divorced of greed, envy, hate and bitterness of any kind is considered peaceful. Outward peace and health come as a result of inner peace and a cool spirit. In particular, God is worshipped for who he is and for what he continues to do for humankind.

The primary method through which the Limba worship God is the offering of sacrifices (*Saraka*). Pouring libations (*Agbumandi*), invocations (*Kama-gbonkilitande*), prayer (*Kuraminε*) and singing (*Kamaluja*) are all part of the sacrifice liturgy and ritual.<sup>184</sup>

It should be noted that although libation usually takes place as part of a complete sacrifice, it can stand alone as worship in a few instances, such as at the ground-breaking for the construction of a new building, when dedicating a house/building, at state functions, and in most cases when welcoming a newly wedded person into a family. These ceremonies provide continuity for the survival of the community. Also, through these ceremonies, believers are reminded that they all share a common heritage.

As mentioned above, sacrifice also plays a role in Judeo-Christian worship. In the Old Testament, "sacrifice was the principle act in Israel's cult" (De Vaux 1997:415).<sup>185</sup> Because

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<sup>183</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:111).

<sup>184</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown). For the types, the history and the origin of Israel's sacrifice and ritual see De Vaux (1997:415-56).

<sup>185</sup>Thompson (1974:19-35) argues that the sacrificial cult of the Hebrews was not originally intended for the worship of Yahweh, but was a primitive religion which was eventually incorporated into the Yahwhistic cult by priests in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. His argument, although interesting is largely incomplete and entirely inconclusive.

there has been no centre of sacrifice for Judaism since the destruction of the second temple in CE 70, Jewish worship now centres on the synagogue. Christian worship, while it does not offer physical sacrifices, remembers the sacrifice of Christ through the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The items offered as sacrifices to *Kanu* vary according to the level and purpose of the sacrifice, to the social and financial status of the bearer, and to the advice of the sacred specialist. If the ceremony requires the offering of an animal, it may be a cow, a sheep, a goat, or a chicken. An animal sacrifice may be either a blood sacrifice or a bloodless sacrifice. In the former, the animal is slaughtered. Some of the meat is cooked and eaten by the worshippers, while the remaining uncooked meat is distributed to households.

When the animal is not killed (in the case of a bloodless sacrifice) the animal is set free after the ceremony and it should be left for the remainder of its life to die a natural death, because it is God's living sacrifice-property belonging to God. It is sacrilegious to kill and eat such an animal. The offering of plants and fruits to God is also considered a bloodless sacrifice. Bananas, oranges and kola nuts, are the most common choices for fruit offerings. Rice can also be used as an offering.

In every case, three items must be present to make a *Limba* sacrifice complete: water, kola nut and moulded rice flour mixed with sugar. Often there is also wine, charcoal and a prepared meal. These items are all symbolic:<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup>Rev. MacFoday Kamara (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

- (1) Water (*mandi*) has several symbolic meanings;<sup>187</sup> it stands for peace and harmony, and life. It cools and refreshes, and "it is also the simplest and most acceptable manifestation of hospitality" (Sawyerr 1996:49).
- (2) Rice-flour (*hudεgε*), because of its whiteness, symbolises purity and cleanliness.
- (3) Kola nut (*huthugen*) is a means of communicating with the Supernatural.
- (4) If wine (*manpa*) and charcoal (*tεrε*) are included in the ceremony, they are for happiness/merriment and misfortune respectively.
- (5) A prepared meal (*kutuŋ*) is for joy and satisfaction.

Sacrifices for forgiveness, cleansing, protection, health, well-being, fortune and the aversion of misfortune, thanksgiving, the various degrees of sin, politics, victory and as required by the worshipper, are all offered on five levels. Acquiring the items for sacrificial purposes does not present a challenge for the Limba. The main concern is the ability of the worship leader to "speak well" (*gboŋkoli/thenlika*) in order to achieve a positive result.

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<sup>187</sup>Among the Mende and Creoles of Sierra Leone, water cultivates harmony, and it cools and refreshes (Sawyerr 1996:49).



Sacrifices for thanksgiving are less stressful than those made for liberation from sin, the aversion of plagues, protection and welfare, because they are not for the removal of sin or misfortune (although a brief intercession for the forgiveness of sin is made at the start of the occasion in order to stand blameless).

In thanksgiving, the worshipper comes with the assurance that he/she is fulfilling God's purpose by being grateful in return for His goodness to them. Because the Limba are grateful by nature, the skills for expressing appreciation and thanks are known by the majority of the people.

When it comes to penitentiary and petition worship, it is a different case. The ability to speak well to the supernatural is not treated lightly. The duty of the leader could be rightly compared to role of a solicitor/advocate, in a judicial matter, as he/she pleads for clemency on behalf of a convicted client. A defence lawyer who wants a more lenient punishment, or perhaps no punishment, for a guilty client(s) must mount a strong appeal in order to win the mind of the judge or jury. In the Limba view, a lawyer who succeeds in liberating a guilty client is considered a person who "speaks well."

Penitentiary worship is a pleading for forgiveness and salvation. Therefore, "speaking well" to the supernatural is of vital importance to attain this end. Speaking is a key component of Limba philosophy and society and plays a prominent role in the entire Limba cosmology. A comment made frequently in Limba circles is: "If humans know how to talk to one another with respect and with the proper use of words, what about talking to God who owns us with far more honour?"

#### 4.6.1 Levels of Worship

There are several levels and forms of sacrifice offered to God in different places and at different times of the year. Five levels are prominent:

##### (a) Chiefdom level

Of all the levels, chiefdom sacrifice is the most elaborate because it involves all the villages and sections within the chiefdom. The most common occasions which call for a chiefdom sacrifice are natural disasters (such as floods, droughts, and sickness) or accidents.<sup>188</sup> Less common occasions, on which chiefdom sacrifices may be offered include the installation of a new chief, the death of a chief or a notable chiefdom official, as well as the ceremonies held on the 40<sup>th</sup> day after and on the first anniversary of the death of such an individual. In a later chapter we shall deal with the sacrificial rites pertaining to the installation or death of a chief made both in the Limba homeland and in the western area.

##### (b) Section, Village or Town Level

Sacrifices on the section and village levels are less elaborate and deal with issues that do not affect the entire chiefdom. The purposes are often the same as those of the chiefdom level sacrifices. Because of the size of the crowd attending, at least one cow is required to be killed at the section level. At the village level, a cow or a sheep might be slaughtered depending on

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<sup>188</sup>In Freetown disasters of any kind are investigated by the central government. Usually, the government encourages people to pray for the situation according to their faith or beliefs.

the population and wealth of the chief. As in the case of the chiefdom, either the priest or oldest person officiates.

*(c) Compound or clan level*

Sacrifices made on the compound level are offered mostly for the welfare of the compound's members, to return thanks for their prosperity, and to make requests for the various needs of the members. At this level acceptable sacrifices can be either a fowl or a sizeable animal which is killed at the centre of the compound. Weekly sacrifices are made in some compounds.

*(d) Household*

Sacrifices on the household level are usually bloodless. Kola nuts, rice flour, fruits and cooked rice are common items for household level sacrifices. The oldest active member of the family leads the worship. This may be done at the grave site of a family ancestor or in the house. In many homes, for the first forty days after the death of a relative, white rice and any of the palm oil sauces are cooked daily without salt and pepper (*kulemeti nuthon*) and placed near the head of the deceased person's bed. In some homes, simple sacrifices and prayers are offered daily.

*(e) Personal Level*

Sacrifices made on a personal level are essentially the same as those made at the household level. The difference is that at the personal level as the name implies, the ceremony can be done by an individual, or in some cases, an uncomfortable individual may seek the help and guidance of a sacred specialist to perform the

rite on his/her behalf. For instance, if an ancestor gives an instruction to be carried out by an individual (such as to offer a sacrifice), the person may inform a sacred specialist about his/her experience. He/she relays the full message or received instruction to the sacred specialist who, in turn, performs the ceremony.

#### *4.6.2 Acts of Worship*

Sacrifices on the chiefdom, section, village and household levels all involve groups of people, share similar communal characteristics and contain numerous rituals. Because of these similarities we shall only consider rituals on the chiefdom and personal levels.

##### *4.6.2.1 Chiefdom Level*

###### *(a) Prelude*

When a disaster of large proportion occurs within a chiefdom, people come together to try to make sense of what has happened and to give support to those who are directly affected. The diviner is called upon to find out what was responsible for the calamity. Most often, when the tragedy is natural, a sacrifice for propitiation is recommended. A date for the sacrifice will be fixed and a message sent to all the villages and sections of the chiefdom to participate in the arrangements and the ceremony.

The main components for the sacrifice are cows (the number depends on the crowd expected) which must be provided by the Paramount Chief. The ceremony may take place at the Paramount Chief's compound or at the source or location of the disaster.

For example, in the case of flooding, it may take place on the banks of a river, or in the case of a mudslide, it may take place on a mountain top

Representatives from all the villages and sections of the chiefdom (mostly chiefs or dignified officials) are expected to travel to the PC's compound a day or two before the event to present their gifts and contributions, and to give support where it may be required. Upon arrival, the local arrangements team, which is normally made up of important personnel, welcomes the visitors as they arrive and further explains the rationale behind the sacrifice and concludes with the usual customary way of expressing thanks and appreciation for the gifts and contributions through a well-spoken oratory.

On the day of the sacrifice, the occasion may begin with dancing, led by several musical groups within the chiefdom, at different spots around the compound. A traditional meal is served after the dance or at the end of the sacrifice. In some communities, the cooking of food for the occasion is the sole responsibility of the men, and women are not allowed to enter the cooking area.

When the sacrifice is ready to be made, the cow (*manaŋ*) and the other items prescribed by the diviner are brought and placed at the centre of the compound. Because of the deference given to old age, and the belief that older people are closer to the ancestors, and that they possess the experience needed to 'speak well', the oldest active male in the community (or the one appointed) is called upon to officiate. Where there is a community priest, he takes charge instead. Men who are wearing hats immediately remove them. Women are required to cover/veil their heads and stay behind the men. All participants are

obligated to sit or kneel on the floor and stretch their right hands over or towards (depending on proximity) the gifts to be offered.

(b) *Invocation*

If the consent and readiness to accept worship was not sought earlier using the kola nut, the leader then moves on to invoke the presence and attention of God:

<i>Ka bari bena ye, loṅthaṅ</i> (3 x)	Excuse us, let it be so...
<i>Ya mandí ye - manenitε</i> (3 x)	Here is water - it is not tears
<i>Te beṅ/be foma nabgeleku:</i>	All of you/to you all as you go around:
<i>Yi yapoṅ . . . ,</i>	You old men... (here the names of the outstanding ancestors are called)
<i>iṅ yapoṅ...</i>	with the other old men (their names are also called)
<i>Yi ndo komisa wɔ bohite mina</i>	You as our parents and guide
<i>Beṅ kay na nde kay;</i>	You went to your place
<i>Beṅ pey mina dondo</i>	You left us here
<i>Miṅ ndo thεbinε lima na-pεthε</i>	helping us so that we may have perfect peace

After every completed phrase, the participants respond with the word *amin/amina* (a Muslim word for Amen).

Because the Limba have enormous respect for age and position, no one casually approaches an elder with a request. For this reason, it is customary to seek permission when approaching the supernatural. It shows deference, and it ensures that God or the ancestors will not be disturbed by the worshippers. The Limba concept is that if humans can give respect and reverence to elders, greater respect should be given to God. The word *benā* ("us") is the first person plural is commonly used when addressing God and the ancestors. The usual word for "us" is *mina* which is used later in the prayer. If God is the focus the

second person singular pronoun *yi* or *yina* ("you") is used. References to non-ancestral spirits are clearly stated.

Water is poured out as libation to God or the ancestors in order to 'cool' their minds. In Limba culture, one way a victim expresses forgiveness to an offender is to accept water from the latter and drink it as an indication that his/her anger or bad feelings have been cooled down or washed away. Water is both qualitatively better and quantitatively and greater than tears which are not adequate to fulfill this requirement. That is why worshippers offer water, and specify that it is not tears.

After water has been poured out three times as libation the focus of the sacrifice is then identified. "All of you/to you all," is a reference to God and the ancestors who are believed to be 'going around' as spirits. This is one of the many times that God and the ancestors are jointly referenced. In most cases, God is addressed, in prayer, through the ancestors. This action buttresses Finnegan's findings (1965:108-9) that Kanu is worshipped in prayers and sacrifices both through the ancestors, and at times concurrently.<sup>189</sup>

The word *yaponj* ("old men") used here to refer to the ancestors is the common word of respect for old men who are alive. This is the part in the prayer where the names of the community ancestors as many as the worship leader can remember are then called. The relationship between the living and the ancestors is like that of a parent and child. The ancestors are in the 'abode of the dead' manifesting great interest in the living.

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<sup>189</sup>The Kono and Temne of Sierra Leone also pray to God and the ancestors concurrently (Taylor 1963:69).

The above invocation is common in sacrifice performed on all five levels. In invocations, the supernatural is approached in reverence with water and invoked to be present and pay attention to the worship and needs of the people. This enables the worshippers to then express the purpose of their worship.

*(c) Purpose of worship*

The invocation is followed by a statement of the purpose of the worship. Here the leader states the reason for which the sacrifice is being offered. If the nature of the sacrifice is for propitiation, the leader may say:

<i>Kεε nthonani na kunthe mina</i>	But sickness has overcome us
<i>Awa miŋ luwe na miŋ thake bena</i>	So we heard that we offended you
<i>Bεŋ na se mina thetiyeke</i>	That is why we have come to apologise
<i>Iŋ miŋ bena penkita yiki bambaj</i>	And to present you this respect
<i>saraka satham̄ bali ye</i>	Sacrifice is capable of handling any problem

In this case, the sacrifice is necessitated by an epidemic. Although God/the ancestors are helping the living, sickness/disaster has struck. The cause of the epidemic might be that the supernatural has been offended. In that case, the people have come to apologise and make amends to God/ancestors. As we have already discovered, apologising is a prominent characteristic of Limba culture. The worship is both an expression of apology and an offering of respect through sacrifice which is the highest respectable means of relating to God and to the ancestors. It is also the most capable means of handling problems. Literally, the prayer "*Saraka satham̄ bali ye*" means, "Sacrifice does not get tired in handling problem." This expresses the confidence and belief that the Limba have in the power of sacrifice.



Or the following will be said:

<i>Yi kōthen nambara/nampara</i>	You know what has
<i>ba penka kubōri ko</i>	befallen our community
<i>Mina npati nda/be kēnda</i>	We are your children
<i>Miη se iη huberina do</i>	We have come with our crying to you
<i>Ba masitay mina</i>	So that you can help us
<i>ka nambara/nampara ba kantu ba</i>	with our problem/suffering
<i>Na yerokoy yi ba miη sa hε/fε</i>	As you have allowed us to come to you
	today
<i>Nōη yibe yerokoy thanaη tha</i>	May you accept the gifts
<i>sise miη than</i>	we bring

Because God is "All-knowing" and he is considered a parent, in some prayers, as in this case, the reason that necessitated the sacrifice is not given. As their God and parent par-excellence Kanu already knows their predicament. The word "cry" may mean real tears, sorrow, problems or needs. God as their parent is the only Being to whom they can cry for help. He is the only one who is more than capable of wiping away their tears, soothing their sorrow, taking away their problems and providing for their needs. The strength and ability to stand before God in worship is a privilege that comes through God's grace. God should further allow them to present their gifts of sacrifice and to accept them in the spirit in which they are presented.

*(d) Presentation of Gifts*

The purpose of worship is followed by the presentation of the items to be offered for the sacrifice. The size of the gifts for the sacrifice depends on the number of worshippers and the chiefdom's financial capability. One by one, the items brought for the sacrifice as the case may be, are called out to God and their significance is stated.<sup>190</sup> For example:

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<sup>190</sup>This is the case on all five levels of sacrifice.

Ya manaj kɛndaŋ                    here is your cow(s)  
Ya manpaŋ kɛndaŋ                here is your wine

(e) *Intercessory prayers*

After the presentation, the main prayers are said to the ancestors for God's approval (*yɛrɔkɔy*) and blessing (*thaduba*) for the sacrifice about to be offered. The leader prays either:

Nɔŋ miŋ be tha thomɔ bali	May we have power to confront any problem
Ba thankaha tha kantu	And to protect our lives
Hɛɛɛ kobekede, hɛɛɛ kapothi;	Peace above, peace on earth;
Nɔŋ mu be niyɔ mu kantu	May it be ours
Ho, masala!	O God!
Miŋ be dɔŋɔ iŋ kubɔri ko	May we have peace in our families
Nɔŋ nthonay be mina gbarihɔ,	May sickness escape us,
ho, Masala	O God
Ka piriŋine miŋ,	Where we wronged you,
beŋ be mina pɛniyɛ- hoMasala	forgive us, O God
Nɔŋ miŋ be bariŋande	May we stay away
iŋ gboroho-baliŋ ba gbarahɛŋ	from evil matters and problems,
ho Masala	O God,
Te beŋ kay,	The day you will go,
tɛŋ tuma dɔ	that is the time we will come
Na wuŋ pate mina	As we end it
ka barika- woo-lɔnthaj	in peace Amen
Mawumaj, sɛkinthaj ko kandenj	Right now, take yours
e mina dununa ko kantu	and give us ours

In life's journey and struggles, *Kanu* is the source of empowerment to confront the known and unknown challenges that threaten our harmony and success. We also need the protection of God as the battle rages. As peace is vital for oneself and for keeping the society together, the worshippers need on earth the peace that comes from God for themselves and their families. The sickness which has caused the sacrifice is not a sign of peace and well-being; therefore God's healing is required. Suffering is believed to be a measure from God for wrong doing. If the epidemic is due to a wrong deed, the people are seeking God's

forgiveness so that they will be healed. They need a heart that is divorced from all evil and that will guard against destructive motives and actions. On account of their supposed wrong doing, if God does listen to them this time, they will come again even if he is not there. Assuming that all has gone well, it is fitting to end the prayers with an assurance that peace has been made with God. An immediate response by God to their worship is then sought by the throwing of kola nuts to know God's mind. The effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a sacrifice is determined by the response of the supernatural.

Alternately the following prayer may be used:

<i>Miŋ thonthon nɔŋ tha duba abekede</i>	We ask that blessing from above
<i>be mina penki ka kekɛŋ do</i>	be granted to us below
<i>Miŋ kiŋ ka berina kɛnda</i>	We are here to pour out our cry to you
<i>Masala</i>	the Mighty One;
<i>Yi wuntheŋ ko sɛkiti nampareŋ</i>	You alone can take away
<i>ba kɛntu</i>	our plight
<i>iŋ dunkuna mina ma thebɛ</i>	and restore peace
<i>iŋ malɔholima</i>	and happiness to us
<i>Dunkuna mina malɔholima</i>	Grant us peace (within and without);
<i>Nɔŋ nampara be tha mina penki</i>	May we not experience trouble anymore
<i>Miŋ se iŋ sarakabaŋ</i>	We come with this sacrifice
<i>ba malɔholima</i>	so that we can have happiness.
<i>Gbaku wo sise manaŋ</i>	The chief has brought a cow
<i>ka hɛra ba dunku yi ninbaŋ</i>	out of what you have given him
<i>Ba yina miŋ be kutu malɔlima</i>	So that we can give it to you and find
	peace.

The worship leader may start by asking God to bless them with blessing from above and proceeds to tell God the reason they came to Worship. As in other cases, the worshippers are pouring out their cry to God Almighty. He is the only one that is capable of taking away their troubles and giving them peace and harmony. Therefore, he is implored for the absence of disaster through sacrifice which is the most vital means of worshipping and

reconciling with God. The prayer concludes with a statement expressing the effort of the chief for providing the sacrificial animal to be offered for the attainment of peace.

*(f) Offering and sharing of Gifts (saraka baŋ)*

The items are then offered to God. Cows are bound and thrown down by the young men before they proceed to cut the animals' necks. The cows are then skinned and the meat is shared amongst the participants. The one who kills the animal always gets the neck, the PC gets the breast portion and front leg, and portions are given to the village and section representatives. The rest of the meat is shared amongst the elders and participants.

*(g) Conclusion*

At the end, the leader concludes with the words *lɔŋtha na wuŋ pate mina, kabarika oo lɔŋthaŋ* ("we have finished, excuse us Amen") indicating an end to the ceremony. Then the cultural dance resumes.

*4.6.2.2 Personal Level*

The invocation ritual for the chiefdom and personal levels are virtually the same. Words in the plural on the chiefdom are changed to the singular on the personal level. If the worship is done without the assistance of a sacred specialist, the individual may say the following:

*Kanu yina leyinε mina kafaido  
Hati wo kεnda se iŋ huberina do  
Ba masitay yan ma ka bali yan  
Yi kɔthεn wo kin yan*

God you created us in this earth  
Your child has come crying to you  
so that you can help me solve my matter  
You know mine

*Nɔŋ yi yεɔkoy yiki baj  
yan sise bena*

May you accept the honour  
I bring to you

God who is solely responsible for the creation of Limba knows the situation and solution to the worshipper's predicament that is why he/she has brought sacrifice not only to him (Kanu) but to the ancestors (*ben*a "you") as well.

Or the following alternate prayer will be said:

*Kanu yan kɔtε yan thake bena  
Awa bεna se yan  
ba thetiyeke bena  
Iŋ yan bena sisa yiki  
Ba bena duŋkun yan  
ma malɔholima*

God I know I have offended you  
So, that is why I have come  
to apologise/beg you  
And to bring you respect  
In order that you will give me  
rest and happiness.

Misfortunes are believed to be the result of wrong doing, it is therefore not uncommon for a worshipper at the outset to acknowledge that his/her actions have offended God (*Kanu*) and the ancestors (*ben*a). The only way to be at peace with the supernatural is to beg (*thetiyeke*) for forgiveness in order to attain rest and happiness. The achievement of rest and happiness which is true peace is in a sense salvation for the Limba.

If the ceremony is performed by a sacred specialist, when the items for the sacrifice are acquired, the individual takes them to the officiating person who will say the following on behalf of the worshipper:

*Yan sise hati/pati wo kεnda  
Wundε tepe yan ma ni  
ba tepe bena na be mase  
Nambara/nampara na kunthe ni  
Yi wunthe pe na bilε sεmbε  
ba mase ni  
Wundε sise saraka  
ba bena mase ni*

I have brought your child (the name of the worshipper)  
He/she told me to tell you  
to help him/her  
Problem/trouble has overwhelmed him/her  
You alone have the power  
to help him/her  
He/she has brought sacrifice  
so that you can help him/her

As the worshipper stands and watches, the sacred specialist introduces him/her by name to God and the ancestors, and proceeds to relate the cause and purpose of the sacrifice on behalf of the worshipper with the understanding that God and the ancestors are the only ones able to help.

The following intercessory prayers may be said personally. If the worshipper is assisted by a specialist, the same words are used in the third person.

<i>Yan se ba niya yina thubu</i>	I come to worship you
<i>Nɔŋ malekeŋ beŋ saŋ ba mase yama</i>	May the angels come and help me
<i>Fandaŋ wo kinyan yan dunku yina dayina yah</i>	My father I give to you my entire being
<i>Kɔtɔ ko iŋ siɛba;</i>	My body and my spirit;
<i>yan thon dunku dayina yan dan mu</i>	I give to you, look at them
<i>Sa punku ba tɔta</i>	I am unable to carry
<i>doni ba kiyan woŋ...</i>	my burden...
<i>Sarakaŋ baŋ iŋ wuŋ raminɛ</i>	The sacrifice and prayer
<i>kon mase yama</i>	will help me
<i>Nambara kabanka ba sɛkiti</i>	Take away the trouble at home
<i>Nambara ka bonshɔ sɛkiti</i>	Take away the problem in our family
<i>yan pe bali wo bali kɛnda</i>	I leave every matter with you
<i>Yina kɔtɛ baiyo bai</i>	You know everything

For the first time in these prayers we have come across the word, *thubu* ("worship") a word that denotes prostrating and expressing a longing for God. In desperation, the worshipper has come to seek and implore God to send his angels as support during this time of anguish. In dedication of his/her entire being (both the physical and spiritual), the worshipper expresses inability to bear his/her burden and goes on to name it. With confidence that sacrifice and prayer will solve the problem, a plea is made to God for an eradication of the trouble at home. After making his/her request known, the worshipper leaves everything in the care of God who is all-knowing.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

The highest being in the Supernatural hierarchy, according to Limba belief, is the Supreme Being called *Kanu*, in short, or in full *Kanu Masala*. *Kanu* exists and lives above. He is Almighty and Omnipotent, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, who is therefore all-knowing. He is the Chief that rules from above, their Teacher and Father. The names or epithets, and attributes of *Kanu* portray his character, abilities, qualities and peculiarities. *Kanu* is worshipped through sacrifices, offerings, prayers and libations.

Some traditionalists juxtapose their belief in *Kanu Masala* ("God Almighty") with a belief in *Kanu Wopothi* ("god below"). The latter is considered less powerful and is seen as being mischievous. This is not a personal being, but a descriptive category applied to any evil spirit. Unlike *Kanu Masala*, *Kanu Wopothi* is not generally understood to be an object of worship, except to those who have "spiritual eyes" or who have taken a personal spirit. While the majority of Limba will bring gifts to *Kanu Wopothi*, these are not sacrifices, but acts motivated, admittedly, by paranoia.

Although the NPLC adopted the name *Kanu Masala* from the traditionalists, and similarities between the Limba and Christian teachings of God are found in both systems, the church continues to argue that it does not serve the same God as the traditionalists. In spite of that the traditionalists who attend the NPLC continue to equate *Kanu* with the Judeo-Christian God. In response, NPLC out-rightly dismisses that claim, and has

continued to view the traditionalist beliefs and worship of *Kanu* as idolatry.

The overwhelming similarities between *Kanu* and the Judeo-Christian God suggest that they may, in fact be one and the same. It is therefore, not unreasonable to conclude, that the God of the Bible who is at work in the Judeo-Christian tradition is the same God worshipped by African traditionalists (Mbiti 1989b:61; Fashole-Luke n.d.). With this conclusion we can now move on to the study of Angels.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Angels** (*Malekai*)

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Until recently, the positions of angels and ancestors within the Supernatural hierarchy were a matter of debate among the Limba. Although there are still a few who continue to debate this, at present, a majority of traditionalists believe that angels, because they are natural spirits, who act as direct agents of God's will and have an intimate relationship with him, are higher spiritual beings than the ancestors who are human spirits and have attained their spiritual status by human design.

Very few African societies speak directly about angels. However, most Africans speak about "gods", "spirits", "divinities", or "deities" with characteristics similar to those of angels found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Limba, however, do not have words or synonyms for "gods", "deities", or "divinities". Angels are what the Limba "know and talk about,"<sup>191</sup> but their understanding of these beings is limited.

The Yoruba speak of *orisa* ("divinities, deities or gods") who are believed to be ministers of *Olodumare* ("God") with responsibilities similar to those of angels (Adelowo 1982:161-66). The African gods, deities or divinities are believed to be

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<sup>191</sup>Kandeh Samura (Interviewed July 2002: Kamakwie Town).

created by God and are subordinate to Him. "Their intimate but subordinate relationship with God is conceptualised in terms of Father/Son, Chief/messenger or lord/servant relationships" (Metuh-Ikenga 1981:81). Their status is not very different from the Christian ideas of angels. In Nuer Religion the "little gods" are the *Malaika* ("Angels") from the Arabic word *Mal'ak* (Nadel 1954:247).

Lockyer, a British missionary to Kenya, recounts a story of angelic encounter told to him by a native Mau-Mau who converted to Christianity:

One dark night the men of the Mau-Mau tribe were climbing the hill up to the school to capture and kill the missionary children, and fulfill one of their vows by eating a white man's brain. Suddenly men in white robes appeared all around the school, with flaming swords, and the natives ran back down the hill. Then the new Christian asked, "Who were these men; were they angels?" A missionary replied, "We do not have enough men on the staff to surround the school, and we have no flaming swords," With wide eyes the native shouted, "They were angels!" (Lockyer 1995:ix).

This story, suggests that although the belief in angels appears to be less prominent in African Religion, some ethnic groups, like the Mau-Mau people, hold some belief in angels. The Mau-Mau man's question and the missionary's response suggest that the Mau-Mau man's knowledge about angels may have predated his conversion to Christianity. A solid effort by scholars to examine Africa angelology might reveal even more groups with such a belief.

The NPLC has dismissed the traditionalist's belief in angels saying that the traditional belief has no affinity with the Christian belief, as Limba traditionalists claim. The church

believes that the angels known to traditionalists are actually the fallen angels (Ezek. 28; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6) which are also called "demons" (Matt. 4:24; 7:22; Mark 1:32, 34; Luke 4:41).

In this chapter, we shall look at the two main issues that are discussed on the subject of angels in Limba Religion - the nature and the role of angels.

## 5.2 Nature of Angels

The Limba believe angels are natural spirits with wings (*bapey*), who are also capable of assuming human likeness. They can rightly be described as hylomorphic because they have both a spiritual and a physical nature. They are spirits because they dwell with God, they have wings because they fly (*akain*), and they assume human form because this is how they appear to people, whether physically, or in dreams. They appear to people in physical human form as "strangers" who help them in times of great need.<sup>192</sup> The following is an example of one such encounter:

I remember before the war when I was home, it was the time when my youngest daughter was to be initiated into the bondo society. That year, the farming season was bad. My crops did not do well and a portion of them were eaten by animals. I had no money for the ceremony to take place. Three weeks before the scheduled date as I was walking home from my farm and entering my village, I came across a man I have never met in my life he was wearing white and carrying a bag. We exchanged greetings, and he asked me for directions to *Makere* village, two villages from ours, which I gave. But before he left he asked me if I could offer him a cup of water to drink. I took him to my place and gave him some water, he drank and thanked me. I then accompanied him out of the village to ensure that he took the right road. In appreciation of my

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<sup>192</sup>An example is the story above about the Mau-Mau man.

hospitality, he opened his bag and gave me a substantial amount of money, more than what I needed for my daughter's initiation ceremony. I could not believe what was happening to me. One thing that was puzzling about this man was that his face was very difficult to look at and he could not give me his name or address. There is no doubt in my mind that he was an angel sent by *Kanu Masala* to help me.<sup>193</sup>

From the Mau-Mau man's story and this one, we see that angels in Africa protect people; they have the ability to communicate, and possess human needs like thirst.

The Limba also believe that angels possess moral attributes. Angels as *Patibeŋ Kanu* ("children of God") are endowed with love (*matimo*), and they are kind and good (*hayho*). Even the angel of death (*maleka wo bilɛ hutuka*) is considered good because he fulfills God's mission. There are male and female angels. Irrespective of their closeness with God, angels are the only kind of supernatural being that does not require worship or veneration. Like humans, they are under God's instruction and were not created for worship or veneration.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, angels are spiritual beings (Heb. 1:14), some of whom have wings (Isa. 6:2). They are also "able to manifest themselves as active and effecting agents in the empirical world" (Lockyer 1995:5). They appear in dreams (Matt. 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19; Acts 10:13; cf. Acts 12:9) to "both Christians and some would-be-converts" (Mbiti 1997:514). Dreams "are vehicles of communication from God to people - to reveal, warn, and inform" (Mbiti 1997:514). Angels sometimes appear in human likeness to visit people (Gen. 19:1; Judg. 13:16) and welcome hospitality (Gen. 19:2). For this reason Hebrews 13:2

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<sup>193</sup>Bagbon Samura (telephone interview: March 2004).

exhorts Christians not to "neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." In their "ability to assume human likeness, angels are able to affect material conditions and historical events"<sup>194</sup> (John 5:4; Acts 5:19; 12:7, 23). Angels are endowed with proper names, for example, Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26) and Michael (Dan 10:13, 21; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7) which imply that they have personalities. Anytime that the Bible identifies the gender of an angel, the reference is male<sup>195</sup>. This is contrary to Adelowo's (1982:159) statement that the Bible does not make any serious attempt in associating gender with angels. Angels are also called children of God (Luke 20:36).

### 5.3 Role of Angels

Angels have several roles to play. Their primary role is that of a messenger/servant (*batɔntiwo*). The Limba believe that as "messengers/servants of God, angels are the carriers of God's message, and the fulfillers of God's plan."<sup>196</sup> Angels relay God's messages mostly in dreams. As messengers/servants, angels are mediators between God and humankind which puts them in special relationship with God, of whom they are agents, and with humans who, in most cases, are the object of their service.

It is on account of this mediatory role that the angels and the ancestors are sometimes confused. In much of ATR, "a similar role seems to be given the ancestors, whose continued existence

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<sup>194</sup>Lockyer (1995:5).

<sup>195</sup>The masculine pronoun "he" is used in reference to angels Gabriel and Michael, see Achtemeier (1996:356 & 682). In several other passages, strangers who are identified as angels, are also referred to as "men", for example Genesis (19:1-12).

<sup>196</sup>Madam Kumba Koroma (Madam Koroma was also interviewed on the phone on March 2004).

in a metaphysical state which takes them 'nearer to God' allows them to help their descendants" (King 1994:10).

God also assigns angels to look after particular individuals. This duty entails caring for (*atima*), protecting (*apaŋ*), guiding (*adinki*), guarding (*akinkinti*), and helping (*masite*) the person. Although God does not delegate to the ancestors duty of seeking the interests of people as he does to angels, the roles of angels and the ancestors as mediators, and caretakers of humankind overlap. Unlike the ancestors, the role of angels as caretakers and protectors goes beyond death. The final job of an angel is to take the deceased to *katilɛ* ("the home of dead"), after which the angel returns to God to give a report of his/her duties.

Angels in Limba Religion and Judeo-Christian tradition are not only similar in nature; they are also similar in the roles they play. In the Bible, angels are portrayed "as messengers or servants of God who are of unquestionable integrity, good will and obedience to Him...(Gen. 16:7-13; 21:17-20; 22:11-18; Judg. 6:11-23; 1 Sam. 29:9; 2 Sam. 14:17, 20)" (Adelowo 1982:158; cf. Lockyer 1995:3). The Hebrew word *mal'akh* in the OT, and the Greek word *angelos* in the NT mean simply "messengers" (Lockyer 1995:3). As messengers, angels are God's ambassadors and emissaries (1 Tim. 5:21), and as such they simply follow whatever directive God gives them. They are ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14). Like in Limba Religion, their functions as "God's messengers cannot be limited to specialized categories, but rather they are presented in broad and varied auxiliary functions" and as such "they appear as helpers and protectors to people in need, as proclaimers of news or mediators of revelations from God, and as guides and guardians" (Lockyer 1995:4).

Individual Christians (Matt. 18:10) and Christian communities (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) are attended to by angels. God assigns angels the duty of protecting and guarding the faithful (Exod. 14:19; 2 Kings 6:17; Ps. 34:7; 91:11), and they also "serve as a source of veritable succour" (Adelowo 1982:159) for the faithful here on earth (1 Kings 19:5-7; Matt. 4:11), and in eternity (Luke 16:22).

Angels not only effect good, they can also effect affliction and judgement (2 Sam. 24:16; 2 Kings 19:35; Job 33:22; Ps. 35:5, 6; Pro. 16:14; Acts 12:23; Rev. 12:7-9; 14:14-20; 15-16).

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

Angels occupy the second place after the Supreme Being in the supernatural hierarchy of Limba Religion. Unlike most other Africans, the Limba do not teach about or belief in "gods", "divinities", "deities".

Angels are hylomorphic. They are natural spirits with wings, but are also capable of assuming human form. They are believed to be spirits because they are with God. They are believed to assume human likeness because that is how they appear to people, whether in dreams or in person. They communicate and have human needs. There are male and female angels. As children of God, they possess the moral attributes of love, kindness, and goodness to people.

Angels are God's messengers and servants. In that regard, they carry God's messages and fulfill his plans. In their capacity as messengers and servants, angels play the role of mediators between God and humankind; they care for, protect, guide, guard

and help people. When an angel completes his/her service to the individual assigned to him/her he/she takes his/her charge to the place of the dead (if the deceased is qualified to go there).

Although the NPLC condemns Limba angelology, the above study shows that there are striking similarities between Biblical angelology and that of Limba Religion. The differences in the two are very slight. We now move to the study of Ancestral Spirits/Ancestors which appear next in the hierarchy of the supernatural, after the Angels.



## CHAPTER SIX

**Ancestral Spirits/Ancestors (*fureni be/hureni/nbembɛŋ*)****6.1 Introduction**

The word which the Limba most frequently use for the ancestors is the plural *Fureni be/Hureni* (lit., "old people").<sup>197</sup> It has been suggested, that, *fureni be* is the lengthening form for the word *furu/huru* (breeze/wind/spirit).<sup>198</sup> The word *furu* is from the root *fu* ("to sleep," "to spend the night"). Synonyms for *Fureni be* include *bila*, *biya bebɔrɔ be* and *betiɔ be*<sup>199</sup> all of which mean ("old people").<sup>200</sup> An alternate word for *Fureni be/hureni* is *nbembɛŋ* ("Forefathers," "Great grandfathers").<sup>201</sup>

As in most African cultures, the ancestors are of "central importance" in the lives of Limba traditionalists (Finnegan 1967:20). Their presence "is felt all through Africa in spite of Christianity and western sophistication" (Setiloane 1978:407). Africans are still attached to their ancestors. Therefore, to take the ancestors away from them is to "destroy their roots in the past, their culture, their dignity and their understanding of *communion sanctorum*" (Hollenweger 1993:x; Setiloane 1978:406). It is "not surprising, therefore, that it was and still is, at

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<sup>197</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>198</sup>Kalawa Conteh (Interviewed July 2002: Kamabai Town).

<sup>199</sup>Kabba Bangura (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>200</sup>Finnegan (1963:12).

<sup>201</sup>This parallels the Mende, *kɛkɛni*, and *ndeblaa* our "Forefathers" (Sawyerr 1968:2, 16; Gittins 1987:62-63). Later Sawyerr (1996:44-45) refers to *kɛkɛni* as "the fathers" and *ndeblaa* as "the forebears."

this point, that Christianity has met with the stiffest resistance in Africa..." (Fashole-Luke 1974:209).

The NPLC leaders like their AOG forebears have unanimously condemned ancestor veneration as a heathen and superstitious practice.<sup>202</sup> For this reason, the church attempts to completely avoid the use of the word 'ancestor.' This is because in Limba vocabulary the word *fureni* ("ancestor") and its synonyms are only used in reference to the venerated dead. Therefore the church feels strongly that use of the word in the church's vocabulary would create a great misunderstanding. The designation "hero of faith" is instead used when dealing with any Biblical passage that uses the word 'ancestor' or 'ancestors'.

Like the Limba word *nbembəŋ* ("Forefathers," "Great grandfathers") which serves as a synonym for *Fureni be/Hureni*, the Hebrew word 'av ("Father") is also translated "Ancestor" (Gen. 10:21), "Forefather" (Gen. 15:15), and "Grandfather" (Gen. 28:13). In the NT, the Greek word *pater* ("Father") is also translated "Forefather" and "Ancestor" (Mark 3:9; Luke 1:73, 16:24).

In this chapter, I intend to first discuss which of the three terms 'the Dead' 'Ancestral Spirits' or 'Ancestors' best suits the Limba context. We will then discuss the requirements for and process of becoming an ancestor, the role of the ancestors, the question whether the reverence afforded ancestors properly constitutes worship or veneration, and rituals involving the ancestors.

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<sup>202</sup>This is exactly the case in many parts of Africa where Western missionaries have "unanimously rejected African ancestor cults as pagan superstition..."

## 6.2 The Dead, Ancestral Spirits or Ancestors?

Scholars are divided as to which designation appropriately represents the status of the venerated dead. Although Finnegan (1965:109-13), uses the term "ancestors," in a few instances when discussing the spirits of the dead relatives of the Limba, she prefers the general term "The Dead." She states that when an adult who is not a witch dies, a ceremony is performed on the third day during which, the deceased goes to be with the other dead in an unknown place called *katilɛ*. She went on to say that the burial rites of a known witch<sup>203</sup> are, "correspondingly, somewhat different." Finnegan's statements infer that children and witches do not attain ancestorship, which stands to reason that the Limba do distinguish between their dead as to who qualifies to attain ancestorship. Two years later writing about the ancestors she stated:

They cannot be represented as a separate category of beings with special supernatural characteristics of their own juxtaposed to humans, for in Limba eyes the dead are merely human beings who were once alive and now are dead and buried, basically resembling their children who are now on earth... Possessing essentially human qualities as they do, there is no point in introducing the dead into the stories as a special category. For in spite of the important part played in Limba life by prayers and sacrifices to the dead, they are at root not special separate beings at all, but the human beings of the old days-'they are us' (Finnegan 1967:21).

This statement sharply contradicts the contemporary Limba view that tends to separate the ancestors from the general body of the

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(Fashole-Luke (1974:209).

<sup>203</sup>The burial rites of a witch are different in order to ensure his/her spirit does not return to continue malevolent practices.

dead and humankind.<sup>204</sup> A majority of the Limba I came in contact with during my fieldwork represented the ancestors as a separate category with special supernatural characteristics of their own juxtaposed to humans. They are closer to God than humans and therefore possess a supernatural entity. "They are understood to have maintained their human qualities, yet they are thought to be much more *spirit*..." (Sawyers 1996:44).<sup>205</sup> Therefore, the term "The Dead" is a misnomer.

In a wider perspective, Mbiti has argued that:

'Ancestral spirits' or 'ancestors' are misleading terms since they imply only those spirits who were once the ancestors of the living. This is limiting the concept unnecessarily, since there are spirits and living-dead of children, brothers, sisters and barren wives, and other members of the family who were in no way the 'ancestors'. One would strongly advocate the abolition of the two terms...and replace them with 'spirits' or 'the living-dead' whichever is applicable (Mbiti 1989a:81-82).

However brilliant and useful the terms, 'spirits' and 'the living-dead' could be to designate the ancestors; from the worldview of the Limba (as well as most other Africans) they are

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<sup>204</sup>Some African ethnic groups also demarcate between the dead who are ancestors and those who are not. Gittins (1987:60-61), differentiates between the ancestors and the dead in Mende belief. He uses three terms, *ndëubla*, *halabla* and *kambëihubla*, which are certainly used to refer to the deceased. *Ndëubla*, in particular he says applies simply to the 'dead and buried' and does not carry any implications about ancestorship. They are the people who had not had the *tenjamëi*, performed. The word is strictly applied to the non-ancestral dead. Metuh-Ikenga (1981:76) tells us that the Igbo of Nigeria call the dead who have attained ancestorship, *Ndichie*, and these they venerate as benevolent spirits. The dead who do not meet the requirements for ancestorship are called, *Ogeli*. These are wandering, malevolent spirits, which are frequently exorcised. Junod (1927:373-75), states that the Thonga people of South Africa, differentiate between the ancestors who receive veneration from the living, and ghosts whose existence is considered malevolent.

<sup>205</sup>In Creole view, the ancestors, "live in the world of truth and do discern truth and therefore no longer subject to the effects of deception" (Sawyers 1996:44).

not adequate replacements for the terms 'ancestral spirits' or 'ancestors' Death itself does not qualify one for ancestorship. In Limba view, "not every person that dies necessarily becomes an ancestor,"<sup>206</sup> as we shall see later certain conditions should have been met while the deceased was alive and a ceremony of inclusion into the rank of an ancestor must follow the death of such an individual.

For the Limba, the terms 'ancestral spirits' or 'ancestors' are appropriate to differentiate "the ancestors" from the ordinary dead and the spirits of ghosts and witches all of which are categorised as Human Spirits, because they were once human.<sup>207</sup> The general category of non-ancestral spirits also includes nature spirits and non-ancestral human spirits.

The ancestors in Limba view are the spirits of those individuals (both male and female)<sup>208</sup> who have successfully gone through the stages of life to attain prominence and who, after death, have been included in the community of the venerated dead.<sup>209</sup> The visibility of the graves (*thaloma thaj*), the movement of the ancestors *furu* ("breeze") which they do not see, but feel, and the appearance of the ancestors in dreams are the reasons they believe that the ancestors are in their midst and are accessible.<sup>210</sup> Their proximity does not constitute a threat in any way.

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<sup>206</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed 2002: Freetown).

<sup>207</sup>Cf. Finnegan 1965: 112; Gittins 1987:53).

<sup>208</sup>It is this understanding that makes the gender biased term, *nbembey* ("Forefathers" "Great grandfathers") less popular because "there is no gender differentiation; both male and female could be ancestors" (Kalu 2000:57).

<sup>209</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1967:20).

<sup>210</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:109).

In view of the aforementioned, I join the likes of Parrinder (1962: 57-66), Sawyerr (1968:13-33; 1996:43-55), Fashole-Luke (1974:209-21) and Gittins (1987:53-61) to name a few, in using the terms ancestral spirits/ancestors interchangeably in reference to the venerated dead. We now consider the Limba view of who is qualified to be an ancestor.

### 6.3 How Does One Become an Ancestor?

The qualifications for becoming an ancestor and the methods of installation as an ancestor vary slightly among the Limba. As in many African societies, death by itself does not make one a Limba ancestor. Usually, a potential ancestor is recognised as such before death because of his/her achievements, status, moral standards and positive contributions to society. It is on the basis of these qualifications that the living decides who becomes an ancestor. For the Limba, the following requirements are taken into consideration:

- (1) At the time of death one must have attained old age,<sup>211</sup> hence the term *fureni be* and its synonyms, *bila*, *biya bebro be* and *betiyo be* "old people" (Finnegan 1963:12, 1965:109). Being an adult by itself does not qualify someone to become an ancestor. Finnegan (1965:109) fails to mention the requisite level of adulthood when she describes the ancestral rites applied to "an adult who dies..." Technically, a person is considered an adult after initiation, in reality one is not considered an adult until the age of forty.<sup>212</sup> The Limba believe that death at a ripe old age is natural death and it is God's death. This

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<sup>211</sup>Cf. Yambasu (2002:65). See Idowu (1973:187) and Kalu (2000:57) for a summary of the general requirements for ancestorship in ATR.

idea parallels current Limba view, "to say that death is through 'Kanu' would therefore be rather like our speaking of a 'natural' death-Kanu kills old people, for one expects them to die..." (Finnegan 1965:108).

- (2) The deceased must have been a married adult and had at least one child.<sup>213</sup> Marriage in Limba view conveys "higher economic and social status" (Finnegan 1965:65, 76). A child is important so that the name of the deceased will be remembered in prayer and offering and not be lost. The rational is one cannot be an ancestor to the ethnic group unless one is an ancestor to a member of the group. Finnegan (1965:110) mentions that at the household level of ancestral veneration the oldest son or a surviving brother calls to his father.
- (3) The deceased must have been a member of a recognised secret society:<sup>214</sup> the *Gbangban* for men, the *Bondo* for women.<sup>215</sup> By becoming a member of a secret society one joins the ranks of the forebears, from "whose life-blood the existence of the community was derived and on which it continues to be sustained with the aid of the contemporary leaders" (Sawyerr 1996:44).
- (4) During his/her life-time, the deceased must have performed a heroic task.<sup>216</sup> Heroism constitutes professional expertise and outstanding ability or prowess. The ancestor

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<sup>212</sup>Finnegan (1965:76); cf. Sunberg (2000:3).

<sup>213</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown). Cf. Yambasu (2002:65).

<sup>214</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>215</sup>The *Gbangban* corresponds to the men's *Poros* societies and the *Bondo* corresponds to the women's *Sande* or *Bundu* of the Mende (Little 1949; Sawyerr 1968: 1 & 1996:44) and Temne (Dorjahn 1982:35-62). As in these other Sierra Leonean ethnic groups, the Limba secret societies are the principle ethnic cults. These societies are the defenders of their culture and society.

of an ethnic group may include a master hunter, a master witch catcher, and a master healer and many others.

- (5) The deceased must not have been a witch. Witches are considered to be destroyers of personal and communal harmony. They kill and destroy by spiritual means. The Limba are afraid of witchcraft which makes life more stressful to cope with because the power of witches transcends distance and no one knows when he/she will become a victim of witchcraft.<sup>217</sup> Because of "their evil ways" witches cannot live with God.<sup>218</sup> "They do not have place in God's presence" as good spirits do,<sup>219</sup> and will not be permitted to enter Katile to join the other dead (Finnegan 1965:109).
- (6) Death must have come from natural causes, and not unnatural causes such as accident or suicide. Deaths from diseases considered to be unclean (small pox, leprosy, epilepsy, tuberculosis etc.) are also considered unnatural deaths and are indications of God's punishment of the wicked and sinful.<sup>220</sup>

The first four requirements indicate that a person's achievements and/or status in life determine his/her future in the spirit-world. The last two requirements prohibit 'bad deaths.' When a person who has met all of these requirements dies a "Good death," the final step is the performance of the necessary funeral rite for the attainment of ancestorship. This rite is the process by which deceased persons are installed as

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<sup>216</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown). Cf. Yambasu (2002:65).

<sup>217</sup>See the discussion below on 'witchcraft' under "Non-ancestral Spirits."

<sup>218</sup>Hamusa Kargbo (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>219</sup>Hamusa Kargbo (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).



ancestors and "once the proper rites were performed, the deceased took their place among the ancestors" (Yambasu 2002:64). In most Limba societies, this inclusion occurs three days after the person's death. Upon death,<sup>221</sup> and before his/her burial, the prospective ancestor is considered *kubeli* "a corpse" (as in the case of all Limba dead). After burial in *huloma ha* ("the grave"), the dead person becomes *hure* ("a ghost"). At the ceremony on the third day (*kudigbi*), it is believed that the deceased joins the other dead at an undisclosed place of the dead called *katil /katiy*. The dead person is then considered a *fure wo* ("an ancestor"). In the hinterland, arrangements are made for burial to take place within a day. The prospective ancestor is buried by his or her respective secret society amidst great wailing and singing. After burial a hen is killed over the grave. On the third day those who were unable to attend the burial itself, find time to attend this important funeral rite of passage.

On the household, compound, village or chiefdom level; it is very important that the oldest available person leads this particular ceremony because he or she is considered to be the closest to the ancestors.<sup>222</sup>

On all levels, the ceremony of induction may follow this order: the leader begins by saying: "Excuse us, let it be so" (3 times). It is customary to approach the supernatural with these words in order to show deference, and for fear that God or the

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<sup>220</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>221</sup>A discussion on Limba view on 'death' is below under "Life Cycle."

<sup>222</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:110). At the Krio funeral rite, *Awujoh*, "an old female member, preferably the oldest, of the family is generally the first to invoke the spirits, presumably, because she has the longest and the farthest memory of the family line" (Sawyer 1996:45).

ancestors might be disturbed by the worshippers.<sup>223</sup> The names of current ancestors are called; usually the walk of life of the candidate determines which particular ancestors are to be called upon. For example, if the deceased was a chief, a hunter, a diviner or priest, his/her ancestral predecessors will be called upon by name. This is followed by a general reference to *Kanu* and to the rest of the ancestral spirits that were not named, "All of you/to you<sup>224</sup> all as you go around: You old people."<sup>225</sup> This statement identifies the focus of the veneration as God and the ancestors who are believed to be 'going around' as spirits. Although God and the ancestors are known to reside in the sky and the place of the dead respectively, as spirits they are capable of roving around. This is one of the many times that God and the ancestors are jointly referenced. In most cases, God is addressed, in prayer, through the ancestors. This action buttresses Finnegan's (1965:108-9) findings that *Kanu* is worshipped in prayers and sacrifices through the ancestors, and at times concurrently. The leader proceeds to determine the willingness or readiness of the ancestors to listen to, and to accept the veneration that is about to be offered by throwing two halves of kola nut on the floor. If both the inside halves of the kola nut turned upright it is an indication of acceptance and the leader can proceed with the rest of the ceremony. The first stage is concluded by expressing thanks to both *Kanu* ("God") and the ancestors for their willingness to listen to what they are about to say.

Next, the death is officially reported. Although it is believed that the ancestors are aware of what goes on, they still need to

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<sup>223</sup>In this regard, as a sign of respect to the supernatural, a priest always knocks at the door of the shrine to alert the spirits before entering it.

<sup>224</sup>This is similar to the Creole concluding phrase of invocation, *ɔl dɛn wan wi* ("you all" "all those").

be informed officially by invocation and prayer of important occurrences in the community. The ancestors are then invoked to accept the deceased into their ranks. The achievements and qualifications of the deceased are mentioned and the same kola nuts are again thrown on the floor to ascertain the mind of the ancestors. If the ancestors accept the inclusion of the deceased as mentioned above, the items for the sacrifice are offered.

First, water is poured as libation with the words: "Here is water-*it is not tears.*" Which are repeated three times as the libation is being poured. The reason for the libation and for the clarification that "it is not tears" is the same as that discussed earlier in "Worshipping *Kanu.*"

On the household level if the family can afford it, a hen is killed and cooked. If not red and white kola nuts and rice-flour will suffice. Usually at the compound, village or chiefdom level, a sheep or cow is killed and the meat is shared. The number of animals slaughtered depends on the size of the crowd. When the ceremony is concluded musicians and dancers take over to entertain mourners and guests. This may go on until the early hours of the following day.

Some people have a shrine in their homes where stones representing the ancestors of the family/clan are kept.<sup>226</sup> At the death of a would-be ancestor, a stone representing him/her is added to the receptacle or the place in the house where the other stones are kept. This system enables the family/compound to keep records of the number of their ancestors. This system

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<sup>225</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:110).

<sup>226</sup>This is similar to the Temne *Boro ma sar* ("shrine of stones") a boat-shaped receptacle to mark the memory of their dead heroes (Sawyer 1970:6).

makes provision for honouring a deceased family member who did not meet the community's requirements but was not a witch and did not die from 'unnatural' causes.

The time, energy and resources invested in these ceremonies, and the continued trust and belief that Africans place in the ancestors demonstrate the essence of ancestral spirits in traditional spirituality. What part really do the ancestors play in the lives of believers? Let us proceed and consider their role in Limba view.

#### **6.4 The Role of the Ancestors**

The ancestors are "very closely involved in all Limba life" (Finnegan 1965:113). They manifest interest in the welfare of the communities to which they belonged, and still belong.<sup>227</sup> They do not only belong to the village, but also order the lives that are led there (Finnegan 1965:112). Even though spatially they are primarily associated with their graves, because of their spiritual characteristic, they are capable of following their children wherever they go. This makes it possible to call on them everywhere and from anywhere in the world. Not only are they ever-present, they are also conversant with everything that goes on in the community. The traditionalists' relationship with the ancestors is not one of paranoia, but one of intimacy and deference as is evident in their relationship with their living elder kin (Finnegan 1965:112-13). The ancestors are around for the good of the people, not to afflict them. They are in a better world, in God's realm because they are good spirits.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup>Cf. Parrinder (1962:58); Griffins (1987:53).

<sup>228</sup>Cf. Yambasu (2002:64).

The ancestors inherited from God and bequeathed to the community farming methods, hunting skills, skills of interpreting weather conditions and the seasons of the year, story-telling, the rules of their secret societies, and songs and dances. They continue to uphold all of the social institutions, techniques, values and ideals of Limba life. They teach the living new songs, "composed according to the traditional style, "which are often said to be inspired by the dead" who put them "into the heart of the singer" (Finnegan 1965:112). Like good parents, the ancestors reprimand the living when they are aggrieved or neglected and nothing is done on the part of the living to make amends.<sup>229</sup> Suffering or punishment from the ancestors is for the welfare of the victim. As a parent punishes a child for his/her welfare, the ancestors consider their living relatives as their children and do their best to help them. They are the closer link between the people and God.<sup>230</sup> The Limba believe that the ancestors beg God to help the living, "to give them, for example offspring or wealth or much rice" (Finnegan 1965:112). In this context the ancestors are seen as earthly parents who beg the chief to give help to their children. They communicate directly with God, "and for their children's sake, intercede with Kanu who is over all things" (Finnegan 1965:112). The ancestors cooperate with *Kanu* and represent the social ties within the community. In Limba view as in that of most African peoples, ancestors are good spirits who continue to interact and seek the welfare of their people in several ways.

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<sup>229</sup>Cf. Mbiti (1989a:83).

<sup>230</sup>Cf. Mbiti (1989a:82).

Mbiti (1989a:82) aptly describes the role of the ancestors in some African communities:

They return to their human families from time to time and share meals with them, however, symbolically. They know and have interest in what is going on in their family... They are guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics and activities.

Setiloane (1978:407) expresses it this way:

Ah...yes...! It is true.  
They are very present with us...  
The dead are not dead; they are ever near us;  
Approving and disapproving all our actions,  
They chide us when we go wrong,  
Bless us and sustain us for good deeds done,  
For kindness shown, and strength made to feel at home.  
They increase our store, and punish our pride.

One can rightly say that the Limba and other African peoples have a high regard for their ancestors. This leads us to the question: "Do Limba worship or venerate their ancestors?" We shall now look into this issue.

### **6.5 Ancestor Worship or Ancestor Veneration?**

Finnegan (1967:21) states:

The exact relations between Kanu and the dead are not clearly defined. In a sacrifice Kanu is often called on as well as the dead, and some Limba, when the question is raised, tentatively suggest that perhaps the dead convey the requests of the living to Kanu in somewhat the same way as a father intercedes for his children with a dominant chief.

Today, the relationships between *Kanu* and the dead are clearly defined by the Limba. No one debates the fact that *Kanu* is

higher than the ancestors and he "is over all things" (Finnegan 1965:112). Although the Limba offer the same sacrifices and prayers to the ancestors as they do to *Kanu* and sacrifices are often offered concurrently to the ancestors and *Kanu*,<sup>231</sup> and although in these acts of sacrifice and prayer they express their submission and dependence on both *Kanu* and the ancestors which would seem to constitute worship, most Limba will argue that they are venerating the ancestors and not worshipping them. An interviewee made it clear in these words: "I wish to make it clear that we do not worship the ancestors as we do in the case of God, we merely venerate them as our dead relatives who brought prosperity to our communities and who continue to care for us."<sup>232</sup>

The question of whether Africans worship or venerate their ancestors has been a matter of interest for several decades. Fashole-Luke (1974:210-11), poses the question: "Do Africans worship their dead ancestors or do they venerate them?" To him the question is not just academic because it involves, "the problem of whether African ancestral cults are merely idolatrous practices," and "the problem of whether the rituals and practices offered to the ancestors constitute true worship." He challenges the reader to assess "whether the quality of the so-called worship offered to the ancestors is of the same nature as that offered to the Supreme Being." His considerations are vital in our attempt to explore an adequate answer to the question.

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<sup>231</sup>This is evident in prayers like: "Kanu Masala and you dead...may we have cool hearts...if anything remains for me to say, may you complete it for me you dead; may you complete it Kanu Masala" (Finnegan 1965:110),

<sup>232</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

After a close look at ancestral rites, practices, and prayers, Sawyerr (1966:33-39) argues that ancestral cults constitute true worship. Much later in another published work (1996:43-55), after discussing his views and the views of several other scholars on the appropriateness of the term 'ancestor worship' Sawyerr (1996:55) concludes that, "Africans do worship their ancestors as they do their divinities" and this worship, he continues, "consists of prayers, sacrifices, and divination on communal occasions or prayers and divinations on private occasions." In Sawyerr's understanding, the rituals and practices offered to the ancestors both in public and in private constitute legitimate worship and are of the same nature as those offered to God.

Parrinder (1962:65-66), after considering the various scholarly debates on the issue suggests: "Perhaps the African attitude to the different classes of spiritual beings might be expressed approximately in terms used in Roman Catholic liturgy...It might be helpful to speak of *Latria* for the Supreme Being alone in Africa, with *Hyperdulia* for the gods and *Dulia* for the ancestors." *Latria*, *Dulia* and *Hyperdulia* are Greek terms that were developed to differentiate between different types of honour in order to make more clear which is due to God and which is not. *Latria* is used to designate the honour that is due God alone, *Dulia* is used in reference to the honour that is due humankind especially those who lived and died in God's friendship, i.e., the Saints. *Hyperdulia* is a combination of the words *hyper* and *dulia* meaning "beyond *dulia*." This is reserved for the honour given to the Virgin Mary, who is worthy of honour higher than the *dulia* given to other saints.



On the basis of these distinctions Catholics have sometimes said: "We adore God but we honour his saints." Fashole-Luke (1974:211-12) in a similar view states:

The basic axiom of the Christian faith is that worship should be offered to God alone; but throughout the history of the church there have been rituals and prayers offered to saints which sometimes come very close to worship. Critics of the cult of saints and martyrs have often described these rituals as 'Saint Worship', but their practitioners have replied that it is neither Christian worship in a debased form, nor does it contradict the basic Christian premise that God alone is worshipful. This reply is grounded on the distinction between various qualities or levels of worship, so that a Christian can honestly say that he worships only the true and living God and venerates the saints. This does not mean that veneration of the saints is not genuine; it is merely an acknowledgement that it is at a lower level than worship of God. We suggest, therefore, that this distinction is equally valid in African religious beliefs and practices concerning the ancestors and provides us with an adequate paradigm for understanding these rituals and practices: worship of the Supreme Being, veneration of the ancestors.

Fashole-Luke further argues that, "the phrase 'ancestor worship' is emotionally charged, conjuring up primitive and heathen ideas of idolatry" while in contrast, "the phrase 'ancestor veneration' is neutral," and does not present us with the negative images provoked by the phrase 'ancestor worship'. He strongly recommends we discard the phrase 'ancestor worship' and adopt the phrase 'ancestor veneration' in discussions pertaining to African ancestral cults.

Having considered the arguments of Parrinder and Fashole-Luke, "ancestor veneration" seems a more appropriate term for the African regard shown to ancestral spirits than does "ancestor worship." The Limba venerate their ancestors on account of the

mediatory role that they play between God and the living, and the service they render as elders of their families. The ancestors deserve veneration "for what they are and do for us."<sup>233</sup> Let us now look at some rites of ancestor veneration.

## 6.6 Ancestral Rites

Like God, the ancestors are reached mainly through sacrifices and offerings which are made for various purposes and at different levels.<sup>234</sup> Ancestral sacrifices may be offered in response to the advice of a sacred specialist whose advice was sought out for the appropriate response to some present or imminent misfortune. They are also offered for regular and recurring purposes including, the accession of a new chief, the dedication of a new house and at important points in the rice farming cycle. Smiths, hunters, diviners or the owners of swears make their own special sacrifices to dead predecessors (whether their actual ancestors or not)" (Finnegan 1965:110).

At the chiefdom and village/town levels a sacred specialist or occasionally, the oldest person present leads the ceremony. On the compound level, the ceremony is conducted by the oldest person in the clan. At the household level, the oldest son, or the brother of the deceased, leads the ceremony, which may be held at either the house or the graveside. It is common to find a small shrine in a home where food is occasionally placed for an ancestor. On the personal level, a competent individual who knows the procedures and formalities may offer sacrifice to an ancestor or ancestors. However, most people prefer to engage

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<sup>233</sup>Santigie Sesay (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>234</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1967:20).

the services of a sacred specialist to perform the ceremony on their behalf because of his/her religious status.

At all levels, the ceremony follows a similar order starting with an invocation, followed by a libation, a prayer, the offering of gifts and a concluding prayer. On the chiefdom and village/town levels, music and dancing precede and follow the ceremony. "In most cases, kola nut (*huthugen*) and rice flour (*hudεgε*) are used to contact the ancestors."<sup>235</sup> At certain levels *Kanu* and the ancestors are addressed jointly in prayer. Because the ancestral rites are nearly identical at all levels, and because the rites at all levels are very similar to those offered to God, we shall avoid eminent repetitions by only considering the unique household and personal graveside (*kahuloma/kaboŋa*) ceremonies.

#### 6.6.1 Household

The Limba, like other ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, go to the cemetery to speak to an ancestor or ancestors.<sup>236</sup> In the hinterland people go to the cemetery as often as they want. In Freetown, most people go to perform ceremonies at the cemetery only on New Year's Day. In general, Limba traditionalists believe, that it is more respectful and effective to go to the graveside when time permits in order to speak to the deceased than to attempt to do from home. The family will take along red kola nuts, rice-flour, fruit and water for the ceremony.

A family may find time to go to the graveside to offer sacrifice is to seek help to resolve family disputes or to help straighten

<sup>235</sup>Hamusa Kargbo (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>236</sup>For example, the Mende (Harris 1968:20-22), the Krio (Wyse 1989:12), & the

out a recalcitrant family member who is causing trouble for him/herself and for the family or community. In these situations the family consults an ancestor who was capable of resolving family dissensions amicably or whose advice the troubled family member was known to heed.

The oldest son or the brother of the deceased or the oldest family member present will lead the ceremony. The kola nuts will first be opened and, as they are being rolled on the deceased's grave, the leader may say the following words:<sup>237</sup>

<i>Pa Sori, yu fambul dɔn kam fɔ si yu</i>	<i>Pa Sori, your family has come to see you</i>
<i>Wi want fɔ tuk to yu</i>	<i>We want to talk to you</i>
<i>Mak wi si yu mind thru dɛn</i>	<i>Let us see your mind through these</i>
<i>kola ya so</i>	<i>kola nuts</i>

As usual, the ancestor is named. In this case he is called Pa Sori.<sup>238</sup> As expected, his family came to speak with him because they needed help. To the traditionalist the mind and voice of the Supernatural is visible through kola nuts. When both sides of a spilt kola nut lie flat, it indicates a positive response or answer; otherwise it is a negative response. From the contents of the prayer that follows, we may conclude that Pa Sori gave the visitors the go-ahead to continue their ceremony. This favourable response is followed by the pouring of a

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Kono (Parsons 1964:26).

<sup>237</sup>The prayers in this section are in the Krio language because that was the language the interviewee (Santigie Nyankuthɛgbɛ Interviewed August 2002: Freetown) decided to communicate in. The Krio language as stated earlier is the common parlance in Sierra Leone. All Sierra Leonean ethnic groups speak Krio as well as their own language.

<sup>238</sup>The term Pa is a title of respect when addressing an older man or somebody in position of trust. Sierra Leoneans used to call the former military head of state Capt. Valentine Strasser (who was in his late twenties) by that title because he was the head of state. Male Teachers and Pastors are frequently called by that title. The term is frequently used in reference to an older man.

libation, after which, the reason for the veneration is made known:

<i>Pa Sori, wi nɔ kam fɔ distɔb yu pis</i>	Pa Sori, we have not come to disturb your peace
<i>Wi gɛt prɔblɛm we yu no bot</i>	We have a problem that you know about
<i>Yu na bin di pɔsin we bin de hɛp wi</i>	You were the person helping us
<i>Di trɔbul we you lɛf na di hos de go ɔn</i>	The trouble that you left in the home still goes on
<i>As no yu bin abul fɔ mek pis we done cam to yu</i>	As you were the peacemaker, we have come to you
<i>Yu de naw na di tru wɔl hɛp wi ɔsi Gɔd de</i>	You are now in the true world where God is

In Limba spirituality, the good dead are always presumed to be in peace. Therefore, the visitors make it clear that they have not come to disturb the peace of the deceased. They came with an old problem that the deceased already knew, and which he had tried to help resolve while he was alive. Now that he is in the true and better world where earthly occurrences are no longer hidden from him,<sup>239</sup> the family believes they can now count on him for help even more than before because he is in a better place and has the resources to help resolve the problem.

After making their purpose known, a request is then made:

<i>Mek Gɔd gi yu the pawa fɔ hɛp wi dis tɛm</i>	May God give you the power to help us this time
<i>Hɛp wi sɛtul dis prɔblɛm</i>	Help us settle this problem
<i>Nɔ tay ya pan wi</i>	Do not be weary with us
<i>Hɛp the fambul fɔ ti nap tranga</i>	Help the family to stand strong
<i>Luk wetin wi bring fɔ yu</i>	Look what we brought for you
<i>Mek Gɔd hɛp wi ɔl. Emen.</i>	May God help us all. Amen.

In the first line, we see that the venerators attribute power to God and not to the ancestor. If the matter is going to be settled once and for all, it is God who will give the deceased

<sup>239</sup>Cf. Sawyerr (1996:45).

the power to fix it. Pleas are made, for patience because the venerators are concerned that they might have already wearied the deceased with their problem and for help to enable the family to stand strong in times of challenge and struggle. The sacrifice is then offered and the ceremony is concluded with a request for God's help for both the venerators and the ancestor.

### 6.6.2 *Private*

When a deceased relative appears in a dream<sup>240</sup> and complains about being mistreated, the person who has offended the deceased goes to the grave to make amends. He may take along a sacred specialist with the usual kola nut, rice-flour. If the individual decides to go alone, he/she may start by saying:

<i>Mi papa/mama a dɔn kam fɔ tuk to yu</i>	My father/mother I have come to talk to you
<i>ɛn sɛtul di prɔblɛm we a dɔn kawz</i>	And settle the problem that I have caused
<i>A tek Gɔd naym beg yu</i>	I take the name of God to beg you
<i>fɔ padin mi fɔ di bad a dɔn du</i>	to forgive me for the bad I did to you
<i>Na Gɔd in naym a beg fɔ padin</i>	In God's name I am begging for forgiveness
<i>Mi na mɔtal man a de mek mistek padin mi</i>	I am human I make mistakes forgive me

The opening statement shows that the individual has come to talk to either a parent or an older deceased person.<sup>241</sup> The deceased was offended through either neglect or some other unacceptable behaviour by the venerator. The phrase "I take the name of God to beg you,"<sup>242</sup> is a tool to encourage a positive response where

<sup>240</sup>Cf. Harris (1968:20-22).

<sup>241</sup>It is common to hear people addressing a non-parent father/mother as the case may be. This is also a sign of respect reserved for the elderly.

<sup>242</sup>I was told that usually when the name of God is sincerely used to ask the ancestors for forgiveness, no kola nut or any other means is needed to know the mind of the dead because the deceased or ancestors will surely respond positively. However, most traditionalists feel that worship without kola nuts will be empty, so they are always used even when God's name is invoked to win the favour of the ancestor(s).

this may be difficult to obtain. Among the Limba as well as among the other ethnic groups of Sierra Leone, no one expects to be turned down when asking for forgiveness or making another request in the name of God. This is thought to ensure a positive outcome.

The worshiper proceeds to acknowledge his/her failures and throws the sides of the spilt kola nut on the ground to determine the result. When a positive result has been obtained, the ceremony is concluded with an expression of thanks, and as in the concluding phrase of the previous ceremony's prayer, God is asked to help both the worshiper and the ancestor:

<i>Tɛnki, tɛnki, a gladi fɔ padin mi</i>	Thanks, thanks, for forgiving me
<i>Mek dadi Gɔd mek we fɔ wi ɔl</i>	May God make a way for us all.

Israelite funeral rites "have sometimes been explained as evidence for a cult of the dead" (De Vaux 1997:61). Sometimes, "the argument is that the deceased person was feared, and that the living therefore wanted to protect themselves from him, or to secure his goodwill; at other times, it is argued that the living attributed a kind of divinity to the dead" (De Vaux 1997:61). In Israelite history:

Excavations show that there was a time when the Israelites followed the Canaanite custom of depositing food in the tomb...similar customs continued for a long time, and still do continue in parts of the Christian world; they indicate nothing more than a belief in survival after death and a feeling of affection towards the dead. They are not acts of worship directed towards the dead, for that attitude never existed in Israel. Prayer and sacrifice of expiation for the dead (both incompatible with the cult of the dead) appear at the very end of the Old Testament...Finally, these ceremonies were regarded as a duty which had to be paid to the dead, as an act of

piety which was their due (1 Sam 31:12; 2 Sam. 21:13-14).

So far there is no Biblical or historical evidence that the cult of the dead originated from Israel nor was it a part of their religion. Biblically, ancestors are not involved in the lives of the living, nor do they attempt to contact the living. Attempts by the living to contact the dead are condemned, and the possibility of such contact is never confirmed (Ferdinando 1996:120). In this regard, "we conclude that the dead were honoured in a religious spirit, but that no cult was paid to them" (De Vaux (1997:60-61)).

## 6.7 Conclusion

The ancestors are the ancestral spirits of adult dead relatives who during their lives had attained physical and/or moral prominence, and have made positive contributions to their communities, and on the basis of these qualifications have been included in the community of the venerated dead. Ancestral Spirits are believed to be very active in the affairs of the living as mediators between God and the living, as guardians of the culture, institutions and values of the ethnic group. In that respect, the Limba like most African traditionalists venerate their ancestors.

The rituals used to venerate Limba ancestors are very much the same as those used to venerate God. However, a close look at the prayers offered during ancestral veneration makes it clear that the ancestors are regarded as subordinates to God.<sup>243</sup> For example, the last lines of the closing prayers of the household

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<sup>243</sup>Though the ancestors are intermediaries between the living and God, and may have more power and knowledge than humankind, "they do not grow spiritually



and private graveside ceremonies: "May God help us all" and "May God make a way for us all" show that the venerators pray for God's help and God's way for themselves and for the ancestors as well.<sup>244</sup>

The NPLC, like their AOG forebears unanimously condemn ancestral veneration as heathen superstition. As they strive to enforce a complete break from traditional practices, in their preaching and teachings they try to avoid the use of the word 'ancestor' (which in Limba vocabulary refers to only the venerated dead) in order to prevent a possible misunderstanding. They substitute the phrase 'hero/heroine of faith' where the word 'ancestor' appears in the Bible.

Although the Bible prohibits Ancestor worship (Deut. 18:11-12) and Moses found it necessary to specify such worship was not compatible with the worship of God (Deut.26:14b), there is Archaeological evidence that shows that the ancient Israelites deposited food near the tombs of their venerated dead (De Vaux 1997:61). This custom still continues among many Christians in the world. In Sierra Leone, on January 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, many Christians take food and gifts to the graves of their departed relatives.

The Roman Catholic tradition makes provision for the veneration of departed Christian saints, and defines it in the Doctrine of *Dulia*. Christians who are involved in these practices, like their Limba counterparts, are careful to specify that their

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towards or like God" (Mbiti 1989a:160).

<sup>244</sup>The Mende conclude their ancestral prayers with *ɲgewɔ jahun* ("by the will of God"), and the Krio *bai God pauer* ("by the power of God). Like the Limba, "this suggests that the ancestors are thought of as capable of fulfilling the requests expressed in the petitions, but also somewhat dependent, in the ultimate analysis, on the sovereign Will of God, who has greater power than

actions are not acts of 'worship' directed towards the dead. Rather, they indicate a feeling of affection for the dead and are regarded as an obligation which the living have to pay to the dead as an act of piety that due them.

The major difference between ATR and Christian teaching is that ancestors in the Bible are only heroes of faith, and are not involved in the lives of the living as intermediaries between God and humankind, or as helpers and providers for humans.

Having thoroughly discussed Ancestral Spirits/Ancestors let us now move on to the study of Non-Ancestral Spirits and their various roles.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Non-ancestral Spirits

#### 7.1 Introduction

The Limba, like most African peoples, believe that their spiritual world is full of a myriad of spirits.<sup>245</sup> "We have hundreds of spirits roving around us"<sup>246</sup> the traditionalist would say. These non-ancestral spirits are believed to be quite different from ancestral spirits (Finnegan 1965:113).<sup>247</sup>

Finnegan (1965:113) states that non-ancestral spirits "are not and never have been human." According to Limba pneumatology, this is not true of all non-ancestral spirits. Ghosts, who are considered non-ancestral spirits, like the ancestors were also once human and fall under the category of Human Spirits. Further, these spirits live outside the social order of the village (Finnegan 1965:113), while the ancestors are in the village and fall within the social order. For this reason, unlike the ancestors, the spirits are considered to have more in common with animals than with humans (Finnegan 1965:113) and to relate only to individuals who have 'double sight' *thaya thale* (lit. two eyes) to see them and communicate with them.

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<sup>245</sup>See Mbiti (1989a:77) and Harris (1968:1).

<sup>246</sup>Samuel Koroma (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>247</sup>Gittins (1987:53) in his work on Mende religion draws a distinction between the ancestral and non-ancestral spirits. In a footnote he states that the Mende, "are perfectly aware of the distinction of what I call 'ancestral' and 'non-ancestral' spirits...." The former, are considered social, and the latter,

The NPLM based on Ephesians 6:12 and the deliverance miracles of Jesus and the apostles, also believes that our world is infested with myriads of benevolent and malevolent spirits. However, the church holds the traditionalists responsible for encouraging evil spirits by having personal and collective relationships with them and for venerating them because of their powers. For the NPLC, Christ has authority over evil spirits (Matt. 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-36; Mark 1:32-34; Luke 4:41), and has bestowed that authority on his disciples (Mark 3:13-15; Luke 10:17-20). Therefore, when a Christian's life is believed to be threatened by demons or evil spirits, prayers claiming the authority of Jesus are offered to rebuke these forces.

In this chapter we shall look at the various categories of non-ancestral spirits, their characteristics, and how they are venerated.

## 7.2 Categories and Characteristics of Spirits

### 7.2.1 Natural Spirits

Non-ancestral spirits are classified as either natural spirits or human spirits.<sup>248</sup> Natural Spirits<sup>249</sup> are believed to be either celestial<sup>250</sup> or terrestrial<sup>251</sup> beings.<sup>252</sup> They were created as they are and are either associated with natural features, or rove disassociated (Ferdinando 1996:113). Because of the "mysterious, fearsome and somatic nature"<sup>253</sup> of *thabekede* ("mountain/hill top"), *thasili* ("lake"), *gbonkoni* ("forest"),

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are considered non-social.

<sup>248</sup>See Gittins (1987:92-97), Mbiti (1989a: 74-89) and Magesa (1997: 53-57).

<sup>249</sup>Cf. Harris (1968:3, 34-53); Parrinder (1962:43-54).

<sup>250</sup>Cf. Evans-Pritchard (1956:28-62).

<sup>251</sup>Cf. Evans-Pritchard (1956:63-105).

<sup>252</sup>Cf. Magesa (1997:53).

ɲagboro ("cave") and *kutɛnɛ/ɲatɛnɛ* ("cotton tree"), spirits are commonly believed to inhabit them.<sup>254</sup>

Natural spirits are varyingly considered good, bad, or ambivalent in their operations.<sup>255</sup> The good spirits are called *kukahi/mabakaŋ*, and the bad ones are called *waali/mbaaliŋ/mbaayiŋ*. In general, nature spirits are characterised by an unpredictable ambivalence and must therefore be treated cautiously.

The acquisition of special skills and good fortune is often attributed to good spirits. It is believed that *bathaya* (a person gifted with a "spiritual eye"), will take "a good spirit"<sup>256</sup> to become wealthy, or renowned or to attain certain skills. It is a common notion that people with outstanding abilities or talents in the village have "taken a spirit" (Finnegan 1965:114-15). For example, "a young boy who performs especially well in the athletic dance before initiation...hunters, smiths, leaders in the societies, strikingly good drummers and singers, and, above all, the diviners of various kinds"<sup>257</sup> are all believed to have obtained their outstanding abilities from spirits.<sup>258</sup> What is generally said to have happened is that, a double sighted man or woman wandering in the bush meets a spirit, that says it is willing to help him or her to get whatever he or she wishes. An agreement is reached and the recipients return home carrying the spirit in the form of a round smooth stone (Finnegan 1965:114).

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<sup>253</sup>Harris (1968:1-2).

<sup>254</sup>Kalawa Conteh (Interviewed July 2002: Kamabai Town). Cf. Finnegan (1965:116), Parrinder (1962:43-54), and Magesa (1997:53).

<sup>255</sup>Cf. Ferdinando (1996:113).

<sup>256</sup>Samuel Koroma (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>257</sup>Finnegan (1965:114).

<sup>258</sup>Harris (1968:44-46) classified these spirits as 'land spirits' because they cater for the land-activities of the people.

Although people may be aware of the causes of a particular misfortune, suffering, accidental or inexplicable deaths, as well as the deaths of young people are usually considered to be the acts of evil spirits (Finnegan 1965:108). Natural disasters, such as floods and the consequent destruction are attributed to the anger of nature spirits.<sup>259</sup> Destruction caused by thunder and lightning, wind and rain, are similarly thought to be the work of spirits.<sup>260</sup>

The following are the most commonly consulted spirits in Limba pneumatology:<sup>261</sup>

- (1) *Ninkinanka*<sup>262</sup> is the spirit consulted by chiefs for power and influence. To gain skill and prominence in his chieftaincy, a chief has to be in constant touch with the supernatural. Apart from this understanding, traditionalists believe that the chief, as a powerful figure, derives his power from a greater power that makes ruling possible. This power may be the Supreme Being, the ancestors or the spirits.
  
- (2) *Yaaro* is the spirit that possesses other prominent men in the community. Prominence is difficult to attain exclusively through human power or influence. Traditionalists believe that rich or famous people have

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<sup>259</sup>In ATR, it is believed that spirits dwell in "wells, springs, rivers, lakes and the sea" (Parrinder 1981:50). See also, Harris (1968:39-44), Jell-Bahlsen (2000:38-53) and Wicker (2000:198-222).

<sup>260</sup>Cf. Magesa (1997:53). In Sierra Leone "a country in which natural forces often oppress at their most awesome. Religious belief is accordingly inculcated by thunder-storms, great rains and winds..." (Harris 1968:3).

<sup>261</sup>Information on *Ninkinanka*, *Yaaro*, *Kolidonso*, *Sokoro* and *Gbangba* was sent to me by Rev. MacFoday Kamara after my fieldwork.

<sup>262</sup>Finnegan (1967:280) states that this spirit "seems sometimes to be conceived of as like a snake, living in the forest" and "sometimes as like the rainbow." The association of *Ninkinanka* with the description of a rainbow fits well with the story that is told about him (Finnegan 1967:280-83).

taken the spirit *Yaaro* to make them what they are, and to maintain their status.

- (3) *Kolidonso* is the spirit for hunting. Good and excellent hunting skills are attributed to the patronage of the spirit *Kolidonso*.
- (4) *Sokoro*<sup>263</sup> is a dwarf spirit that is also contacted for hunting purposes. As the counterpart of *Kolidonso*, *Sokoro* is believed to be equally powerful, but much shorter in stature which makes him very swift to find game.

Clan and Personal spirits also fall under the category of nature spirits. Some spirits are thought to stand in a special relationship with certain clans for example; *Kumba* is connected with households in Bumban and Bafodea, and the spirit *Koyande* is identified with the Biriwa chiefdom.<sup>264</sup>

The most popular and revered of all nature spirits is *Gbangba*. It is the spirit of the male secret society and also the main spirit of the ethnic group. Although it is not known how the females have, along with the males, come to accept *Gbangba* as the main spirit of the Limba. As the main spirit of the Limba, it is not surprising that *Gbangba* is feared by a majority of the people, and also why the *Gbangba* secret society is found only in the Limba homeland. There are also several other kinds of spirits, which are referred to as *Thumbu*, *Sumuyenke*, *Kondeyo*, *Hukoko*, and by several other names.

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<sup>263</sup>Cf. (Finnegan 1967:280).

<sup>264</sup>Finnegan (1965:115-116); cf. Mbiti (1989a:75), Harris (1968:3).

There are a number of similarities between the pneumatologies of ATR and of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Like Limba tradition, in the Judeo-Christian tradition there is a strong belief in the existence of spirits (Ferdinando 1996:120) both good and evil (DeHaan 1972:10; cf. Achtemeier 1996:236).

The good spirits are allegiant and obedient to God. In this category we have the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, and "a great number of angels called ministering spirits" (DeHaan 1972:10). The Spirit of the LORD/God and the Holy Spirit are one and the same (Acts 2:16-17) and represent God's mysterious power or presence which he gives to individuals and communities that empower them with "qualities they would not otherwise possess"<sup>265</sup> (Achtemeier 1996:432; see also Erickson 1992:266-67). In the OT, leaders like Moses, Joshua, the Judges, David, Solomon, prophets, and kings receive their prowess from the presence of the Spirit of God. In the NT, it is God's Spirit that endows Jesus with power to fulfill his mission (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; Matt. 12:28; Luke 4:16-21) and that empowers the apostles and the early church as seen in the book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles. Today it is believed that the Holy Spirit continues to sustain the church and believers (Erickson 1992:268-275).

The evil spirits are believed to be disobedient to God and "under the direction of Satan who controls an organised host of wicked spirit beings. They are a formidable foe arrayed against God and His people..." (DeHaan 1972:10; cf. Achtemeier 1996:236). The notion that there are myriads of "evil forces in the world that manifest themselves in various ways" is still valid in the

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<sup>265</sup>Unlike the Limba traditional spirit *kukahī/mabakaŋ* which is taken by a person with a "spiritual eye" for empowerment and prosperity, God bestows his Holy Spirit on people on his volition.



Judeo-Christian worldview (Achteemeier 1996:236). A close reading of the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles reveals "that Christ and His apostles accepted the reality of evil spirits, and taught their followers to fear them" (DeHaan 1972:29). In the OT there is evidence of a belief in malevolent spirits (Gen. 6:1-4; Lev. 16:6-10, 26; Job 6:4; Ps. 91:5-6; Is. 34:14). Little was known about evil spirits. It was not until the late postexilic period that a cogent pneumatology of evil spirits developed in Hebrew thought. What developed during this time frame was a belief in "numerous evil spirits or demons" (Achteemeier 1996:236), who were led by an individual spirit whose most common designation was *ha Satan* ("the accuser"). This eventually came to function as a personal name "Satan." In the Septuagint, the title *ha diabolos* ("the slander/the devil") came to be used as the Greek equivalents (Job 2:1; Zech. 3:1; 1 Ch. 21:1). This was also used in the NT for example Matthew 4 and Luke 4. The eventual understanding was of a hierarchy of demons, organised into armies, under the leadership of Satan "doing battle with God and God's allies" (Achteemeier 1996:236). These spirits were able to afflict and even possess humans in order to cause physical or mental illnesses. People even came to believe that "demons could take control of nature and cause natural calamities and disasters" Achteemeier (1996:236). Jesus' earthly ministry included the exorcism of such demons (e.g., Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39; Matt. 12:22-32; Mark 3:22-27; Luke 11:14-23) and the Apostle Paul demonstrated an understanding of such a pneumatology (Rom. 8:38; cf. Col. 1:16; 2:15; Eph. 3:10; and also 1 Cor. 10:20).

In Christianity, "many of the completely inhuman and unnatural evils of society are at least in part" attributed to the devil and his spirits (DeHaan 1972:16). However, there are also

instances in the Bible where God has sent evil spirits upon people (1 Sam. 16:14-16, 23; 18:10; 19:9; 2 Chr. 18:22).

### 7.2.2. Human Spirits

The next category of non-ancestral spirits is Human Spirits (*kuyimay*). These are the dead who have not been "integrated into the ancestor cult" (Ferdinando 1996:113). These include witches, wicked dead relatives and ghosts. Witches, and wicked dead relatives who have not received respectable burial rites, are believed to become malevolent spirits<sup>266</sup> roving around in the night or day to bewitch or injure the innocent, especially their enemies or infants.

#### 7.2.2.1 Witchcraft (*thawɛthɛ/huwɛthɛ/huwɛthi*)

Witchcraft<sup>267</sup> is practised by a man or woman called *bawɛthi wo/bayaku wo* ("a witch")<sup>268</sup> who may potentially afflict people by mystical means through the power and encouragement of evil spirits (Bourdillon 2000:176) usually "at night guarding against discovery" (Finnegan 1965:119). It is said that a witch leaves the body spiritually when "asleep and goes out to attack another person, infant or adult" while their victim is also asleep (Sawyerr 1996:11).<sup>269</sup> Parrinder (1973:92) has strongly dismissed

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<sup>266</sup>Cf. Ferdinando (1996:113).

<sup>267</sup>See Magesa (179-89) for a discussion on the English and African usage of the word.

<sup>268</sup>The belief as to which gender a witch may be varies in Africa. Like the Limba, among the Gwari, "men and women could equally be suspected of witchcraft (Bourdillon 2000:186). In contrast, the Yoruba and Mende peoples believe witches are usually women (Sawyerr 1996:11). So also are the Nupe (Bourdillon 2000:186). Parrinder appears not to have a clear-cut position on the issue. "Witches are believed to be women, the word witch can equally well serve for men" (Parrinder 1962:122), in other works, he has relegated witchcraft to only women (Parrinder 1963:138 & 1967:92).

<sup>269</sup>Because of the evil associated with witchcraft, the mystical power a witch uses to harm people can be referred to as 'evil magic' (cf. Mbiti 1989a:194-

such a belief as a delusion adding that: "People do not leave their bodies or destroy the souls of others. So in fact there are no witches, though many people believe in them." Parrinder however failed to give any evidence in support of his argument.

To most Africans witchcraft "is the greatest wrong or destruction on earth" (Magesa 1997:68). In Limba worldview as in many African beliefs; suffering, sickness and death usually "have their origin in witchcraft" (Magesa 1997:68). Witchcraft is considered the "reverse of normal values and behaviour" of the community (Bourdillon 2000:176). For these reasons practitioners of witchcraft, "are always considered to be bad and anti-social" (Finnegan 1965:119).

In Limba society, as in many African societies, belief in witchcraft is very strong. Finnegan reported that most Limba traditionalists, if asked why they believe in witchcraft would "often reply by saying that after all the witches confess" (Finnegan 1965:119) and "no one could confess to anything so terrible if they were not guilty" (Bourdillon 2000:180), even today, this is still the most common explanation of this belief. Although witch-hunting is rare in Limba societies, there have been cases where accused witches have been made to confess under physical and psychological duress. Today, because of modernisation, although a confession is seen as "an indication of witchcraft practices," it does not on its own establish culpability for a crime (Bourdillon 2000:193). Legally, Limba authorities are required to "look very carefully at the circumstances of the confession and at corroborating evidence" (Bourdillon 2000:193) before taking any positive action.

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96). Magic in a nutshell is the manipulation of supernatural forces by mystical means (cf. Mbiti 1989a:193). See Parrinder (1962:113-220) & Mbiti (1989a: 193-96) for an overall discussion on magic.

The Limba believe that "witches are all round...acting invisibly" (Finnegan 1965:116, 117). Witches are believed to acquire their power through their "double eyes" which make them capable of seeing beyond the physical and ordinary. However, not all people with double eyes practice witchcraft. As mentioned earlier, many people with exceptional abilities are believed to have "double sight." This includes sorcerers and traditional healers (Magesa 1997:180). It is also believed that twins and triplets possess "double sight." These individuals "may possess the same powers as witches, but they are not necessarily malevolent" (Magesa 1997:180). Most of them are good people who use their abilities to expose witches and those trying to harm others through mystical means. Some use their double vision to secure wealth and fame through the spirits. The Limba consider double sightedness as a gift from God. However, like many of God's gifts, while most people use them for good, some people misuse and abuse them.

Witches sometimes take on different forms to commit their mischievous acts. They, like other "spirits are capable of taking the forms of animals, reptiles and birds,"<sup>270</sup> therefore some spirits are associated with animals<sup>271</sup> like leopards, elephants, lions, snakes,<sup>272</sup> owls<sup>273</sup> and vampire bats.<sup>274</sup> Most

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<sup>270</sup>Samuel Koroma (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown). Cf. Harris (1968:74), Bourdillon (2000:176), Parrinder (1962:118).

<sup>271</sup>Cf. Harris (1968:5); Parrinder (1962:44).

<sup>272</sup>Among many ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, it is believed that snakes like the warmth of a pregnant woman and will wrap themselves around her leg for comfort (Harris 1968:5).

<sup>273</sup>The nightly cry of an owl is considered supernatural as a manifestation of witchcraft (Harris 1968:5). Therefore, when an owl starts to hoot at night, people come out with sticks and metallic items and start to beat on them together while using abusive and profane words against the witch who has sent the owl to come and carry out mischief. It is said that witches do not like curses or profanity to be used against their mothers. When such words are uttered, the owl leaves and will not return for a long time.

<sup>274</sup>The same procedure is also followed when the hooting sound of a vampire bat is heard. The sound of a vampire bat indicates that witches are sucking

ethnic groups in Sierra Leone believe that even the bravest and strongest beasts are normally afraid of humans. Because of this belief, if the Limba hear that a wild animal attacking a person; it is thought that, that animal or reptile is not ordinary, and a witch must have entered it. A witch who takes an animal or reptile form is called "baŋahi wo/bakahe wo." Witches also deprive people through spiritual means by stealing crops, plaguing and killing cattle, causing harm and destruction on anyone who is seen as a threat to them politically or socially. Wicked like-minded people may procure the services of witches to eradicate a political opponent or a rival in love affairs.

*(a) Process of witchcraft*

When a witch is full of envy, malice or bitterness, at night, he/she assumes a spiritual form and leaves his/her physical body lying in bed while he/she goes and eats the internal parts of his/her victim by spiritual and mystical means. At times, a witch may use a gun called "kufaŋki" to kill a victim. If he/she is successful, the victim becomes a walking corpse and eventually dies. Some times, a witch's plan may backfire if another double sighted person catches him/her in the act and decides to stop or destroy him/her. If he/she decides to stop the witch, the good "double sight" individual follows the witch and blocks him from entering the house of the proposed victim. If this happens the witch should count himself/herself lucky. Alternately, if the "double sighted" person chooses to destroy the witch, he/she prevents the witch from entering his/her own house after a destructive trip. If he/she does not enter the house and take on his/her mortal body by daybreak, he/she will die. It is believed that witches fly even great distances to

find their victims, the power of flight being achieved through the use of groundnut/peanut shells.<sup>275</sup>

*(b) Eradication and Prevention of Witchcraft*

The Limba, like most Africans,<sup>276</sup> seek to eradicate witchcraft because of the destructive results. The most common way this is achieved is that the witch is named and caught (Finnegan 1965:117) the act of witchcraft is then reversed by a sacred specialist. There are several ways this may be accomplished. If the death of a person, or animal or the destruction of something is declared to be the work of a witch, a diviner called, *basakapu* (a person who exposes witchcraft through a spirit in a box) is summoned to name the culprit. Depending on the community, if the accused denies the charge, a series of tests may be conducted to declare the truth, or a "swear"<sup>277</sup> may be invoked to pursue the miscreant. If the offender is caught using a "swear", he/she must undergo an elaborate and expensive ceremony to remove the eminent curse of the "swear". In most cases a person found guilty of witchcraft is required to make a public confession, and it is up to the village to either forgive or banish him/her.

The Limba are taught from childhood to protect themselves and interests from witchcraft and evil spirits by procuring protective charms. Although a witch is considered to be powerful and is feared by most people, it is also believed that in the natural human existence he/she "is vulnerable to certain charms and spells and could be repelled by them" (Harris

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<sup>275</sup>Cf. Harris (1968:74).

<sup>276</sup>See Parrinder (1963:129).

<sup>277</sup>See Finnegan (1984:8-26) for details on the procedure of "swearing", types of "swears", purpose of "swears", postulated powers of "swears", and control

1968:75). Most Sierra Leoneans "view the Limba as more involved in 'medicine' and the supernatural than any ethnic group in the country" (Opala & Boillot 1996:4).

In general these charms are called *taliŋ beŋ* ("medicines"). There are several categories of *Taliŋ beŋ*. *Sɛbɛ* are objects used for protection of one's home or person. They may be worn as amulets or pendants or may be hung over the doors of houses in leather bags that have had tiny chunks of kola nut spat on them. *Kulɔŋki ko* are objects commonly buried on farms. *ŋakurɛ*, and *kumanki/kuwanki* are objects visibly hung around farms to protect them against thieves. *Kulaba* is a combination of white, red and black pieces of cloth sewn together to be hung outside of a house and to be fashioned into under vests and slips worn to protect people from bodily and spiritual harm.<sup>278</sup> People also wash and rub their bodies<sup>279</sup> with potions known as *Manɛsi*. Charms may also be sticks, stones, pieces of traditional cloth, or almost anything a person thinks is powerful.<sup>280</sup>

*Taliŋ be* are used to "secure a feeling of safety, protection and assurance" (Mbiti 1989a:196). A person's use of religious charms reflects "invisible values and beliefs." These charms serve as "visual aids" (Byaruhanga-Akiiki 1993:192) that give confidence and security to the user.

The spirit of a powerful person is believed to live on after his/her death with the same passions as he/she had when alive.

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on the use of "swears" among the Limba.

<sup>278</sup>This African method of protecting oneself and interests against malevolent spirit(s) has also been referred to by scholars as magic. Parrinder (1962:114) refers to this act of mystical protection as 'Personal Magic' and Mbiti (1989a:193-94) sees it as 'good magic'.

<sup>279</sup>Cf. Parrinder (1962:114); Mbiti (1989a:193).

<sup>280</sup>Cf. Parrinder (1962:122); Mbiti (1989a:193).

For this reason, people make sure that when a convicted witch dies, steps are taken to prevent him/her from surviving death to return and cause more mischief.<sup>281</sup> To this end, a sacred specialist (*basakapu*) is usually summoned and an offering is made to the ancestors to deactivate the power of witchcraft possessed by the deceased.<sup>282</sup>

The NPLC condemns witches and witchcraft on the basis of Leviticus 19:26b and Deuteronomy 18:10. Parrinder (1963:117, 122) believes that the witchcraft discussed in the Bible is altogether different than anything known today and that it is therefore a mistake to use scripture to either condemn or justify witchcraft as we know it. "The plain fact is that the Bible knows scarcely anything of true witchcraft, certainly not the New Testament, and the few injunctions found in the Old Testament refer to something else" Parrinder (1963:118).

To buttress his argument, Parrinder (1963:120-22) gives a brief study on the Hebrew words which have been translated "witch"/"witchcraft". The Hebrew word most often used to denote a witch is *kashaph* (Parrinder 1963:120; DeHaan\_1972:95). The meaning of the term is not clear and its significance has to be judged from its usage (Parrinder 1963:120; cf. Achtemeier 1996:1217). *Kashaph* in its various forms, is most often translated 'sorcery,' 'sorcerer/sorceress,' or 'diviner' (Holladay 1988:166; Brown 1996:506). Although the exact details of the practice of witchcraft are not clear in the Hebrew Bible,

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<sup>281</sup>Cf. Sawyerr (1968:107).

<sup>282</sup>In olden days the practice of deactivating the spirit of a witch was to dismember the corpse and bury its parts in different places. That practice has long since been discarded by the government of Sierra Leone. Other Africans as well have practices to forestall the activity of the spirit of a witch. The Temne, like the Limba once dismembered the corpses of witches, the Efik of Calabar burn the corpses, and some tribes in Nyasaland throw the corpses of witches to hyenas (Sawyerr 1968:107).



it is stated in the Jewish writings known as the *Talmud*<sup>283</sup> (Joma 83b) that "some women were 'addicted to witchcraft' and the occult" (Packer 1980:423). In another passage, Sanhedrin 67a, it also alleged that "the majority of women are inclined to witchcraft" (Packer 1980:423). So far, we have no proof to justify the similarities and differences between the practice of witchcraft in the OT (if it existed) and that in ATR.

The NPLC has also condemned traditional charms as "pathetically useless" (Parrinder 1962:116), claiming that they offer no assurance and "they evoke no voluntary self-surrender in those who trust in them" (Sawyer 1968:134). The ancient Hebrews also used charms in the form of amulets.<sup>284</sup> Hebrew women wore earrings (Gen. 35:4; Jud. 2:13; 8:24) and used amulets to ensure fertility (Packer 1980:442). Men wore pendants "suspended from chains around the necks" and engraved with "sacred words or the figure of a god" (Packer 1980:481). To form another kind of amulet, scriptural texts were written on a papyrus or parchment scroll which was then rolled tightly and sewn up in linen (Packer 1980:481). Eventually, the practice of wearing amulets came to be considered idolatrous and was replaced by the wearing of phylacteries "on the forehead between the eyebrows," and "on the left arm" (Packer 1980:482). Moses' use of the image of the serpent (Ex. 4:3-5; 7:8-13), Naman's washing in the Jordan and eventual cure (2 Kg. 5:1-19) and Christ's working of miracles in conjunction with natural objects (John 11:1-53) have been put

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<sup>283</sup>The word *Talmud* means "learning" or "study" from the Hebrew word *lamad* "to learn" or "study" (Evans 1992:126). The *Talmud* contains "the sayings and traditions of some of the tannaic rabbis" (Evans 1992:2). It "is made up of *Mishna* (and *Tosefta*) plus interpretive expansions called *Gemara* (from the Hebrew word *gamar*, "to complete)" (Evans 1992:126).

<sup>284</sup>An amulet is "a small object believed charged with divine potency and thus effective in warding off evil and inviting the protection of beneficial powers. Amulets were integral to belief in magic and derived their efficacy from close physical contact with a holy person or object" (Achte-meier 1996:32).

forward as further evidence of the use of religious charms and objects in the Bible (Byaruhanga-Akiiki 1993:192).

The NPLC tradition of destroying charms by fire was adopted from their AOG forebears.<sup>285</sup> At the annual adult baptismal service where charms are burned, the pastors make a show of dangling the items, while condemning and challenging the powers of evil in the name of Jesus. The charms are then collected in one place and burned. The text from Matthew 6:24, "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other..." is usually read and explained before the items are destroyed. There is a popular Limba church song about the inferiority of the power of charms:

<i>Kaiŋ sɛbɛ... (4 times)</i>	I do not have <i>sɛbɛ</i>
<i>Yɔko Kanu na pitikay yan</i>	My trust is on God alone

There is also a song about the powerlessness of traditional charms:

<i>Wɔ bɛna ka yo ka duniya baŋ</i>	There's no one in this world
<i>Wɔ nthɔn tuku ndɛ ŋai hɛlɛŋ</i>	That will die and rise again
<i>Wɔ bɛna kaa ka duniya baŋ</i>	There's no one on earth
<i>Wɔ bɛna ka wo pindi tuka ya</i>	There's no one that can prevent death
<i>Yi kei ka mɔri woŋ mase yama</i>	You went to the diviner to help
<i>Mɔri woŋ dethe, ndɛ gbale manɛsi</i>	The diviner looked, he prescribed charms
<i>Manɛsi maŋ tha yina punku mase</i>	The charms were unable to help you

The rationale behind this song is that charms have no power over death. If they did, many people would be alive today.

One of the reasons given by Limba traditionalists for their dual religiosity is that Christianity does not provide any visible

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<sup>285</sup>See Olson (1969:192).

protection against evil forces. Because Christianity condemns the use of charms and religious artefacts for protection against malevolent spirits, the traditionalists see it as less protective than ATR and therefore undependable. Further, they see the NPLM destruction of traditional charms and artefacts as destructive to traditional culture.

#### 7.2.2.2 Ghosts ("hure")

A ghost is "an apparition or sceptre of dead person" (Parrinder 1962:137). Like many Africans, Limba traditionalists believe that a spirit becomes a ghost<sup>286</sup> when a person has not received proper burial and is resultantly "wandering about between this world and the next" (Parrinder 1962:60). While ghosts in other traditions plague people "and bring sickness to children" (Parrinder 1962:137), ghosts in Limba tradition are harmless, but are notorious for stalking and harassing their targets until something is done to appease them. Usually, this is accomplished by performing a second burial rite.<sup>287</sup> Because of their habit of harassing the living, ghosts are considered to be evil spirits. Stories of ghosts haunting homes, offices and people are still common among most peoples in Sierra Leone.

Judeo-Christian tradition says very little about the activities of ghosts. The belief in "disembodied spirits" (Achte-meier 1996:375) or "shades" (Heb. *rephaim*) is found in the Hebrew Bible (Job 26:5; Ps. 88:10; Prov. 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; Isa. 14:9; 26:19; cf. 29:4, "a ghost [Heb. *Ohb*] from the ground") (Achte-meier 1996:375). Jesus' disciples when they saw him walking on water (Mark 6:49; Matt. 14:26) and later when they

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<sup>286</sup>Cf. Ferdinando (1996:113).

<sup>287</sup>Cf. Parrinder (1962:137).

saw him risen (Luke 24:37), mistook him for a "ghost" (Achte-meier 1996:375). As in the case with witchcraft, there is not enough information about ghosts in the Bible to adequately compare Biblical ideas to those of ATR.

Finnegan (1965:11) concludes that in Limba perspective:

...spirits of every kind share the same characteristics-that of being away from the village, potentially dangerous though often giving their favourites great riches, associated rather with individuals than a village or lineage as a whole; they are unlike both the dead who belong to all, and *Kanu* who is over everything.

### 7.3 Offering to Nature Spirits

An offering (*kudamaŋ*) is made periodically or as required to appease the spirits or as thanksgiving for a fortune received from the spirits. *Kudamaŋ* is offered to benevolent or malevolent spirits by the chiefdom/village/town, compound, household, or individuals in caves (*ŋagbɔrɔ*),<sup>288</sup> or forests ( ), near lakes (*husili/thasili*), or springs (*katha sosi*), under huge/cotton trees (*kutɛnɛ/ŋatɛnɛ*),<sup>289</sup> on mountains,<sup>290</sup> at shrines<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>288</sup>Most of the people who go to perform religious rites in caves are those who have personal spirits. Because of their fearsome nature and home-like structure, caves are considered to be the home of many spirits. Offerings to personal spirits for forgiveness, thanksgiving, and prosperity are made in caves.

<sup>289</sup>Cotton trees are believed to be the meeting places of witches. They are considered powerful spiritual centres for the agents of "God Below." Not too long ago in Sierra Leonean politics, candidates for elections would take offerings to the bases of cotton trees for success and political prominence.

<sup>290</sup>"There are mountains exclusively for the worship of God/ancestors and there are others for the spirits" (Santigie).

<sup>291</sup>"There are some shrines which are only used for worshipping God and/or ancestors, while there are others for the purpose of presenting offerings and for the veneration of non-ancestral spirits" (Santigie). Every village/town has a sacred place which people are not allowed to enter without the approval of the priest. The only people that have the right to enter into these places freely are the priests in charge. Members of the community can only enter

(*thagbom/ḡathoko*) which have full-time priests, society bushes, and black smith's houses. *Kudamaḡ* is usually made in the perceived "home" of the spirit to which it is made, it is seldom made at the family/clan shrine where the clan spirit (*nthongbakile*) dwells. Items offered to these spirits are much the same as those used for sacrifices offered to *Kanu* and to the ancestors. Let us consider some of these ceremonies

### 7.3.1 *Forest Spirits*

Offerings to the spirits of the forests are made by those who have taken a spirit to become outstanding hunters or by those who believe that contacting the hunting spirits before a hunting expedition (*hudonso*) will ensure its success. A hunter (*badonso*) who has one of the hunting spirits (*kolidonso* or *sokoro*) may decide to give thanks to the spirit or may make an offering for forgiveness if the spirit has been neglected or offended. Either kind of offering may be either a blood offering or a bloodless offering, depending on the advice received from a sacred specialist, or on the wishes of the hunter.

During the ceremony the spirit's name is called and the hunter, or the sacred specialist on behalf of the hunter, expresses his thanks for all the good the spirit has been doing for him. This is followed by the offering of gifts. If the purpose is to ask for forgiveness from the spirit, the hunter does that in the usual way someone might ask for forgiveness. The hunter determines whether he has been forgiven by the spirit or not

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upon invitation. The importance of these places varies, however, some are for defence purposes, bush schooling, child bearing and others are for acquiring a better status. There are other shrines where people go to lay a curse "swear" (*thoḡkoni*) on those who have wronged them.

through the use of kola nut in the same way as in the worship of God and the veneration of the ancestors. Another way in which the spirit may communicate is through the appearance and action of vultures. If vultures appear at a particular time and start eating the meat offered it indicates that forgiveness is in place. If they do not appear at the appropriate time, it may indicate the contrary.

### 7.3.2 Water Spirits

The spirit which controls rivers, lakes and streams is called *Mami Wata* ("Mother of Water"). Flooding that is not caused by rain is attributed to the work of the water spirit. Because *Mami Wata*<sup>292</sup> is considered to be an agent of the "god below," some people do not bother to appease her but take their concerns directly to God or to the ancestors. Others go to the stream, river or lake from which the problem emanated to make an offering and to offer prayers to appease *Mami Wata*. Also, if a river has dried up on account of a drought, the community may choose to pray to God and the ancestors or to go to the river banks and present an offering. Such an offering, like most others, can be either a bloody sacrifice or bloodless sacrifice. The leader may say as follows:

*Riva spirit wi dɔn kam*  
*Becawz yu dɔn distraw*  
*wi land ɛn prɔpati wit wata*  
*Dɔ ya padin wi eni tin*  
*wi dɔn dɔ wrong*  
*Wi dɔn bring dis shiip to yu*

Spirit of the river we have come  
 Because you have destroyed  
 our land and property with water  
 Forgive us for anything  
 we have done wrong  
 We have brought this sheep to you

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<sup>292</sup>The notion of *Mami Wata* as the goddess of water is common in some West African cultures. She is also known as *Mami Wota* (Jell-Bahlsen 2000:38-53) and others call her *Mami Water* (Wicker 2000:198-222).

*Acεpt am εn padin wi  
Mek dis prɔblεm nɔ bi egen*

Accept it and forgive us  
Do not let this problem happen  
again

The worshipers begin by informing the spirit of their presence, and the nature of their problem. Their land and all their possessions have been destroyed by water. Because it is generally presumed that disaster usually strikes when the spirits have been displeased or offended, the worshipers, are asking the spirit for forgiveness even though they are not sure of what wrong they have done.

The people have brought a sheep as an offering, and the spirit is asked to accept the offering and forgive the people their wrong. The confession and offering is intended to put an end to further calamity. The ceremony is then concluded as the throat of the sheep is slit and the blood is drained and sprinkled on the river. The meat is left on the banks for vultures to eat.

The notion that nature and/or natural objects possess sacredness is attested to in the Bible. Jacob after his dream at Bethel remarked "How awesome is this place!" (Gen. 28:17). At the burning bush God told Moses to take off his sandals from his feet, for he was standing on holy ground (Ex. 3:5). Because the Israelites and their ancestors were Shepherds and peasants, they shared the Canaanite belief that there is a "divine presence or action in the springs which made the earth fruitful, in the wells which provided water for flocks, in the tree which bore witness to this fertility, and in the high places where the clouds gathered to give their longed-for rain" (De Vaux 1997:277). At the wells of Beersheba, Abraham called upon the name of God (Gen. 21:31) and Isaac set up an altar to God who appeared to him there (Gen. 26:23-25).

Trees had sacred associations in Israelite religion (Achte-meier 1996:1174). Trees served as memorial objects (Gen. 21:33), and "they marked the open-air sanctuaries ("high places") honoured by the patriarchs (Gen. 12:6-7) but condemned by the prophets for the illegitimate rites held there" for example Jeremiah 3:6 (Achte-meier 1996:1174). The palm tree of the prophetess Deborah between Ramah and Bethel (Jg. 4:5), where she settled "disputes between Israelites, probably did have a religious significance" (De Vaux 1997:278-79).

Despite the command against deifying mountains in Hebrew religion (Ezek. 18:6, 11, 15; Jer. 3:2, 6, Hos. 4:13), sacred mountains are attested in the Bible. Mount Sinai or Horeb and Mount Zion were associated with God (Achte-meier 1996:710; De Vaux 1997:281). Mount Sinai is called the "mountain of God" (Ex. 3:1; 4:27; 18:5; 24:13). It was the place where the covenant between God and Israel was made (Ex. 19:24), the place where Moses spoke to God (Ex. 19:3, 10; 24:9) and the place where God's presence was revealed (Ex. 19:16, 18). Mount Zion is the "holy mountain" of the Psalms (Ps. 2:6; 3:5; 15:1; 43:3; 99:9) and of the prophets (Is. 27:13; Jer. 31:23; Ez. 20:40; Dan. 9:16, 20).

In the NT the worship of God was not restricted to any particular mountain (John 4:2-24). Mountains were significant in contexts of worship, prayer, and important religious events (Achte-meier 1996:710). For example, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-7:29), Jesus' temptation (Matt. 4:8), his transfiguration (Mark 9:2) and for his own prayer and devotion, Jesus went to the mountains (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12; 9:28; John 6:15). "The Mount of Olives was the setting for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29); his



betrayal occurred on the slopes at Gethsemane (Matt. 26:30-56; Mark 14:26-50); and it is reported that the Mount of Olives was the site of his ascension (Luke 24:50; Acts 1:9-12)" (Achtemeier 1996:710).

In both Israelite religion and in the NT, worship was not paid to these places; "they merely mark the place of worship" (DeVaux 1997:278).

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

The Limba believe in a myriad of non-ancestral spirits which are classified as either natural spirits or human spirits. Natural spirits were created as they are, and are believed to be associated with natural objects like mountains, waters, forests, huge trees and caves, and with natural phenomena like thunder and lightning, storms and rain. Natural spirits are either benevolent or malevolent. Good spirits are said to be helpful to individuals and communities and must be honoured for their patronage and be appeased when offended. When offended or neglected, malevolent spirits become malignant to individuals and/or communities, causing misfortune, suffering, death, and destruction. The Limba have personal and communal spirits that seek the welfare and interests of the individual and community. Offerings to return thanks and appreciation to benevolent spirits are sometimes made in any of the places mentioned above. Offerings are also sometimes made to drive away malevolent spirits.

Non-ancestral human spirits include the spirits of witches, wicked dead relatives and ghosts. The Limba believe in, and fear witchcraft. Witches are believed to possess animals,

reptiles, and nocturnal birds to perpetrate mischief. So the Limba traditionalists do their best to protect themselves against the power of witches, and if possible, they try hard to eradicate witchcraft and its practitioners. To protect themselves from the power of witches, the traditionalists seek help through sacred specialists who prescribe the use of religious charms and objects. The Limba are renowned in Sierra Leone for their expertise and obsession for traditional charms and objects. Ghosts are the spirits of the dead that did not receive proper burial rites. Although they are considered harmless, their habit of haunting the living has caused them to be classified as evil spirits. Offerings are not made to non-ancestral human spirits.

The "Biblical perspectives on the spirit world are a good deal closer to traditional African thinking than to the skepticism and demythologizing of much modern Western theology" (Ferdinando 1996:120). There are a number of key similarities between African pneumatology and Biblical pneumatology. Both Biblical writers and African traditionalists believe in the existence of individual personal spirit beings with identity, intelligence will and self consciousness. These beings fall into some sort of hierarchy, which is not well understood by humans. These beings are powerful and sometimes use their powers to inflict misfortune on humans. This understanding helps to give meaning to suffering.

There are also a number of fundamental differences between the two pneumatologies. Biblical pneumatology is primarily theocentric and plays little attention to the roles of other spirits. Any attention which is given to these activities is always framed in the context of the sovereignty of God who sets

limits on these beings (Ferdinando 1996:130).

African pneumatology on the other hand is anthropocentric and the spirits are defined morally by their relationship to man, whether they bring harm or good and almost any spirit may move from one classification to another based on their actions. The chief harm inflicted by spirits is physical. "In the event of misfortune it is an offending witch or spirit that is invariably sought out, which contrasts sharply with the theocentric reaction of Job or of the sufferers in the book of Psalms" (Ferdinando 1996:123). God often appears to be silent in Limba pneumatology.

Having studied the major components of the Supernatural - the Supreme Being, Angels, Ancestral Spirits, and Non-ancestral Spirits, let us now consider what the Limba understand and teach about Humankind.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Humankind (*wə meti*)

#### 8.1 Introduction

The Limba traditional worldview as it relates to humankind may be considered from the viewpoint of humanity's origin, purpose in life, and final destiny. In general, humankind is believed to have originated from God, and is superior to and more intelligible than any of God's other creatures. The Limba believe that there is a purpose for human existence; every individual has a role to play in the universe. In that regard, humankind "is at the very centre of existence," and the Limba "see everything else in its relation" to humankind's central position (Mbiti 1989a:90; Cf. Okorochoa 1994:73). Humans in the journey of life must deal with the Supernatural, and with animate beings, and inanimate objects. This puts them in a position where they must strive to maintain a balance between personal identity as unique individuals on one hand, and communal identity on the other.<sup>293</sup> This advocates "the integrative notion of 'person' as a being-in-plenitude who can assert his/her being only in concert with other beings" (Yambasu 2002:45).

Although there are a few issues surrounding humankind on which the NPLC disagrees with traditionalists, the two groups have very similar ideas about humankind.

We shall now discuss the origin and nature of humankind; humankind's relationship with God and with other creatures and the human life cycle from birth to life-after.

## 8.2 Origin and Nature of Humankind

Earlier, under the topic "God as Creator", we discussed the Limba belief that *Kanu* created humankind. This belief is so strong and prevalent in their worldview that there is hardly a Limba who thinks otherwise. The Limba believe that *Kanu* created them out of the earth, thus they "are products of the earth"<sup>294</sup> hence the word *womɛti* ("humankind") which literally means "one created from the earth" or "one of a town or village".<sup>295</sup>

A person, according to Limba worldview, consists of a body (*koɔ*) and breath (*siba*).<sup>296</sup> The body contains the breath, which comes from God and makes humankind a living being. *Siba* gives life to the body and "without its presence the body is lifeless" (Opoku 1993:75). At death *siba* leaves the body which is buried, decays and stays in the grave. The Limba claim not to know the final destination or end of *siba*. In addition to the body and spirit, humankind is endowed with a spiritual nature that enables him/her to relate with the supernatural.

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<sup>293</sup>Cf. Mbiti 1989a:90).

<sup>294</sup>Samuel Koroma (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown). In Sierra Leone, the Mende believe that all people "originated from the earth" (Sawyerr 1996:9). Africans have various myths explaining God's method of creating humankind. Some examples are: that humankind was created from clay, out of a hole or marsh in the ground, from tree, out of a vessel, from human parts, and that humans came from heaven or from elsewhere (Mbiti 1989a:91-92).

<sup>295</sup>Samuel Koroma (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>296</sup>In Yoruba religion, Olodumare puts his breath into the lifeless bodies which *Orisha-nla* had formed to make them living being," likewise the Akan teaches that humankind consists of body and breath and are separated at death (Opoku 1993: 74-75). The Mende believe that humankind is constituted of spirit and "flesh, muscles, bones and all the other physical components of the human body" (Sawyerr 1970:82). In general, the Africans think that humankind is made up of "body and soul, but the soul can have multiple contents" (Sawyerr

From a Biblical perspective, humankind is created by God (Gen. 1:26-27), formed "from the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7; 3:19, 23). Humankind is made up of soul/spirit and body/flesh (Matt. 10:28; Gen. 6:3; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 5:23; Col. 2:5).<sup>297</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, the soul is the "breath of life" that God breathed into Adam and he "became a living being" (Gen. 2:7; cf. 46:18). Likewise in the NT the soul refers to one's life (Matt. 2:20; Mark 3:4; Luke 12:20).

### 8.3. Relationship with God

The relationship between God and humankind in Limba view is based on the belief that humans are God's creation and that God provides and continues to provide for human existence.<sup>298</sup> Although objective proof is understandably lacking, the Limba claim to be autochthones created from the earth in their present homeland (Fanthorpe 1998:18), unlike all other Sierra Leonean ethnic groups who they believed were created somewhere and later immigrated to their present place. This, they claim provides them with a special relationship with God. Further, the Limba claim special relationship with God because their ancestors told them that God himself came down and formed all their social and religious institutions, and showed them the skills necessary for living (Finnegan 1965:107-08).<sup>299</sup> They also claim to have inherited their moral and religious ethics from God (Finnegan

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1996:113).

<sup>297</sup>Cf. Sawyerr (1996:112-113).

<sup>298</sup>In the story "The dog and the rice" (Finnegan 1967:238-39), Kanu created the Limba people, provided them with food, and taught them the techniques of farming. In several African stories, God created and put humankind in a state of paradise with all the necessities of life (Mbiti 1989a:93-94).

<sup>299</sup>There are stories that support this belief: "Kanu gave food to the Limba" (Finnegan 1967:235-38) is about God's provision for the Limba; "Kanu gives chiefship" (Finnegan 1967:239-44) is about the institution of the Limba chieftaincy, and "Kanu and palm wine" (Finnegan 1967:246-47) speaks about the Kanu teaching the Limba to tap palm wine.

1965:109). Because of this special status and relationship with God, the Limba believe that they are obliged to sustain a harmonious relationship with God; therefore, every individual is encouraged to strive to be at peace with God and with others. From the moment one wakes in the morning to the time one goes to bed in the evening, everything must be done according to God's wishes.

In the Bible humankind is created in the image and likeness of God implying that humankind belongs to God and should give him/herself to God. People experience the fullness of humanity only when they are in proper relationship with God (Erickson 1992:168), and of all creation, humankind alone is capable of "having a conscious personal relationship with the Creator and of responding to him" (Erickson 1992:157). In the beginning the relationship between God and humankind was cordial (Gen. 2) but humankind's disobedience destroyed that fellowship and relationship (Gen. 3). This relationship was later reconciled through the atoning death of Christ.

#### **8.4 Relationship with other creatures**

Humankind as a creature of the earth is part of the natural order. Humans share the universe with animate beings and inanimate objects which are all part of God's creation (Finnegan 1965:107; Sawyerr 1968:12). Since humans are a part of nature, they are "expected to cooperate with it" (Opoku 1993:77). It is "the need to remain in harmony with nature" (Opoku 1993:77) that has caused the African to incorporate the environment and its inhabitants into his/her "religious perception of the universe" (Mbiti 1989a:90). For the Africans, "sacredness extends to their environment and all the means of sustaining life, that is,

the sacredness of all creation" (Okorochoa 1994:80). To be in harmony with nature is "to be on good terms with one's entire social and spiritual world" (Zuesse 1991:178). Therefore, in Limba view, humans as the highest and most intelligent creatures, have the responsibility to take care of God's universe and "all that is in it."<sup>300</sup> Every individual must be a caretaker of God's creation because if humans "do not take care of the earth and God's entire creation; the animals do not have the ability to do so"<sup>301</sup>

Limba people are both spiritually and physically connected to the earth. It is the place where their ancestors are buried, and it is the source of their livelihood. It is from this perspective that the Limba speak out and take a tough stance on ecological<sup>302</sup> issues. One interviewee made her frustration known this way:

There are two things that are paining me about the way we treat the earth and what God has given to us. People are going from bush to bush cutting down trees for firewood to cook food. If you go now to some villages in my chiefdom, they look like deserts. The trees which are protecting these villages and giving them other benefits have been cut down. We know that wood is vital to cook our food; I believe that there are other available means of providing fire for cooking.

The other problem is with the pollution of some rivers and streams. Just take a walk along the shores of the stream around us. Without a doubt you will see trash and at least a dead domestic animal floating on it. There are a few more things that happen on rivers and streams that I cannot say here. If we are saying the

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<sup>300</sup>Sorie Sesay (Interviewed July 2002: Madina Town).

<sup>301</sup>Sorie Sesay (Interviewed July 2002: Madina Town).

<sup>302</sup>Although ecology is a wide and complex field that requires the study of organisms in their environment and the study of relationships among organisms, the various issues that are being discussed by science and religion are interrelated and both disciplines are trying to restore a common relationship between animate and inanimate existence.



earth is God's and He has delegated the upkeep of it to us, then let us do it the right way.<sup>303</sup>

From these words, it is clear that some Limba are "treating nature as a mere object of exploitation for the satisfaction of human needs" (Opoku 1993:77). As a whole, the Limba strive to maintain a physical and spiritual balance with nature. The goal is to live with sacred awareness and an ethic of eco-sustainability. However, for economic reasons and because of negligence and apathy, some are not putting to practice the teachings and beliefs they have inherited. The frustration expressed above is on two issues which call into the question Limba stewardship of God's earth:

- (1) The indiscriminate cutting down of trees for firewood has led to forest depletion and has left some villages looking like deserts. They have been stripped of their trees making these communities vulnerable to even the mildest storm that blows. While wood is the most common fuel used for cooking by people without electricity or kerosene stoves. However, there is an alternative for the less fortunate in the country which is charcoal. Charcoal stoves, locally called "coal pot", are much more affordable than kerosene stoves.
- (2) The pollution of many rivers and streams through the improper disposal of garbage and other waste. Most people think that because rivers and streams empty into the ocean, anything dumped into them will be carried there and eventually rot away.

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<sup>303</sup>Ya Almay Turay (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

Some traditionalists believe that the prevalence of diseases like cholera and tuberculosis in Sierra Leone is caused by the careless handling of nature by humankind.

Although most of the published series on ecology,<sup>304</sup> have not addressed ATR and ecology, the contribution of ATR to the "ongoing world-wide concern with environment cannot be overemphasised" (Opoku 1993: 78).

Limba traditionalists believe that animals were created by God, are a very important part of nature, and should be treated with respect. Every Limba clan, like those of many African societies,<sup>305</sup> has a taboo (*thana/kasi*) which forbids clan members from eating particular animals or birds (Finnegan 1965:52). The infraction of a taboo is a sin called *kadoko/kako*. In general the intentional destruction of any animal, reptile, or bird is considered a sinful act known as *kamalo*.

However, in spite of these and other restrictions that are intended by the Limba to prevent the abuse of animals, and to foster harmonious relationships between humans and animals, the actual maltreatment of both domestic and wild animals is prevalent in Limba societies. This is because, as we noted earlier in this chapter, the Limba believe that humankind is superior to animals and far more intelligent than them.

In Judeo-Christian tradition, although different from God's other created beings, humans are "not so sharply distinguished from the rest of them as to have no relationship with them," they are

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<sup>304</sup>The Harvard Divinity School's "Religions of the World and Ecology" series, and the World Wide Fund for Nature's "World Religions and Ecology" series have nothing presently or upcoming on ATR and ecology.

<sup>305</sup>Opoku (1993:77).

"part of the sequence of creation, as are other beings" therefore there should be harmony between humankind and "the rest of the creatures" (Erickson 1992:160).

The word ecology is derived from the Greek *oikos* ("house"). Ecology suggests the idea that humankind and all creation forms "one great household" (Erickson 1992:160). "Religious life and the earth's ecology are inextricably linked, organically related" (Sullivan 2000:xi). "Environmental destruction is not only a danger" to human existence, it is also "a sin against God" (Rajotte with Breuilly 1992:2). Humankind is God's agent in "caring for the earth" (Achte-meier 1996:442).

Because humankind is uniquely created in God's image, he/she is placed over the rest of creation, to have dominion over and take care it (Erickson 1992: 160; Achtemeier 1996: 442).

### **8.5 Life Cycle**

Religion, in Limba culture pervades every aspect of life from conception to the afterlife.<sup>306</sup> For the Limba, life is a 'holistic' journey, that "begins and ends"<sup>307</sup> with God who is consulted "every step of the way."<sup>308</sup> Awareness of the divine presence and intervention in their daily lives is reflected in the rites of passage which mark important stages and events in the life of the Limba.<sup>309</sup> The religious tenets of the Limba, like those of most Africans, have formed the matrix of every aspect of Limba life. Mbiti (1989a:2) rightly observes:

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<sup>306</sup>Cf. Mbiti (1989a:107).

<sup>307</sup>Alie Sesay (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>308</sup>Hamusa Kargbo (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament.

In ATR, "all acts from birth to death and thereafter bind the person as a communal being to everyone around themselves, especially those who have passed on to the metaphysical world and those still to be born" (Oosthuizen 1991:41).

In the NPLC, religion also permeates the life of every believer. The church however condemns traditional rites of passage as devilish and misleading because they are not centred on Christ and the teachings of the church. Parrinder (1962:90) has suggested a possible parallel between the rites of passage in ATR and some of the seven sacraments of the Christian church.

#### *8.5.1 Pregnancy (bahɔle) and child birth (hukomisine)*

For the Limba the religious journey starts at conception.<sup>310</sup> As soon as a woman knows that she has conceived,<sup>311</sup> religious observances start. These observances are necessary for two reasons.

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<sup>309</sup>Cf. Parrinder (1962:90).

<sup>310</sup>This is also true of other Africans (Parrinder 1962:91).

<sup>311</sup>In Limba sexual ethics, "only married women are expected to be pregnant" (SLDE 1993:91). It is a disgrace to the family whose girl/woman is impregnated before marriage. In Freetown, the shame will be on the pregnant girl herself. Therefore, a school going Limba girl drops out of school in her early pregnancy and with the consent of her parents flees to an undisclosed place until the child is born and left with one of its grandparents or close relatives. Presently with the available terms of birth control, teenage pregnancy has dwindled considerably.

First, the conception and eventual birth of a child is understood as "not merely a result of man and woman coming together in the act of sexual intercourse," but "as the result of a blessing from God and the ancestors" (Magesa 1997:83). In that regard, the sayings: *Kanu wante de na bilɛ sɛmbɛ ba duŋgu si* ("God alone has the power to give life"), and *Kubri iŋ sɛmbɛ sa duŋgu si* ("Money/wealth and power cannot give life") are common among the Limba. At conception, thanks are given to God who has granted the couple/family the greatest gift in the world that neither money nor human efforts can procure. Usually thanksgiving for a pregnancy is made through prayers only, but sometimes a sacrifice<sup>312</sup> of rice-flour, kola nuts and water is made at home.

Wedding prayers in the hinterland and in the Western Area include a special prayer for the gift of a child for the newlyweds. After a year of marriage, if the woman has not conceived, the couple/family usually attributes it either to sterility or to the work of witchcraft. In either case, a sacred specialist is invited to call upon God, the ancestors and patron spirits on behalf of the couple/family to bless the womb of the woman. A ritual consisting of exorcism and cleansing is done.

The second reason that religious observances are required at conception is to thwart the clandestine activities of evil spirits. The news of a woman's pregnancy is not received with ultimate joy until the child is born (SLDE 1993:85). In other words, the pregnant woman, her husband and the families on both sides are apprehensive until the child is born.<sup>313</sup> During this period of uncertainty, prayers and small scale sacrifices are

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<sup>312</sup>A sacrifice of thanks for pregnancy and child birth is common in Africa (Parrinder 1982:91; Cuthrell-Curry 2000: 459).

<sup>313</sup>This is common among Africans (see Parrinder 1962:91; Parson 1964:36-37).

made to God the one responsible for all pregnancies and births, and "to ensure normal gestation and delivery" (Parrinder 1962:91). Further, certain taboos must be adhered to by the pregnant woman for her protection and that of the baby:<sup>314</sup>

- (1) Lime fruit on a string should be hung around the woman's neck for protection against evil forces.
- (2) The woman must not go out for a walk at night because it is believed that evil sprits are more active during the night and through witchcraft might enter the womb to destroy the fetus.

In Limba society, like many African societies,<sup>315</sup> men and children are not permitted to be present for the delivery. Eventually, when the child is born, the birth attendant gently spansks the baby, to make it cry, the cry proves that the baby is alive and healthy.<sup>316</sup> In Freetown, where most births take place in government hospitals, medically trained midwives assist in the delivery, and in most cases boys are circumcised before leaving the hospital. Boys born in the hinterland where in most cases there is no proximate medical centre, are usually circumcised during their pre-teen or teenage years before their initiation into the secret society. A boy born at home in Freetown, is later taken to a local druggist or nurse for circumcision.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>314</sup>This is also common in African societies (Parrinder 1962:91-92; Mbiti 1989a: 108-09).

<sup>315</sup>See Parrinder (1962:92; Mbiti 1989a:109).

<sup>316</sup>For health reasons, the former practice of spitting kola nut into the child's mouth by the birth attendants (Finnegan 1965:75) is no longer in practice in most Limba communities.

<sup>317</sup>Circumcision is practiced in most parts of Africa (Parrinder 1982:94).

When a child is born at home, the mother should make sure that fishing net is placed on the door where the child is, within a day after the birth. This is intended to catch malevolent spirits that may attempt to enter the child's room to harm it. Both mother and baby are required to stay inside the house for several days before coming outside. During this time the husband or another close relative is obligated to prepare meals called *marɛbɛ/masepe* ("to cleanse the stomach") for the new mother. *Marɛbɛ*, is made up of rice and palm oil stew.

Because "life is from God,"<sup>318</sup> the foetus has the right to life from the moment conception takes place. The Mende believe that the *ngafa* ("life/spirit") is from God and enters the mother's body like the Akan *kra* ("a spiritual likeness of God"), "thus inspiring and giving life to her blood, that is to the foetus" (Sawyer 1996:68). A majority of Limba traditionalists are strongly opposed to abortion. An interviewee has this to say:

Abortion has no place in our tradition. We can never destroy God given life...Anyone who destroys God's creation that way is doomed for a life full of trouble and misery. In fact that person is no different than a witch who goes out to eat a child in its mother's womb. To us there is zero tolerance when it comes to abortion.<sup>319</sup>

However, a Westernised and educated interviewee views things somewhat differently:

Abortion I believe should only be accepted on medical ground. If the mother is getting problem with the conception and if it is not aborted will result in tragedy, I recommend that abortion is the best way to

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<sup>318</sup>Madam Kumba Koroma (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>319</sup>Madam Kumba Koroma (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

go. I believe like other traditionalists that life is from *Kanu* and we do not have any right to destroy it. But there are circumstances at times that call for that action. For instance, coming back to the war we were just discussing. Traditionalists took people's lives through supernatural means because it was necessary to do so because our lives at that time were at risk something drastic had to be done to save ourselves. This situation is not different from the mother whose life is at risk to abort a pregnancy that threatens her life. Our people I know will never see my logic. In fact they will call me *poto* "White man" because of my ideas. I only do not justify getting rid of a pregnancy that was a result of rape. Also, it is wrong when girls who go for abortion because our custom teaches that it is wrong to have a baby out marriage. They know that it is wrong to have a child if you are single, then they should abstain from sex. Equally, abortion for the sake of poverty makes no sense to me. We all know that in our culture you have to take care of your child until he/she gets married. Then you should be financially prepared to take full care when it comes.<sup>320</sup>

In Judeo-Christian tradition, conception is also seen as a gift from God. The angel of the Lord told Samson's mother that she would "conceive and bear a son" (Jdg. 13:3); it was the Lord who caused Ruth to conceive (Ruth 4:13), and Mary's conception was from God through the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20). Children were God's gift to humankind, and it was a joyful experience when a woman became pregnant especially after long years of waiting (Gen. 30:23; Luke 1:58). During delivery, a midwife<sup>321</sup> usually assisted the mother (Gen. 35:17; 38:28), and Jeremiah 20:15 suggests that "the father was not present at birth" (De Vaux 1997:43). The Roman Catholic Church, the NPLC and most Christian anti-abortion<sup>322</sup> movements have argued against abortion on the

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<sup>320</sup>Bagbon Samura (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>321</sup>See De Vaux (1997:43), and Packer (1980:444). For a detail discussion on midwifery in Bible times, see Packer (1980:444-45).

<sup>322</sup>Contrary to pro-choice's belief, anti-abortionists argue that the foetus is



premise that humankind was formed by God in the womb, that the foetus is a human being from conception, onwards and therefore has the legal right to life from the moment conception takes place.

#### 8.5.2. Naming (*athundu keŋ*)

Limba children are usually named on the seventh or eighth day if the umbilical has dropped<sup>323</sup> otherwise it is delayed until this happens. The umbilical cord is usually buried near the house.<sup>324</sup> As the guests arrive they take turns complimenting the parents and expressing their appreciation for the invitation. The child is usually named by the father<sup>325</sup> (Finnegan 1965:75 & SLDE 1993:84) who informs the ancestors and presents the child to God because the child belongs, not only to the family, but more importantly to God and to the ancestors (Mbiti 1989a:112).

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already a human being from the time of conception.

<sup>323</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:75). The naming and out-dooring of a child on the seventh or eighth day, is a borrowed custom from Islam. Before the coming of Islam, the Limba did not have a specific time for the child to be named or taken out of the house, only that a child should not be named until the umbilical cord had fallen off. The traditional Limba name for the ceremony is *Agbɔrɔŋ* ("to shave"), because, on the day of the ceremony the head of the child is shaved before it is named and taken outside.

<sup>324</sup>Cf. Parrinder 1962:92; Mbiti 1989a:109-10). See Mbiti (1989a:110) for the symbolism of the placenta and umbilical cord.

In many cultures, names given to children are chosen and formed quite deliberately for their meaning, and as noted earlier, a name in Limba world view is often an indication of a person's character, nature, birth position, rank or of some peculiar quality.<sup>326</sup> For example:

- (1) A name may portray the bearer's position and function in the family: The first son is sometimes called *Sara*, and the first daughter *Sira*. The second son is sometimes named *Thamba*, the last child, whether a boy or girl, is sometimes called *Manke*. If twin boys are born, the first is named *Yandi*, and the second *Yemmi*.
- (2) A name may portray the child's relationship with the parents or family: *Bude* is the name of a beloved daughter; *Thambo* ("hatred") is the name of a child hated because of birth defects.
- (3) A name may indicate the day on which the bearer was born: *Kathi* is a girl born on Sunday; *Thens* is a girl born on Monday; *Thalatha* is a girl born on Tuesday; *Yaraba* is a boy born on Wednesday; *Yalamusa* is a boy born on Thursday; *Yarims* is a boy born on Friday and *Simithi* is a girl born on Saturday.
- (4) Sometimes, names are given to mark an important occasion, especially if a child is born on such an occasion. For

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<sup>325</sup>This true also in most African societies (Cuthrell-Curry 2000:462)

<sup>326</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:75), and for other African people see (Parrinder 1962:92-93; Mbiti 1989a:115; Magesa 1997:89-90).

example, a child born during a circumcision or initiation period is often called *Bureyo* (female) or *Buremaŋ* (male).

- (5) If a child is born during a memorable or unfortunate event in the life of a family, the parents may give to the child a name that portrays that experience: *Mallo* ("joy and peace"); *Thebota* ("no peace"); *Baleytoke* ("Do not rejoice").
- (6) A child's name may indicate the situation of its birth. A sickly child that has incurred a lot of expenses is sometimes called *Doyoo* ("laboured upon"). When the last parent of the child passed away after its birth, the child is called *Peyo* ("orphan/ left/forsaken"). A child called *Piiti* ("was forgotten") indicates its birth was over due. Rarely if a mother was not aware of her pregnancy the child is called *Thakotho* ("did not know"). If a child is born during a journey or by the roadside it will be called *Gboŋa* ("road"). A child who is stillborn or who dies shortly after birth it is named *Muruyo* ("no hope").
- (7) If a baby is born deformed or disabled, its appearance is attributed to the work of a witch or evil spirit. Society considers such a child to be manifestation of the devil (*waali*). The child is often named: *yɛliyaŋ* ("Throw Away for me").
- (8) Names may also be given in honour of deceased relatives who have contributed positively to the family and society. In this regard, the bearer is expected to follow the traits of his/her deceased namesake so that the deceased physical memory will linger.

In certain aspects, the name of a person,<sup>327</sup> "place or event in Limba culture and custom is to a large extent more than a mere personal label or tag"<sup>328</sup> and a naming ceremony "signifies that the transmission of life is completed" (Magesa 1997:90).

The naming of the child is followed by a thanksgiving sacrifice<sup>329</sup> consisting of kola nuts and rice-flour mixed with sugar & salt, presented to God through the ancestors. The child is then taken outside the house by an older person to be shown to the world. After all the rituals, family and friends share a meal of rice and soup, palm wine and/or other drinks provided by the father. Some families after this naming and "out-dooring" ceremony will go a step further and take the baby to a sacred specialist to seek additional protection. The specialist will provide, different kinds of phylacteries to be worn by the baby, and potions to rub on the baby's body for protection against evil forces. The parents, especially the mother, will continue to visit the sacred specialist occasionally to keep him informed of the child's progress until the child is weaned and a sacrifice is offered.

The NPLC adopted their naming and out-dooring ceremony from the traditionalists and modified it to portray Christian values. The ceremony is usually performed at the home of the child. It starts with a familiar hymn/song, followed by an opening prayer,

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<sup>327</sup>Limba are also fond of giving nickname(s) to people to portray someone's character, behaviour, special ability or favourite word. In this case the first name is followed by the nickname: *Sayo -Hugbantama* (Sayo - the man of physical strength and might); *Sara - Bathagban* (Sara - the bookworm or the learned); *Hode - Gberema* (Hode - the guileful/duplicitous); *Yimba - Kupεthε* (Yimba - the soft spoken); *Santigie Nyankuthεgbε* (Santigie - be careful). *Santigie Nyankuthεgbε* is a diviner/herbalist in Freetown who likes to tell his customers and acquaintances to "be careful" with both the physical and spiritual worlds.

<sup>328</sup>Rev. MacFoday Kamara (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>329</sup>Cf. Cuthrell-Curry (2000:462).

the reading of scripture and a short exhortation based on the reading. The father of the child is asked to give the name of the child which should have already been written on a sheet of paper that is passed to the pastor who reads out the name. The child is then taken outside the house for the first time to be showed 'the world'.

In the OT the child is named immediately after birth (De Vaux 1997:43). The mother usually named the child<sup>330</sup> (Gen. 29:31-30:24; 35:18; 1 Sam. 1:20), but the father sometimes did<sup>331</sup> (Gen. 16:15; 17:19; Exod. 2:22). Later in NT times, the child is named on the eighth day (Luke 1:59; 2:21). Names were very important in OT times. "Each Hebrew name had a meaning, and it became an important part of the infant's life" (Packer 1980:445). Names given to people usually have meanings, "whether the names are given at birth or in adult years" (Omanson 1989:109).<sup>332</sup> A name "defines the essence, it reveals the character and destiny of the bearer" (De Vaux 1997:43). A child is sometimes named after a particular circumstance of birth (Gen. 4:1; 29:31-30:24; Exod. 2:22; Gen. 25:26; 27:36; 38:29).<sup>333</sup>

In ancient Jewish culture, certain rituals in connection with childbirth were observed (Packer 1980:447), because the child "was born into a deeply religious community" and the following rites had special religious meaning in the development of the child (Packer 1980:447).

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<sup>330</sup>De Vaux (1997:43); Packer (1980:445).

<sup>331</sup>De Vaux (1997:43); cf. Packer (1980:445).

<sup>332</sup>See De Vaux (1997:43-46) for a discussion on OT names and meanings, and see Omanson (1989:109-15) for a discussion and list of OT names and meanings.

<sup>333</sup>See De Vaux (1997:43); Packer (1980:446).

### 8.5.3 Nursing (*adinki*)

In Limba culture, breast-feeding of infants is the norm. The duration of breastfeeding depends on the health of the mother and wishes of her husband. The Limba practice both in the hinterland and in urban areas requires a minimum of six months and usually lasts eighteen months. During this time the woman should abstain from sexual intercourse.<sup>334</sup> This is why children in a Limba family are typically spaced by a year and a half to two years. A woman who does not follow this norm is scorned. Working women in the western Area are usually given a year long maternity leave by their employers. The ceremonies that "accompany pregnancy, birth and childhood" signify "that another religious being has been born into a profoundly religious community and religious world" (Mbiti 1989a:117).

In Limba culture, as in many African cultures, much goes on in the life of the child between birth and puberty: "Many rites are performed and many prayers are said to enhance" the child's vital powers. The child also "learns the traditions and patterns of the life of the family, the village and the clan, through the pure curiosity... but also through various forms of instruction from parents, the neighbours, the grandparents, and peers" (Magesa 1997:94).<sup>335</sup>

NPLC mothers also breastfeed their children and wean them about the same time as traditionalists. After they are weaned, children are dedicated to God at a church service. In ancient Jewish culture, infants were weaned much later, usually by age three (2 Macc. 7:27), and the weaning was celebrated with a feast (De Vaux 1997:43).

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<sup>334</sup>Finnegan (1965:75) reports that the normal period for breast feeding a baby is three years. While this was once the case, a majority of babies are now weaned by eighteen months. In Africa the period varies considerably (Parrinder 1962:92; Cuthrell-Curry 2000:462).

<sup>335</sup>Cf. Parrinder 1982:94).

#### 8.5.4 Secret Societies (*kahu*)

The next important phase of a child's life journey is his/her initiation into a secret society. This initiation plays a crucial role in his/her road to adulthood.<sup>336</sup> Limba people claim that the major secret societies of *Gbangban* (*Poro*),<sup>337</sup> *nabo* and *Kofo* (*Darri*) for men, *Bondo*<sup>338</sup> and *Humendaŋ* for women<sup>339</sup> have no human origin. They simply say that "We met it" (Ottenberg 1994:364), the Limba therefore believe that secret societies were established by God and are maintained by him.<sup>340</sup> In that respect, some educated Limba are strongly convinced that these institutions should be rightly called "Secret Sacred Societies." These societies are "secret" in the sense that no member of the opposite sex, or child who has not yet been initiated, may know about the rituals or take part in the dances. They are not "secret societies" in the sense of having a concealed or limited membership, but this does not mean that all persons of an appropriate age and gender are included in the society's rituals (Finnegan 1965:77).

Initiation into these societies is meant to equip an individual for adult life;<sup>341</sup> through learning certain medicinal, magical and

<sup>336</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:75-76).

<sup>337</sup>Among many African cultures, "there are closed associations which are popularly called secret societies" (Parrinder 1967: 96). The Poro society is found in many Sierra Leonean ethnic groups, see Little (1949:199); Parrinder (1962:95-96); Parson (1964:149-56) and Dorjahn (1982:35-62). The Poro "can be traced back for several hundred years and is related to other West African societies" (Parrinder 1967:96), see also (Parson 1964:149). For various stories and myths about the origin of Poro, see (Parrinder 1967:96-103).

<sup>338</sup>The Temne also call their women secret society *Bondo* (SLDE 1993:204). Mende (Little 1949:200) and Kono (Parson 1964:143) call their women's secret society *Sande*.

<sup>339</sup>Ottenberg (1994:363-87), traces the similarities and differences between the organisation and rites of the male and female societies in Bafodea.

<sup>340</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:107-08).

<sup>341</sup>See Little (1949: 200-10); Dorjan (1982:46-56) and Parson (1964:149) for details on the importance and significant role secret societies play in other

technical skills patterned by these societies (Finnegan 1965:77-9); and to honour both men and women (Fanthorpe 1998a:21). The men's societies are not operated in Freetown only the women's *Bondo* society is seen.

Because secret societies are considered sacred, the process of initiation is preceded by certain religious activities. The bush is cleansed from evil forces and consecrated to prevent unwelcome spiritual forces from entering it and causing havoc.<sup>342</sup> As God is the only one who has control over the powers of evil in the bush, He must be contacted for help. A sacrifice is then offered to God through the ancestors for the well being of the participants, both officials and the initiates. Having the necessary religious ceremonies done before the candidates are initiated, is an attempt to present the officials, candidates and the bush to God's care and control.

The "idea of rebirth is characteristic of many of these initiation rites (Parrinder 1962:96). In general, after the emergence from the bush, initiates are now considered to be adult (Finnegan 1965:76).

The NPLC considers secret society membership as "non-Christian and non-allegiance to God" (Olson 1969:191).

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Sierra Leonean cultures.

<sup>342</sup>The bush is considered one of the main domains inhabited by evil forces. It is a powerful place, independent from the village or town, and that people fear to go. Witches in the bush can enter wild beasts to attack people in the vicinity. Medicinal leaves and wild plants containing enormous powers that are used to kill and cause havoc are found in the bush. Most Limba communities have a medicine man or woman or both as head of the bush.



#### 8.5.4.1 Gbangban

Among the men's three major secret societies of *Gbangban*, *Nabo* and *Kofo*, *Gbangban* is the widest spread and is found in all regions in the hinterland. It has different categories. Most members belong to the lower categories: *Huyenki*, *Hukoko* and *Kondeyo*. A few members belong to the higher and more complex categories: *Sindama*, *ɲaraɲara* and *Nabamba*. Members are typically initiated around puberty. Initiation into a secret society is an important part of the passage from childhood to adulthood. Once initiated, the member is expected to act as a responsible adult; however, he remains in the care and under the control of his parents until he marries.

In the *Gbangban* society, there are two divisions in the bush (*hɛli*). *Thɛɲkidɛɲ* serves as an open court and a partially holy place. *Tharumba* is the most sacred or holiest place. The candidates are taken without previous notice to *thɛɲkidɛɲ*. They remain there for the entire initiation period which lasts three to six months. While in the bush, the prospective candidate is called *Gbaku* ("chief") and is given the treatment due any tribal chief or authority. The initiation programme is intended to equip the initiates to face the realities of life. During this period, the initiates undergo intense grooming and nurturing as well as difficult ordeals which are meant to prepare them to face life's hardships. It is during this time that many cultural and religious teachings are passed down to the initiates.

The final rite is called *kuɲɔti-kamandi* (lit., to be plunged into or immersed in water). This is a cleansing or purifying ceremony so that the newly initiated candidates will be made clean and fit to once again associate with other members of the general

community. *Kuɔti-kamandi* is said to be so dreadful that no one ever desires to go through it a second time.

The night before graduation, the initiates together with their families/patrons spend time in *Tharumba* (the most sacred part of the bush). At graduation, the graduates wear a traditional gown known as *huroŋko*, with a traditional cap (*Kuhaka*).<sup>343</sup> The cap, signifies that the initiates take full responsibility to comport themselves as people who have entered the secret society. If a person commits a crime in the community (especially in Freetown where not every male is expected to have entered a secret society), the first question that is asked is, *E wunde tutokoy?/E wo tutokoy kuhaka?* ("Has he worn a cap?"). If the answer is "yes" the offender faces a more severe punishment, but if the response is "no," the offender is considered, and disciplined as a child, regardless of his age or position within the community. Graduates are respected and are expected to contribute to society in a meaningful way.

Titles are used for all those who play a part in the ceremony. At graduation time, the outgoing initiates are referred to as *Badiŋitokoyɔ* ("freshman"). Later when all is over, they will be known as *Bathɛkɛlɛ* ("an undergraduate").<sup>344</sup> The parents/guardians are known as *Boyhiki*. There are usually sponsors or benefactors who are known as *Basemeŋ*. The person that relates with the public and community on behalf of the society is called *Basampɛrɛ*. Last but not least, are the elders, teachers and councillors who are known as *Bethanthɛ*.

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<sup>343</sup>The cap is seen as being more important than the gown, because of what the different parts represent.

<sup>344</sup>With more to learn along the way, through personal observation and judgement, experience being the best teacher.

#### 8.5.4.2 Bondo

Bondo is the most common secret society for women and is found throughout the country wherever the Limba have an organised settlement. This situation has allowed for some flexibility with rules in urban areas like Freetown.

Unlike in the men's societies, the date of the initiation is not usually kept secret from the candidates because it is considered a joyful occasion. The night before the ceremony, there is a big celebration with music and dancing in the village. The older women play their drums and sing until daybreak when the candidates are taken to the bush. In the western area, the celebration usually takes place in the bush to avoid disturbing the peace.

The main event of the initiation is the act of "cutting". Society elders called *barigba* in the hinterland or *sowei* in the western area, "circumcise" the girls by removing the clitoral hood, and at times, part or the entire clitoris itself.<sup>345</sup> For several days after the initiation, until they heal the girls are tended to by the older women called *siŋkabondoi*. Later, they are taught morality, religious songs, dancing and cooking.

Because initiation into the Bondo society traditionally marks the passage from childhood into womanhood, in the hinterland, most girls are initiated between the ages of thirteen and sixteen and are thereafter considered eligible to marry. In the western

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<sup>345</sup>This practice, otherwise known as Female Genital Mutilation is prevalent in Africa with an estimated 80-90% of women in Sierra Leone having undergone the procedure. Public discussion of FGM in Sierra Leone is almost taboo, but some see it as a major health issue and an abuse of children's human rights. The primary objective of the procedure is to preserve female virginity by discouraging premarital sexual activity.

area, many girls are initiated much earlier according to the wishes of their parents. In many cases girls in Freetown are initiated at eight years of age and some are initiated even younger. The rationale behind this practice is that the initiation process discourages premarital sexual activity. Thus, the goal is to initiate the girl before she has the opportunity to lose her virginity.

After about a week the girls are brought back to the village with their bodies smeared with white clay. They are now referred to as *babɔŋkani beŋ* ("new initiates"). The *babɔŋkani beŋ* dance in the village/town as they are watched by their families, future spouses and friends, who give them gifts and money. After the occasion, they are taken back to the bush by the Bondo officials for further instruction and training. The time spent in the bush varies from community to community. In the hinterland, it may last as long as two months, but in the city, or where the girls attend school, it is typically much shorter lasting between one and two weeks.

Three days before the final ceremony, the girls are secluded in a hut or house close to the village/town where they sing and dance about all they have been taught. When the days of seclusion are over, they become full members of the society and are known as *semaiŋ*. The day that they leave seclusion and reenter the community, they are dressed in fine clothes and jewelry according to the financial means of their family or sponsor. In Freetown most of the girls' families get their friends and acquaintances to buy and wear *ashoby* (the same colour dress) as a way of celebrating with them. The crowd dances and sings popular songs accompanied by drums. The initiates and Bondo officials are given gifts by the girls' families or sponsors.

In the hinterland, after the ceremony, the girls are eligible to be given to marriage because most times they are initiated at an accepted age for traditional marriage. In the Western Area, where most times the girls are initiated at a very young age, and the legal age for consensual marriage for both men and women is eighteen, marriage is not considered after coming out of the *Bondo* society. African secret societies are "important cultural bastions" (Hackett 1991:142).

NPLC strongly condemns men's secret societies as devilish, but accepts the women's *bondo* society as appropriate because the majority of Limba church men want women that have been initiated into the *bondo* society. This is largely because the culture frowns upon a married woman who has not been initiated. This issue is one on which NPLC has deviated from the teachings of their forebears the AOG. The Bible is silent on secret societies.

#### 8.5.5 Engagement (*kuliathi/kudethi*) and Marriage (*hudoŋo/kuyɛntande*)

Girls are often engaged in infancy (Finnegan 1965:62)<sup>346</sup> or even while still in the womb.<sup>347</sup> In the latter case, the prospective husband expresses his intention towards the expected baby in anticipation that the child will be a girl. He starts giving gifts and help to the expectant mother as a sign of beginning the marriage. If the baby is born a girl, the man continues to give gifts and assistance to his future in-laws, and watches as the girl grows.<sup>348</sup> If the child is born a boy, the man volunteers to become the boy's instructor (*soma/sema*) during his initiation

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<sup>346</sup>This is a common practice in Africa where girls are "betrothed since childhood" (Parrinder 1962:97); see also Parson (1964:8).

<sup>347</sup>Cf. Mbiti (1989a:132).

<sup>348</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:62-63).

ceremony, and helps him until this is complete. When a couple is engaged as teenagers or adults, the procedure is different. Representatives of the man go to see the girl's family with a small amount of money to "lock-the-door" guaranteeing his interest in her so that no other interested man may take the girl before he is ready to marry her.

In the hinterland, girls are usually given in marriage between the ages of thirteen and sixteen after their initiation into the *bondo* society.<sup>349</sup> The family of the husband-to-be sends a message to inform the girl's relatives that they will be coming on a certain date (SLDE 1993:88). On the appointed date, as soon as the visitors arrive, a small sum of money called *kεmε* (SLDE 1993:88) is given to the girl's parents. The parents of the girl respond by giving the leader of the visiting group water to drink from a cup containing some kola nuts. The water is then poured as a libation to the ancestors in order to ensure their approval.<sup>350</sup> The bride price (*nahulu*)<sup>351</sup> is then presented by the visitors followed by prayers and the serving of food.<sup>352</sup> The bride price "is the seal on the transfer of rights and obligation from the bride's father/guardian; it is the transfer that marks a legal marriage from other forms which, although they may be equally permanent, were not as acceptable traditionally to the kin concerned" (Dorjahn 1990:170). Traditionalists in Freetown, still follow the above marriage procedures.

In most African cultures, marriages are believed to come from God.<sup>353</sup> In the Limba traditionalist worldview, it is "believed to be God's responsibility" to make marriages, whether prearranged

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<sup>349</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:62-63). In Africa see (Parrinder 1962:97).

<sup>350</sup>Cf. Parrinder (1962:98), and Magesa (1997:121).

<sup>351</sup>For a discussion on *nahulu* see Finnegan (1965:63-65).

<sup>352</sup>Cf. SLDE (1993:88), and Finnegan (1965:63).

or otherwise happen.<sup>354</sup> A good husband or a good wife is believed to be a gift from God, and this is the reason the Limba continue to depend on God for his guidance in choosing the right partner. It is believed that only the help of God enables a family or a suitor to find a perfect match. The Limba often say, "It is God who finds the right spouse for you." Beauty, good looks and charm are not enough, only God is able to determine the right life-partner for a person.

Occasionally, if a man has run out of patience, and can no longer wait on God to provide him a suitable partner, he may take another spiritual route to find her. In such an instance, the impatient man goes and solicits the help of a sacred specialist to win the heart of the one he loves. A sum of money is paid to the priest or diviner who makes for him powerful charms to steal the heart of the lady in question. The client is given lotions and objects to wear, which is believed will not only attract the desired woman, but capture her heart from the moment she sniffs their scent.<sup>355</sup> The diviner may also make a mixture of herbs for the client to secretly place in the food of the person he/she wants to win over.

Conventionally, it is the man who approaches a woman and expresses his interest in her, not the other way around. However, if a woman comes to a man and expresses her interest in him, the traditionalist believes that this is a sign that the woman has been sent by God. Under normal circumstances, a Limba

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<sup>353</sup>See Magesa (1997:121).

<sup>354</sup>Alie Sesay (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown). Prearranged marriages are common in Africa (Mbiti 1989a:133-34).

<sup>355</sup>In comparison, there are certain colognes or body sprays for men that are used to attract the attention of women.

woman would never tell a man that she has an interest in him, but if, God has engineered the plan, she will not find it difficult to approach a man.

Because God created marriage, and directs people to their rightful partners, it is believed that he is also the one who sustains marriages. For this reason, at all Limba weddings God is asked for his blessing, and for the creation of a peaceful and stable home.

In spite of the "occasional difficulty inherent in having many wives" (Finnegan 1965:65), the Limba men in the hinterland, traditionally like to marry many wives if at all possible<sup>356</sup> (Finnegan 1965:65). The reasons given for polygamy are both economic and social.<sup>357</sup> A man's wealth is measured by the number of wives and children that he has. The understanding is that a man with more wives must maintain a larger farm and build more houses than a man with fewer wives. It is also believed that each wife brings more wisdom to the husband. A man with one wife has only one outside source of information and guidance, a man with many wives will have many sources and therefore, a distinct advantage. Polygamy is practiced only rarely in Freetown because the higher cost of living in an urban environment makes it very difficult for a man to support more than one wife.

When the husband dies, a close relative, usually a younger brother normally inherits any surviving wives, especially if they have children.<sup>358</sup> If the widow does not wish to marry the

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<sup>356</sup>The practice of marrying several wives is common in Africa, see Mbiti (1989a:138); Dorjahn (1988:367); and Magesa (1997:136-39).

<sup>357</sup>For a discussion on the positive and negative sides of Polygamy, see Mbiti (1989a:139-40).

<sup>358</sup>In Africa leviratic union is common (Mbiti 1989a:140). However, it is not a



appointed relative, she is allowed to marry someone outside the family, but the children often remain with the family of her deceased husband.

Divorce is not uncommon among the Limba (SLDE 1993:88; Finnegan 1965:64). If there is a marital dispute it is usually the wife who leaves, returning to her relatives. If the husband wants his wife back, he will approach his in-laws to settle the matter. If the wife refuses his attempts, the matter will be taken to the native court for trial and the husband may demand a refund of the bride price. If, however, the husband has lost interest, and does not make the effort to bring his wife home, her family may also make attempts at reconciliation and the husband stands to lose the bride-price if he refuses several of these attempts. If there are children, they will stay with the father or the mother depending on a number of factors. The most common cause of divorce among the Limba is adultery (*abalajaŋ*).<sup>359</sup> Adultery is seen as a spiteful challenge to the husband's dignity and manhood. A husband, who suspects his wife is cheating with another man, will force her to confess *kuhiŋ* (lit., "call-name") to adultery. The husband normally reacts by demanding a huge fine called *kubali* ("woman damage") through the chief or through the traditional court. At times the adulterous wife is returned to her family. On the other hand if a married man commits adultery with an unmarried woman, the wife usually prefers not to confront her husband, because society frowns upon any woman who attempts to humiliate her husband. Illicit sex is not considered

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proper "marriage" in the African point of view because it is a temporary adjustment "to fulfill an obligation to a deceased brother" (Magesa 1997:140). In the case of the Limba this is true because the surviving brother is not required to pay a bridal price nor go through the marriage procedures and rites to get his brother's widow.

<sup>359</sup>The causes of divorce among the Temne (Dorjahn 1990:172-74) are quite similar to that of the Limba's. See Mbiti (1989a:141-42) for a discussion on

a serious offence when committed by a married traditionalist. For these reasons, a maltreated wife usually only cries and tries to forget about her husband's infidelity, or simply turns a blind eye to her husband's adulterous behaviour. Others may put up a strong fight to show their husbands that the man should not always be in control.

In the NPLC, especially in urban centres, engagement is almost always by mutual consent and rarely occurs before both parties are eighteen. The ceremony involves a mixture of traditional and Christian practices. The woman's family is informed that the man's friends and relatives will be coming to visit them on a specific date for the engagement of their daughter. On the specified date, the family and representatives of the man place money, cola nuts, a Bible and a ring all in a big gourd (*kubulo*) and wrap it in white satin<sup>360</sup> to take to the woman's family. The visitors will arrive to find the door of the house locked. After some interesting negotiations, the door is opened and the man's family is invited in. After a long friendly dialogue, the woman to be engaged is presented and the gourd containing the gifts is given to her. She then gives it to her family who take it into a room and later emerge to declare acceptance. This is followed by a prayer after which the ring is worn by the woman to symbolise the engagement. A date for a church wedding is announced by the man's family and food is then served. No money is exchanged at the wedding time but wedding rings are bought for the couple. The gourd, cola nuts and money represent Limba culture. The Bible and ring represent the Christian culture. As in most western countries in the event of a divorce Christian marriages may only be dissolved through the courts. Moral requirements of

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some of the causes of divorce in Africa.

<sup>360</sup>Originally, satin in traditional circles was a sign of

NPLC included monogamy (Olson 1969:191); therefore a polygamist is disqualified to be chosen or elected an elder of the church.

Biblical marriage is a "physical and spiritual union of a man and woman" (Achte-meier 1996:656). Usually, it was preceded by a period of engagement (Deut. 22:23; Matt. 1:18), and was normally arranged by the parents (Achte-meier 1996:96; De Vaux 1997:29; Packer 1980:433)), or at least with the consent of the parents (Achte-meier 1996:96). A bride price (*mahor*), the amount of which varied depending on the demands of the girl's father (Gen. 34:12) and/or the social standing of the family (1 Sam. 18:23) was paid to the girl's father. Marriage ceremonies were almost always a very public event (Packer 1980:435) the most important part of which was the bringing of the bride into the groom's house, in the midst of great rejoicing (Achte-meier 1996:656; De Vaux 1997:33-34). If the husband died without a son, a leviratic law specified in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 required the brother of the deceased to marry the widow (Achte-meier 1996:656; De Vaux 1997:37-38; Packer 1980:435). The son of such union would be considered the heir of the deceased brother (Achte-meier 1996:656).

The patriarchs often practiced polygamy (Gen. 4:19; 29:15-30; 2 Sam. 3:2-5), and sometimes had concubines as well (Gen. 16:1-2; 22:20-24; 2 Sam. 5:13)).<sup>361</sup> Divorce was permitted with certain exceptions. OT law only permitted the husband to initiate a divorce (Deut. 24:1-4), but in NT, provision was also made for a woman to divorce her husband (Mark 10:12; 1 Cor. 7:13).

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purity/virginity/respect.

<sup>361</sup>See De Vaux (1997:24-26; 115-17), and Packer (1980:417-19) for further

### 8.5.6 Farming

Like many Africans, the Limba take their religion to the fields when they are "sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop" (Mbiti 1989a:2). The land and the techniques for farming have been inherited from God, therefore, the Limba believe that in spite of human efforts, *m̄n̄n̄ Kanu tha m̄n̄* ("if God does not agree")<sup>362</sup> there will not be a good harvest. Various ceremonies are performed yearly during the rice farming season at strategic places on the farm (Finnegan 1965:110).

Before the work on the land begins, a sacred specialist may be called to inspect it. If it is found that evil spirits are living on the land or in the area, *Kudamaŋ*, (an offering of rice-flour, egg, kola nut, white cloth or at times chicken) is made to inform the spirits of the family's intention to farm on the said land, and to ask the spirits for peace and prosperity as they work.

If *Kudamaŋ* is necessary, it must be offered on the day the work on the farm is scheduled to begin. This is because the bush (*hukariya/heli/feli*) should not be left unattended after the event in case, evil spirits would otherwise return to repossess the land.

If a piece of land or bush proposed for farming is declared freed from evil spirits, at the time of brushing and clearing of the bush, the head of the family offers a sacrifice for the welfare of the farm and its workers, and for protection against witchcraft or evil spirits at a ceremony called *Kulɔŋki*. An

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discussions on Biblical polygamy.

<sup>362</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:108).

object called *Kulɔŋki ko* is buried in the centre of the farm for protection. The supernatural power of *Kulɔŋki Ko* watches over the farm protecting it from any form of evil or destruction. A banana tree is usually planted to mark the spot where the *Kulɔŋki Ko* is buried.

Before ploughing starts, a sacrifice of kola nuts, cooked rice and rice-flour is offered to the *Kulɔŋki Ko*, to indicate a readiness to start ploughing the farm. This is done because the *Kulɔŋki Ko* is literally seen as God taking care of the farm. On the day of the sacrifice, as usual, food is cooked for everyone to eat. No one leaves the farm until the end of the day's activities. No, food is allowed to be taken home or to the village, it should all be consumed on the farm. After the ceremony, if heavy winds start blowing without rain, it is considered a good sign signifying that *Kulɔŋki Ko* is happy and that the year will be a prosperous one for farming and harvest.

In some other Limba communities, before the farming season begins, the choice and location of the bush is made known to the ancestors through a sacrifice of kola nuts and rice-flour with prayers. A small portion of the bush is cleared and a farming "curse" to scare away thieves in the form of an object known as *ŋakurɛ* is placed on top of a tripod until harvest. As Limba are afraid of the power of any form of "curse" no one comes close to a farm where *ŋakurɛ* is hung.

When the harvest has been brought in, each family or person will give thanks to God and to the ancestors for the harvest. The first batch of harvested rice should not be eaten, but is cooked and offered to God through the ancestors as a thanksgiving sacrifice in gratitude for a good harvest and for God's

protection throughout the concluded farming season. After this ceremony of thanksgiving, the family can now harvest for themselves and their helpers.

Other villages in their end of harvest religious ceremony take their prepared meal early in the morning to a designated cave to offer thanksgiving to the ancestors. Usually an elderly person leads the ceremony.

Although the religious ceremonies, vary from community to community religion plays a vital role on the Limba farm from the start of the season to its end.

Agriculture was the backbone of the economy and livelihood of the Hebrew people. It "developed with the growth of the Hebrew nation" (Packer 1980:263). In the Bible, no human activity is as prevalent as farming (Achtebauer 1996:331). Agricultural pursuits are recorded from the very beginning of the Bible's record of human history (Gen. 2:15; 4:2; 9:20), and farming was important enough to be regulated by the law (Lev. 19:9; 25:3-5; Deut. 22:9-10). Every Hebrew farmer saw "his land as a gift from God, and he believed that he was to be a faithful steward of it (Deut. 11:8-17)" (Packer 1980:263). In that regard, each farmer engaged in religious activities "that expressed his holy partnership with God" (Packer 1980:263). The Hebrew calendar was centred around agriculture, and most of the major religious observances "had an agricultural significance, for they marked the seasons of planting and harvesting" (Packer 1980:263). These rituals gave the farmer a feeling of personal worth and an enrichment of his faith (Packer 1980:263). In order to produce the best crop, the farmer partnered with God from planting to harvesting. The farming season began with fasting and ended with

feasting and worship (e.g., Deut. 16:13-17). Farmers also gave a fifth of their produce to God (Lev. 27:31), and allowed their fields to lie fallow every seventh year in order to emphasise their dependence upon God. The maintenance and protection of the land was dictated by scripture (Isa. 5:5; Deut. 27:17). The older system "used in working the land was attributed to God (Isa. 28:26), and Jesus used figures derived from farming to picture the coming of God's kingdom (Mark 4:3-8, 26-29)" (Achteemeier 1996:331).

#### *8.5.7 Employment*

Those Limba who are not farmers, as well as those who live in the cities try to find employment in the private or government sectors. Because there is a high level of bureaucracy and political interference in these sectors, Limba applicants who lack political backing, often resort to traditional religious methods to secure a job.<sup>363</sup> The applicant approaches the sacred specialist with the belief that only God can make the impossible possible. This belief gives the applicant the faith that God is greater than the officials handling the application, and has the power to touch their hearts to employ him/her.

For some applicants, visits to the sacred specialist do not end once they have been employed. In a job culture where employers/supervisors may sack employees at will, employees are in a constant struggle to ensure that they keep their jobs. With the guidance and help of a sacred specialist, prayers and sacrifices for job security are offered to God through the ancestors, and the employee is given either a religious object or

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<sup>363</sup>This is true of both literate qualified applicants and unqualified or non-literate applicants.

a potion to mystically make those in authority like him/her. It is wrongly believed that almost anyone who rises rapidly to a high ranking position is either dealing with a spirit or being helped by a sacred specialist.

Most NPLC members like the traditionalists believe that in spite of one's qualifications and experience, when applying for a job in Sierra Leone God must be consulted at the beginning of the process, and continually prayed to while on the job. At Wednesday prayer services prospective applicants ask the church to pray with them for God's blessing in their endeavours. Those who already have a job, sometimes give thanks for God's provision and ask for continued prayer for job security.

#### *8.5.8 Politics*

Although voters know clearly the qualifications for a chief, and the reasons why a particular candidate is elected, or "why they themselves support one rather than another, it is commonly said that it is not the people who choose the chief but 'it is God' (*Kanu na*)" (Finnegan 1965:36). For this reason, sacrifices are offered for the chief on his installation, and when he dies.

The process of a chief's installation varies from dialect to dialect. One thing that is common among all dialects is that the coronation of a PC in a chiefdom or a Limba tribal head in Freetown, is that the occasion requires a major sacrifice (Finnegan 1965:37).

The chief officially assumes office when he is presented with the staff of authority by the government, but the Limba do not



consider his office effective until he returns from a period of seclusion known as *Kantha*.<sup>364</sup>

At the end of *kantha*, the chief is accompanied around the town in a procession showing himself to his subjects as they sing, dance and cheer for him. The climax of this function is the sacrifice in the evening or following day. This sacrifice is meant to:

1. Formally present the new chief to God through the ancestors.
2. Return thanks to God for choosing the new chief.
3. Pray for long life and protection for the chief.
4. Pray for peace and stability in the land.

When a Limba chief is being installed in any area of Sierra Leone, the following prayer may be said:

<p><i>Masala, nbenbenj bej...</i></p> <p><i>hɛ/fɛ miŋ se iŋ malɔholima</i>  <i>Yi na dunku mina gbaku wo</i>  <i>Miŋ sa ŋi bayo bali miŋ kiŋ</i>  <i>ba sa tepe bena ba gbaku wo</i>  <i>Sarakaŋ baŋ hɛ/fɛ na ba</i>  <i>beno kalani</i>  <i>Iŋ ba dethia malɔholima</i>  <i>ba gbaku wo iŋ kubɔriko</i></p>	<p>God almighty, our ancestors (the ancestors are then named).</p> <p>Today we have come with joy/happiness          You gave us our chief          we cannot do anything without          first telling you about the chief          Our sacrifice today is to          thank you          And to find favour          for our chief and our community</p>
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<sup>364</sup>During the time of seclusion, the chief receives wisdom from the old and wise men of the society. It is also a time of deep reflection on the promises he made to his people and the responsibility that lies ahead of him. When the chief emerges out of *kantha* he is considered a new man. His old life as an ordinary citizen is gone. He wears special clothes to designate his new office and some assume a name that is preceded by the title of "Almamy." He is now a new man with the spiritual and physical responsibilities of his people.

God and the ancestors are both mentioned in this opening prayer because God is the one who, through the voters chose the chief, and the ancestors are the ones who will keep the chief safe and prosperous. The worshippers are in a pleasant mood because they have a new chief. Nothing will be done without first bringing the chief to God and the ancestors for dedication. Although God and the ancestors are aware of human happenings, they are required to be officially informed of important occurrences. The worshippers have come to thank God and the ancestors and to seek their favour for the chief and for the community.

The following words may be said in intercession:

<i>Wali, Wali, Wali,</i>	Thanks, Thanks, Thanks
<i>Masala kiŋ ba miŋ</i>	The Almighty is for us
<i>Masala miŋ thiyina mamɔ</i>	Almighty we give thanks
<i>Yina Kanu wothimo mina</i>	You are the God who loves us
<i>Miŋ kute hɛɛra ba yina</i>	We have seen peace because you have
<i>dunkuŋ mina gbaku</i>	given us a chief
<i>Yi sɛtiki gbaku mayoŋ</i>	You took our previous chief
<i>Fɛ/hɛ yi dunkuŋ mina gbaku</i>	Today you have given us a new chief
<i>Wali yoo, Wali yoo, Wali yoo</i>	Thanks! Thanks! Thanks!
<i>Thiya gbaku thaduba</i>	Put blessing on the chief
<i>Dunkuna ni fɔsɔ iŋ sɛmbɛ</i>	Give him strength and power
<i>Dunkuna ni</i>	Give him wisdom
<i>Dunkuna mina fɔma malɔholima</i>	Give us all happiness
<i>Yina dunkunɛ mina gbaku</i>	You gave us a chief
<i>Miŋ sise ni fɛ kɛnda</i>	We have brought him to you today
<i>Wali, wali, wali</i>	thanks, thanks
<i>Lɔntha, lɔtha, lɔntha</i>	Let it be so, (3 times)

God is thanked<sup>365</sup> because he is a God of love who has brought peace to the people by giving them a chief to replace<sup>366</sup> the

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<sup>365</sup>A different word *mamɔ* ("thanks") is used on the third line. It carries the same meaning but is different in pronunciation from the previous word *wali* ("thanks"). This is because *mamɔ* is borrowed by the Thonko Limba from the Temne ethnic group.

<sup>366</sup>The affairs of the chiefdom, section and town, in most cases do not run well in the absence of a chief. Also, the politics and lobbying that go on between the contenders and their supporters do not make the atmosphere peaceful. The

(deceased) one he has taken. This is followed by intercessory prayers for God's blessing on the new chief, for strength and power to rule well, for wisdom<sup>367</sup> to rule wisely and decisively, and finally, for happiness for the chief and his subjects. The chief is once again acknowledged as a gift from God and is presented to God, for blessing as he starts his job. This is followed by repeated thanks, and the prayers are concluded with the usual words in concluding a prayer.

The chief as God's choice is considered to be his human representative. He always prays for and is believed to be under the protection and guidance of the ancestors. At his death, elaborate funeral and religious ceremonies are held. The following is the usual prayer said at the funeral:

*Miŋ se iŋ nkinikiniŋ ba mandiŋ  
Pati be kɛnda se iŋ huberina  
Yina lehinɛ mina  
Miŋ kɔtɛ kafaido mɛti tɛ  
Hutuka wo ka gbaku sise  
huberina mandiŋ  
Dunkuna mina thɛbinalima  
Miŋ sa kɔtho te malɔkɔmaŋ huŋande  
Katha ni ka katilɛ  
Haali furenibe sɛkiti ni  
Dunkuna ni hemuwe  
Mase hubɔriko  
Dunkuna mina yoo thɛbinalima!  
Miŋ ka yiŋ sɛmbɛ baŋ pindi tuka  
Mase mina ba sɛkiti tuka  
Nɔŋ gbaku wo dethia  
maloholima iŋ yi*

We have come with great sorrow  
Your children have come with cry  
You created us  
We know that this world is not home  
The death of the chief has brought  
a great cry  
Give us peace of mind  
We do not know when the will come  
Take him to the place of the dead  
Let the ancestors accept him  
Give him rest  
Help the family/community  
Give us peace of mind!  
We don't have power to prevent death  
Help us to accept death  
May the chief find  
peace with you

The death of a chief brings great sorrow. The effect of his death goes far and beyond his chiefdom's jurisdiction. As God's children, they have come with their cry, and with the understanding they are strangers in this world. At this time of

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choosing and installing of a chief puts an end to all political wrangling.

great loss, they need peace of mind. No one can tell for sure when death will come. The people then intercede on behalf of their chief asking that he might be taken to the place where the ancestors live, that the ancestors will accept the chief, and that he will be given rest.<sup>368</sup> They also intercede for the chief's immediate family and for the community asking that they will be able to cope with such enormous loss, and be given peace of mind.<sup>369</sup> As the people do not have the power to prevent death God's help is required to accept death as an ultimate reality, and finally if the chief had not found peace with God during his life time, the people ask that he will find it now.<sup>370</sup>

In national politics, Limba politicians take their religion "to the house of parliament" (Mbiti 1989a:2). Our study of Limba traditional religion in politics would be incomplete without a discussion of its contribution to Sierra Leone national politics from 1968-1992. Sierra Leoneans have generally attributed incorporation and promotion of African traditional religious practices into national politics to two Limba heads of state: Dr. Siaka P. Stevens and Maj. Gen. Joseph S. Momoh. These two men who were both leaders of the All Peoples' Congress (APC) party<sup>371</sup> popularised the idea of traditional religiosity as a way to achieve and maintain power. They made some government and political organisations see "in traditional religion a potential source of reinforcement and legitimation for their activities"

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<sup>367</sup>Unwise decisions and judgements by the chief affect the entire community.

<sup>368</sup>The Limba pray for rest when a good person dies. Witches and bad people are not expected to find rest and peace when they pass away.

<sup>369</sup>Peace is a necessity at this time of great loss. Peace of mind may also mean salvation. God's salvation during times of sorrow and disappointment is essential for the survival of the community.

<sup>370</sup>The Limba believe that God responds well to prayers said on behalf of people, especially to those said for the dead.

<sup>371</sup>Dr. Siaka P. Stevens ruled Sierra Leone from 1968 to 1985 as Prime Minister and President respectively. Upon his retirement in 1985, he personally chose Maj. Gen. Joseph S. Momoh, who was head of the army and a Limba himself to

(Hackett 1991:141). The supernatural became a very important element in politics, which encouraged many members of parliament to ally themselves with diviners or soothsayers.

Throughout APC rule, both high-ranking politicians and those of lesser influence sought out the help of diviners and fortune-tellers to win to keep their seats, or to gain favour of those in higher authority when seeking more lucrative political positions (Opala & Boillot 1996:5).<sup>372</sup> The belief that it was not possible to attain political prominence without the help of these sacred specialists brought a great deal of deception into politics with sometimes disastrous results.<sup>373</sup> Political predators busied themselves trying to hunt down their supposed enemies/victims. It is believed that some politicians engaged the services of sacred specialists to kill their opponents through spiritual means. Sacred specialists have taken advantage of the situation to make themselves rich by sending messages of concern to the politicians advising them of the traditional steps to take. These messages often warn politicians about their enemies who are trying to get rid of them; they predict coups and assassination attempts (Shaw 1996:40).

The pouring of libation was reintroduced at public and state functions during the APC regime.<sup>374</sup> At these functions, libation is poured to seek God's guidance, blessing and protection.

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succeed him. Momoh was overthrown in a military coup in 1992.

<sup>372</sup>For a discussion on politics and divination in the APC party, see Shaw (1996:30-55).

<sup>373</sup>The failed so-called counter-coup by the APC party was blamed on the false divination of a herbalist (Shaw 1996:32). This attempt to overthrow the Military government and regain power, resulted in the executions of seventeen alleged conspirators on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1992.

<sup>374</sup>Pouring libations at state functions is also carried out in Nigeria (Hackett 1991:141).

When civil war broke out the government, recognising that the military was ill-equipped believed their only hope for victory was some form of supernatural intervention. For this reason, they encouraged all citizens, especially those in the hinterland, to use whatever traditional means or power they had to combat the rebels. This action was not surprising, considering the APC's previous reliance on divination and sorcery.

Limba hunters and medicine men responded by forming a traditional defence force called "*Tamabɔrɔ*" ("using traditional means").<sup>375</sup> This led to the formation of a traditional religious defence forces among the various ethnic groups in the hinterland. The Mende formed a group known as "*Kamajos*." The Kono people formed "*Donsu*," and the Temne had two groups, "*Gbeti*" and "*Kapras*." The *Gbetis* were exclusively members of the Temne *Porɔ* secret society called "*Soko*." Each group had its own way of using their spiritual powers against the rebels. When the rebels eventually entered the Limba homeland, the Limba used not only conventional arms and "witch guns" but, through spiritual means used killer bees to attack and destabilise the rebels. Some rebels even died from the painful stings of the bees. The supernatural ability to turn daylight into darkness was another effective method used by the Limba to prevent the rebels from seeing where they were going. *Tamabɔrɔ* fighters could see the rebels but the rebels were unable to see the approaching *Tamabɔrɔ* fighters. Many rebels were killed through these means. Although each ethnic defence group employed its own strategies, one thing that was common among all of them was the traditional outfit called *huronko/ronko*<sup>376</sup> which

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<sup>375</sup>Opala & Boillot (1996:5) state that many of these fighters were recruited from Wara Wara Bafodea Chiefdom the place that is particularly noted for its attachment to traditional beliefs in Sierra Leone.

<sup>376</sup>*huronko/ronko* is a fearsome traditional brown or red gown with black vertical stripes, prepared by the blacksmith, and sodden with herbal medicines to make the user invulnerable (Opala & Boillot 1996:6).

was worn for protection.

However, the traditional fighters were not the only ones using African traditional means to fight, the rebels also made use of their own traditional religious powers to frustrate the efforts of the ethnic defence groups.<sup>377</sup>

The NPLC condemns the use of traditional charms and practices in any way, but the biggest promoters of traditional beliefs (Dr. Siaka Stevens, and Maj. Gen. Joseph S. Momoh) in the country were also patrons of the church. Even after the deaths of these two leaders, politicians who are die-hard traditionalists are still encouraged to patronize the NPLC, no politician seeking to patronize the church has ever been told to bring their traditional charms and objects for destruction by fire.

The Israelite monarchy was instituted by God (1 Sam. 9:15-16; 10) to replace the pre-existing theocracy (1 Sam 8:7). The references to the king as "prince" (1 Sam. 9:16; 13:14), and "anointed one" may point to one who is designated by God (Achteemeier 1996:566). Accession to the throne was seen as a divine choice; a man is made "king by the grace of God", not only because God made a covenant with the dynasty of David, but because his choice was exercised at each accession" (De Vaux 1997:101). Saul the first king was possessed by "the spirit of God" (1 Sam. 10:10; 11:6). Paul exhorted the Romans that political establishments are instituted by God, and political leaders are servants of God (Rom. 13:1-6). In "anticipation of

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<sup>377</sup>When the APC government was overthrown in 1993, *Tamaboro* became inactive. Today, only the Mende *Kamajos* are in existence and some of its leaders are playing an active part in the ruling SLPP government because it is a Southern

the Israelites' desire for a king, God laid down the laws of Deuteronomy" to ensure "that the king would not lead the people away" to heathenism (Packer 1980:389). However, King Saul consulted a necromancer or medium (1 Sam. 28), and Manasseh "made his son pass through fire; he practiced sooth-saying and augury, and dealt with mediums and wizards" (2 Kg. 21:6; 2 Chron. 33:6). The instructions for choosing the anticipated king were given by God (Deut. 23:1-3). These kingship laws did not come into effect "until many generations after Moses (cf. 1 Sam. 8:5)" (Packer 1980:389). The power of an Israelite King was not unrestrained and was constantly checked by the terms of God's covenant with Israel (Achteemeier 1996:566).

The coronation of the King was accompanied by religious rites: the investiture with insignia (2 Kg. 11:12), the anointing (1 Sam. 9:16; 10:1; 2 Sam. 2:4; 5:3; 1 Kg. 1:39; 2 Kg. 11:12), the acclamation (1 Kg. 1:34, 39; 2 Kg. 11:12), the enthronement (1 Kg. 1:46; 2 Kg. 11:19), and the homage (1 Kg. 1:47), all have religious significance (De Vaux 1997:102-07).<sup>378</sup>

Religion and politics went side by side in Bible times. The political laws of the Israelites were based on their religious tenets. In the NT, under Roman rule, the Jews maintained their politico-religious activities through the temple establishment.

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party with strong Mende background.

<sup>378</sup>See De Vaux (1997:108-14) for further reading on the enthronement psalms, the idea of the king as saviour, his divine kinship, and his role in worship.



### 8.5.9 Judicial Process

Before the advent of the British in Sierra Leone, all cases in the Limba homeland were judged by chiefs. Although many of the more serious cases are now removed to the courts, it is still believed that *Kanu* also gives wisdom and courage to the court president or chairman to judge well. In many court sittings, prayers are said before the commencement of proceedings. Before the pronouncement of the verdict on high profile or complicated chieftdom cases, such as land disputes, rebellions, or malicious destruction of property, God is consulted for his guidance and wisdom through a sacred specialist.

In some instances when a verdict is hard to reach, and it is the opinion of the majority that the accused might have committed the crime, but there is no tangible proof to link him/her to it, if the accused continues to stress his/her innocence, the court may recommend the invocation of a "swear" (*kudɔri/kuthɔnkɔni/duku*)<sup>379</sup> as a kind of self-operating justice. Because most Limba are afraid of the power of "swear," the accused will quickly confess if guilty. A "swear" is considered an effective means of preventing or punishing the most profoundly anti-social of crimes, therefore, its use is not only limited to the courts. Out of the court system "swears" are used for various reasons to obtain justice, for example a victim of theft, a man who suspects his wife of being unfaithful, and to pursue witches. The source of the supernatural power of the "swear" is still a matter of

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<sup>379</sup>A "swear" is a curse that acts spiritually through a material object, a "swear" is believed to be capable of consciously pursuing and discriminating culprits. It can spiritually pursue the guilty and possibly his/her relatives also by its own divine means, and it is believed it can make no mistake. Owners of "swears" usually give names to their "swears" to portray their might, for example: *Thɔma fɛ/hɛ* ("eat today"); *Huthɔrɔ* ("problem").

debate among the Limba. Some argue that because of the inhumane actions of the "swear," its power could not be from *Kanu wobekede/kathinthin* ("God above") nor from the ancestors, but must come instead from *Kanu wopothi* ("god below") evil and malevolent spirits.

Most Sierra Leoneans do not trust the national judiciary system because the judges or jurors and/or sentencing are often corrupted by politics. This is especially likely with high profile matters like treason, homicide or the misappropriation and embezzlement of public funds. For this reason, the family and friends of the accused desperately search for renowned sacred specialists to offer sacrifice in order that their loved ones might receive justice and be acquitted.<sup>380</sup> Similarly, people who feel that their needs will not be met by the justice system, or that they will not receive a fair trial, because of prejudice and injustice in high places, turn to God for help and deliverance with the belief that God is the only one who can prevail over any human institution or power.

In the law courts to which NPLC members usually take their cases, a judge is installed after taking an oath from either the Bible or the Koran, and the litigants are required to swear by either the Bible or the Koran. After the annual judiciary break, the commencement of court sittings is preceded by church services in all regions of the country. These services, organised in each

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<sup>380</sup>When the NPRC military government seized power and charged many APC political appointees with the misuse of power and the misappropriation of funds, national newspapers ran stories every week of accused persons and their families visiting traditional spiritual leaders and offering expensive sacrifices to find favour in the justice system and hence escape the wrath of the military. Some of these traditional believers were not Limbas. They were, however, part of a system that encouraged traditional religion as the norm for over twenty years. See Shaw (1996:30-55) for a discussion on politics and divination in Sierra Leone.

region by the local Anglican Church (which is the state church in Sierra Leone) are held to pray for the judicial system that God will bless its leaders in the dispensation of their duties.

The Israelite judicial system was based primarily on the Decalogue (Exod. 20:2-17 and Deut. 5:6-21), the Code of the Covenant (Exod. 20:22-23:33), the Law of Holiness (Lev. 17-26), and the Priestly Code (Lev. 1-16).<sup>381</sup> Before the institution of the monarchy, those who acted as judges in Israel were the heads of families or the elders of tribes (Achte-meier 1996:553). Moses appointed elders to administer justice (Exod. 18:13-26; cf. Deut. 1:9-17). In every Israelite "town disputes were settled by the Elders" who "sat at the gate of the town, where all the community's affairs were discussed (cf. Gen. 23:10, 18; Job 29:7; Prov. 24:7; 31:23)" (De Vaux 1997:152). Later when the monarchy was instituted, "judges included the king as supreme authority in the land, leading citizens and professional magistrates delegated by him, as well as priests in matters strictly religious or in special cases" (Achte-meier 1996:553). Israelite Judges ruled with the authority delegated to them by God who was considered "the judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25). Judges were to be capable, God-fearing, and trustworthy and incorruptible (Exod. 18:21) persons (Achte-meier 1996:553). Codes of conduct for judges stressed the importance of complete fairness and impartial judgement (Exod. 23:1-3, 6-9; Lev. 19:15-16, 35-36; Deut. 16:19-20; 17:8-13).

#### 8.5.10 Health

It is by God's grace that one stays well or healthy, therefore when the traditionalist is asked, *Nama/mε koto kon?* ("How is your

body?") the usual response is either, *yan ndo petɔy sɛmbɛ ba Kanu* ("I am well by God's power"), or simply, *kalaŋ Kanu* ("thank God").<sup>382</sup> Although in Sierra Leone it is generally assumed that wealthy people live longer than poor people because they can afford to pay for expensive medications and the best available medical attention, the Limba believe that "money cannot give you health, only God can." Even when people were cured by Western medicine because they could afford the money for expensive medical treatments, the Limba still believe that it was God who made the healing possible. Both Western and traditional healing systems are believed to be under God's control because it is through divine intervention that both the medical staff at the hospital and the traditional healer are able to heal their patients.<sup>383</sup> Some traditionalist healers claim "that their knowledge of medicines derives from God" (Opala & Boillot 1996:7).

In most African societies, "the manifestations of good, such as health...are attributed to God" (Mbiti 1989a:38). For the traditionalist, sickness is a religious matter and not just a physical or mental condition. When sickness occurs, it shows "that there is an imbalance between the metaphysical and the human world as the flow of numinous power/life force has been disturbed" (Oosthuizen 1991:47), and it is for this reason that Africans take a holistic approach toward sickness.

In the hinterland when a traditionalist is seriously ill, they usually call the herbalist/medicine man or woman,<sup>384</sup> who is

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<sup>381</sup>De Vaux (1997:143-44)

<sup>382</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:108); Mbiti (1989a:60, 61).

<sup>383</sup>See Appiah-Kubi (1993:95-107) and Oosthuizen (1991:47) for a discussion on traditional healing and Western medicine.

<sup>384</sup>A medicine man or woman specialises in making medicine from special plants and leaves taken mainly from the forest to cure illnesses.

believed to possess supernatural powers and to depend on God for guidance in the bush to find the right herbs.<sup>385</sup> The traditionalists believe that although traditional healers do not always diagnose what is wrong with the patient, the healers' faith in God and his/her reliance on God for direction in finding the herbs in the bush to cure the victim, is what gives the patient and his/her family hope and satisfaction (Opala & Boillot 1996:7). It is believed that it is God who chooses the medicine through the healer, so it does not matter whether or not the patient or the healer actually knows the cause of ailment.

In 1983, while working as a lay pastor with the Methodist Church Sierra Leone (MCSL), I encountered two tuberculosis patients one of whom was a congregant of my church. Both vehemently refused to go and see the village nurse for medical attention, because they and their families strongly believed that the cause of their illnesses was witchcraft<sup>386</sup> and that western medicine could not cure. To my great amazement, through the work of a renowned herbalist from a neighbouring village, both patients were completely cured of their tuberculosis.

African healing is believed to be directed by God's providence, and anytime someone is cured it reminds the African of God's presence within the community. However, there have been many cases where traditional and spiritual healing did not work at all.

For the NPLC (Statement of Faith: Doctrine 10): "Divine healing is an integral part of the gospel. Deliverance from sickness is provided for in the Atonement, and is the privilege of all

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<sup>385</sup>Cf. Shaw (1996:32); Opala & Boillot (1996:7).

<sup>386</sup>The Limba "attribute life-threatening and chronic, debilitating illness to

believers (Isa. 53:4-5; Matt. 8:16-17; Jas. 5:14-16)." It is on the basis of God as the ultimate healer that the NPLC conducts Wednesday healing and prayer services.

In Biblical times, healing was associated with God. In the OT, Malachi spoke about the Lord, the "Sun of Righteousness" rising with healing in his wings (Mal. 4:2), and in a Psalm attributed to David, God is praised as the one who heals our diseases (Psa. 103:3). Jesus is the "great physician" (Matt. 8:1-4; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 13:10-13; John 9:1-7) who in his time on earth performed many healings including the woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years, and after spending money on physicians without being cured, came to Jesus and was cured (Mark 5:25-34).

#### *8.5.11 Death (hutoka) and Burial (amanki)*

Death is regarded as both a natural and inevitable aspect of human life. For the Limba, as for most African peoples, death at an old age is seen as God's death (Finnegan 1965:108)<sup>387</sup> and "a dignified event" (Magesa 1997:155). In that regard, although the pain of parting is felt by everyone, there is a general satisfaction and appreciation to God for the gift of long-life.

On the other hand, the Limba attribute the deaths of young people, and untimely or unnatural deaths, to witchcraft, the effects of swearing, or the work of evil spirits (Finnegan 1965:108). Currently, there are two existing views about the cause of such deaths. Some believe that although God himself

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witchcraft" (Opala & Boillot 1996:6)

<sup>387</sup>God's death means "natural" death (Finnegan 1965:108); Cf. (Mbiti 1989a:151). In some African cultures, God created death and allows it to kill people (Niangoran-Bouah 1991:91).

does not take the life of a person, he is responsible for the occurrence of such a death because he is the only one who has the power to prevent or allow it. Others believe that a loving God would neither take such life nor be responsible for the premature death of an infant or a young person.

The Limba have several stories about the origin of death in the world.<sup>388</sup> The story that is most commonly told is that of the Toad and the Snake (Finnegan 1967:234-35):

Kanu did not want the Limba and all animals to die so he made two medicines one for the Limba people and another for the animals. Kanu decided to give the snake the medicine to take to the Limba. The toad got up and objected to that decision on the ground that the swiftness of the snake would cause the medicine to spill. The snake countered by saying he would not spill it and his swiftness would get the medicine to the Limba people in a timely fashion. In spite of his good argument, the toad did not allow the snake to carry the medicine. The snake then carried the medicine for the animals quickly without spilling it. The toad took the medicine for the Limba when he jumped; it fell off of his head and spilled. He then took the empty bowl to Kanu to be replenished. Kanu said, "I will not be able to get more now, I told you not to take it, you disobeyed, you went and just spilt it—I will not be able to get more now." Death came to the Limba because of the toad who spilled the medicine. The snakes do not die naturally because their medicine was not spilled. If snakes are not killed, when they get old they bathe in the medicine which was carried to them from Kanu.

In this story death comes because an unnamed medicine from God

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<sup>388</sup>Stories about the origin of death abound in many African cultures; see (Parrinder 1967:54-63). In many myths, death is the result of "a message or item that God sent to people, but which did not reach them or was changed by the messenger on the way; or the message arrived too late: a faster messenger from God had brought another message (of loss, death)" Mbiti (1991:61-62). In other myths, death is a "consequence of the breakdown of communication between God and humanity caused either by an act of a human being or one of the

did not reach the Limba as a result of the unreasonable judgement of the toad. That is why the shorter version of this story is entitled "The toad did not love us" (Finnegan 1965:233-35).

Usually when a person dies, the Limba, like most Africans, spend a great deal of time, energy and resources "to ensure a proper funeral for the departed" so that the spirit of the departed "may be contented in the world beyond and will not return as a dissatisfied ghost to plague his family" (Parrinder 1962:98). The following is a general description of a proper Limba traditional funeral rite.<sup>389</sup>

When death occurs, wailing starts immediately. Acquaintances begin to converge at the house to express their condolences. The women begin to express their sympathy by wailing<sup>390</sup> loudly as they approach the compound where the funeral is being held. This custom expresses the communal bond that exists between families and friends. The laughter of one, as well as the sorrow belongs not only to the individual, but to the community as well. In most African societies, "the phenomena of death and burial rites usually bring people of diverse beliefs together since people come from various walks of life irrespective of their religious leanings as sympathisers, mourners, friends, and relations" (Abimbola 1991:55). This practice is found both in the Limba homeland and in the Western Area. The women sit on the floor inside the house while the men sit around a table with a plate to collect money for the funeral expenses. A learned person (if one is available) will record the financial contributions and the

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creatures" (Magesa 1997:156).

<sup>389</sup>Normal funeral rites are not carried out if the deceased was a convicted witch. Special burial rites must be performed for a witch to ensure that they do not return from the grave to cause more trouble.

<sup>390</sup>It is very rare for a man to cry in public. Men are very hesitant to openly express their emotions. When a man does show his sorrow, he does it quietly.



names of the donors. This provision also shows the spirit of community. A funeral is not the sole responsibility of the bereaved family, but of the public.<sup>391</sup>

In the Limba homeland where there are no embalmers, the burial of a deceased person takes place the same day, usually within a few hours of the death. In the Western Area, certain processes have to be followed before burial. First a death certificate must be obtained and registered at the Department of Births and Deaths in the Ministry of Health, and a grave is purchased and dug.

The deceased is washed and wrapped in a new piece of white shroud, and laid on a flat board, normally close to the entrance of the house. Generally, if no post-mortem has been performed, cotton wool is placed inside the nostrils, to prevent the deceased from sneezing. This custom comes from the Limba belief that as long as the deceased has his/her internal organs intact, it is possible for a person to come back to life before burial. It is believed that if the corpse sneezes, all those who are present will die. If a post-mortem has been done, the organs have been severed; and the cotton wool is therefore not required, unless a particularly superstitious relative wishes to take extraordinary precautions.

In the village, when the time for burial has come, usually two men carry the corpse to the cemetery in the forest. Graves in these cemeteries are less than six feet deep. After a brief ceremony, the deceased is buried with the head facing eastward. Since the corpse has not been placed in a box or coffin, a canopy is constructed at the grave's mid point from horizontal sticks

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<sup>391</sup>In Western Area only the older women still sit on the floor. The younger women prefer to sit on chairs or benches.

and leaves so that the earth used to fill in the grave does not touch the corpse itself. Some branches or flowers are then placed on top of the grave. Most of the people present at the burial ceremony then return to the home of the deceased for some food and to visit with the bereaved family. The presence and company of sympathisers is considered a vital source of comfort. The Traditionalist believes that if one does not return to the house of the deceased after the burial, the person is inviting a funeral in his/her own home.

In the Western Area the corpse is usually kept for several days in the mortuary or funeral home, while burial arrangements are been made. A wake normally takes place the night before the funeral and burial and goes on to until about 2:00 a.m. At all Limba wakes, mourners and sympathisers are well fed. The funeral rites that follow are the same as those stated above.

All Limba traditionalists believe that, it is God who is responsible for the safe passage of the deceased to the abode of the dead (*katilɛ/katiyɛ*). In that respect, when death occurs, sacrifices are offered to *Kanu* through the ancestors on the third (*kudigbiŋ*), seventh (*nhureŋ*) and fortieth (*huboka*) days after death.<sup>392</sup> Because God was called when the deceased entered the world, He must also be called when that life ends. These ceremonies are observed as a way to relate with the supernatural on behalf the deceased. Along with the sacrifices that are involved in these ceremonies, wailing and prayers of petition for comfort, peace, and protection for the living, and for a cordial

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<sup>392</sup>The ceremonies on the third, seventh and fortieth were borrowed from Islam (Hargrave 1944:66). Before the advent of Islam into Limba country, the Limba only had *huboka* ("cry") which took place at any time of the year when the bereaved family could afford to feed all the sympathisers.

reception of the deceased by the ancestors at *katilɛ* are also made.

In the NPLC, as in most other Christian organisations in Sierra Leone, the dead is washed, dressed, and placed in a casket/coffin. The funeral service is preceded by a vigil which is composed of Christian songs and the reading and exposition of scripture. Food is served at intervals. The funeral and burial services are made up of hymns, several readings from the Bible and a message from the pastor. Although, the NPLC condemns traditional practices, they do sanction the fortieth day ceremony. Presently, because of the high costs associated with having a fortieth day ceremony, and the deplorable economic situation in Sierra Leone, NPLC leaders are no longer encouraging bereaved family members to have the ceremony. However, families who can afford the expense still observe fortieth day ceremonies.

In Judeo-Christian tradition, death is "the end of physical and/or spiritual life" (Achte-meier 1996:232). Death came as a consequence of humankind's sin (Gen. 3; cf. 1 Cor 5:21-22). Earlier we discussed the Israelites' rites that accompanied the dead, and concluded that the rites "were regarded as a duty which had to be paid to the dead, as act of piety which was their due" (De Vaux 1997:61).

#### 8.5.12 *The Next World*

Unlike many other African societies, the Limba do not speak about reincarnation.<sup>393</sup> The phrase 'the next world' is commonly used by the Limba when speaking about the hereafter. The Limba are extremely vague about the issue of the next world. In fact, like

most Africans,<sup>394</sup> Limba religiosity only makes provision for life beyond the grave if one is accepted as an ancestor. As stated earlier, at death, the spirit leaves the body, and the buried body decays in the grave. For the Limba, as well as for other Africans, the grave appears to be "the seal of everything, even if a person survives and continues to exist in the next world" (Mbiti 1989a:160).

In Christianity, the soul/spirit continues after death (Matt. 16:25-26), but there is no clear statement about the destiny of the body beyond the grave. In Genesis 3:19 at death the body returns to the ground from whence it came, while in Matthew 10:28 it is inferred that the body may also experience the suffering of hell, or some will be raised (1 Thes. 4:13-18).

## 8.6 Conclusion

*Kanu* created the Limba out of the earth, hence the word *wɔmɛti* ("humankind") which literally means a product from the earth. A person consists of a body and breath, which gives life to that body and makes humankind a living being.

As God's creations, humans are endowed with a spiritual nature that seeks to be in constant harmony with the creator. The traditionalist "does not draw a distinction between secular and sacred" rather he/she embraces all of life, integrating its parts, and seeking to find harmony or balance between them" (Mbiti 1989b:67). Existence for the traditionalist is "religious participation and the world is a religious phenomenon..." (Mbiti 1989b:67).

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<sup>393</sup>Mbiti (1989a:159-60).

<sup>394</sup>Mbiti (1989a:160-61).

Humans are expected to cooperate and live in harmony with the rest of creation including animate beings and inanimate objects. The Limba believe that human beings are superior to and more intelligent than the rest of creation and should therefore take care of God's other creatures. The Limba are connected to the earth spiritually and physically because they were created from it and because their ancestors are buried in it. This requires the Limba to have an ecological conscience.

The meaning and purpose of life is a mystery that is only deciphered and fulfilled by the presence of God.

Limba dependence on God is evident throughout the entire lifecycle. Because God is the only source of life, this dependence begins on the child's behalf, even before conception. Because God is the ultimate sustainer of life, this dependence is perpetuated even after death by a person's descendants or surviving relatives. Religion deals with both private life and community life. It cannot be confined at home and the Limba take it with them wherever they go. Religion controls and harmonises the society and the individual. It provides spontaneous answers to the challenges of daily life.

God is the provider of everything that is necessary for life. It is God who provides knowledge and understanding to students, and the skills necessary to attain success in agriculture, one's career, politics, and sports. God provides wisdom in making life's decisions and guides people to their marriage partners. Through this same wisdom, God guides rulers and courts to make just laws and verdicts.

In any of these areas, if one is experiencing difficulty, God's

favour may be entreated through religious ritual. Training in such religious ritual is one of the functions of the secret societies, which, it is believed, were instituted by God to preserve Limba culture and religion and to provide training in moral and social ethics. Throughout all of life's endeavors the Limba must depend on God for sustenance and well-being.

At death the breath leaves the body, which is buried, and decays in the grave. The Limba are vague about the final destination or end of the breath.

Like in Limba tradition, in Judeo-Christian tradition, humankind is created by God from the earth with a soul/spirit and body/flesh. The soul/spirit makes humankind a living being. Unlike Limba tradition, in the Bible humankind is created in the image and likeness of God implying that humankind belongs to God. In all of God's creation, humankind alone has the ability to have a conscious personal relationship with God, a worldview that is also shared by Limba traditionalists.

Humankind is uniquely created in God's image, and was put in charge of the rest of creation, this does not excuse humans from having relationships with God's other creatures, rather it makes us responsible for them. Animate beings and inanimate objects are part of the sequence of creation. Therefore there should be harmony between humankind and the rest of the universe, a view that is also shared by Limba traditionalists. Because humankind and all creation belong to "one great household," religious life and the earth's ecology are inextricably linked in Christianity. Humankind is God's agent responsible for taking care of the earth. Therefore, destruction of the environment is a sin

against God.

For the Christian, God must be acknowledged in the physical and spiritual journey of humankind. In that regard, like the Limba traditionalist, the Christian contacts God concerning major events in life from conception to the afterlife. God is the ultimate cause and provider of all the necessities of life. Therefore, the Christian is expected to stay in constant touch with God in the journey of life. One's relationship with God and the rest of creation determines where the Christian spends eternity after death. Unlike Limba tradition, the life of the Christian does not end in the grave. The soul/spirit of the Christian continues after death. There is no clear cut Judeo-Christian teaching about the destiny of the body beyond the grave. In the OT, at death the body returns to the ground where it originated and nothing more. In the NT, the body returns to the earth but may also experience the suffering of hell or be physically raised to everlasting life. Let us now proceed to the concepts of sin and salvation.

## CHAPTER NINE

### Sin (*Hakε*) and Salvation (*kuyaqkaŋ*)

#### 9.1 Introduction

The Limba community, like any African community, is governed by rules most of which were established by the ancestors or the elders of the community for the guidance of its "social and religious life" (Mbon 1991:102). From an African ethical standpoint, violation of any of these rules constitutes sin or wrongdoing (Mbon 1991:102; Magesa 1997:166-72), and sin consequently "creates disharmony and brings about the disintegration of the society" (Asante 2001:361). Sin injures the African "philosophical principle of: I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 1989b:64). In view of that, sin is regarded as an agent destructive to spiritual, personal and social harmony. It is therefore condemned. However, as African societies are *sensu communis*, provisions are made by which an offender may be made whole and restored to the community.<sup>395</sup>

The NPLC accepts the traditional Limba view that sin is destructive and has severe consequences, but the church condemns Limba religion as a sinful endeavour that is hopeless, and that

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<sup>395</sup>This tradition abounds in ATR (Sawyer 1996:121; Mbiti 1989a:205-06).



leads its believers to eternal damnation.

In this chapter, we shall look at the Limba concept of sin, its categories and consequences, as well as the remedy to sin, and the Limba concept of salvation.

## 9.2 Sin and its categories

In Limba worldview, *hakε* ("sin/offence") is any wrongful act or behaviour directed against the supernatural, an individual, or the community. This may include acts against living or non-living entities. This is in line with Mbiti's observation: "It seems that sin in African religion refers almost exclusively to the area of relations between human beings, with spiritual realities and with nature" (1989b:65; cf. Magesa 1999:240).

In Limba cosmology, no one is born with *hakε*. Children are always regarded as innocent, and are referred to as 'angels' because of their sinless nature. As the child grows, he/she becomes maladjusted as a result of bad influences.<sup>396</sup> At an early age the child is taught which acts, behaviours, and words are considered wrong or unacceptable. When the child does wrong, he/she is reprimanded and/or punished. In Limba society it is not until a child is initiated, or becomes a teenager that he/she is considered capable of committing "sin."

Although deliberate sin almost always emanates from evil or wicked thoughts, for the Limba as for most Africans, sin "has to do with real life situations" and is not considered from an "abstract metaphysical" viewpoint (Mugabe 1999:240). Therefore, evil thoughts or motives are not considered as sin until they are expressed in words or actions.

Although technically any wrongdoing may be referred to as "*hakε*" the Limba use different terms to refer to certain categories of sin:

- (1) Sins against God or the ancestors are called *hakε*. Because God created all that is and intends his creation to live in harmony and respect, any intentional act against any part of God's creation is considered a sin directly against God.<sup>397</sup>
- (2) Sins against other humans are called *hakε* or *yulubu*.
- (3) Sins against nature, the spirits or the secret societies are known as *adoko*.
- (4) The infraction of taboos or clan norms is called *kadoko/kakε*.
- (5) The intentional destruction of animals, reptiles or birds is referred to as *kamalo*.
- (6) Intentional crimes of other natures are known as *aspi bali/athaki bali*.
- (7) An accidental/unintentional wrong action of any nature is *anoti kasi*.
- (8) Sexual sin in general is classified as *nkedaj*. Particular sexual sins like adultery and fornication are known as *hubaliqina/abalajaj*.<sup>398</sup> Marrying or having sex with a close

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<sup>396</sup>Cf. Magesa 1999:250).

<sup>397</sup>Cf. Asante (2001:361).

<sup>398</sup>A womaniser is known as *bakedaj*.

relative is known as *kuthombo* ("incest"). Rape is called *kejdaŋ*.

### 9.3 The consequences of and remedies for sins

From personal perspective, sin destroys the good reputation of a person. It makes him/her a bad person and an outlaw of the community. As sin is a socio-religious concept, the offender is considered spiritually and socially unfit and he/she is "avoided by the rest of the community" (Mbon 1991:103). Because the "essence of sin lies in its being an antisocial act" (Bediako 1994:102), it does not only affect the offender, it also affects his/her community (Mbon 1991:103; Asante 2001:361; Sawyerr 1996:123; Magesa 1997:172; Mbiti 1989a:202), and most adversely his/her family or clan.<sup>399</sup> It is believed that certain sinful actions result in curses that, if not remedied will pass on from one generation to another. The belief that "the sins of a parent will follow the child and children yet unborn"<sup>400</sup> is strong in Limba traditional worldview. It is for these reasons that the Limba "seriously frown upon sin"<sup>401</sup> and every effort to "teach about its consequences and prevent it from occurring."<sup>402</sup>

In order for harmony to be restored, the offender must make provision for forgiveness or atonement and achieve peace with God/supernatural, the community, and the self. This accomplished "either through personal or communal rituals of cleansing" (Mbon 1991:103), or through the offering of sacrifice (depending on the nature of the crime). These acts and rituals are the "natural means of restoring the vitality" of the individual and the

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<sup>399</sup>Cf. Harris (1968:108); Sawyerr (1968:31).

<sup>400</sup>Kalawa Conteh (Interviewed July 2002: Kamabai Town).

<sup>401</sup>Lamin H. Kargbo (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

<sup>402</sup>Lamin H. Kargbo (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

community (Sawyer 1996:123).

In most Limba communities, when a sin/offence/crime is committed, the first step to restoration is a confession (*huthembokɔ*) of the act. In the Limba worldview, confession shows humility and honesty. It expresses an open feeling of grief and shame. This expression of feelings is called *athɔŋ kulahu* ("eating shame").

If a Limba traditionalist is the victim of an offence that requires a confession, and the offender refuses to confess, the traditionalist most often will say, *yan pɛy ka Kanu ba kɔsɔŋɔ wo thiya woŋ* ("I leave my case with God who is the righteous judge").<sup>403</sup> Confession is followed by an acceptance ("*yɛrikɔy bathɔnkɔy*") of responsibility for the crime committed (whether intentional or unintentional), a genuine repentance, a request for forgiveness (*mapɛniyɔ*), and a willingness to undergo the appropriate ritual, or to offer the prescribed sacrifice for atonement.

We previously discussed the process by which an offender's sin against God and the ancestors is expiated and forgiven under the topics "worship of God" and "veneration of the ancestors".

Sins committed against a parent, or against an older member of society carry a curse (*danka*) if they are not dealt with through the normal means of confession and restitution. When confession and an apology have been made, the victim of the crime lays his/her right hand on the head or back of the offender, and publicly acknowledges the apology. Because water is considered

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<sup>403</sup>This is similar to the common African saying "God will punish you according to your deeds" (Asante 2001:361).

as a symbol of purification, the offended person then sips a mouthful of water and sprays it on the head of the offender. If the victim is the offender's parent, custom dictates that the child must give a piece of cloth to his/her parent "to cover the parent's embarrassment."

When a sin is committed against a person other than one's parent, the elders are called upon to mediate. If it is a serious offence like adultery, trespassing, the intentional killing of someone's livestock or the use of abusive and profane language against someone, the offender is required to bring a customary gift to present to the victim as a sign of respect and humility. The elders present will ask the offender to either prostrate on the floor or kneel in front of the victim and confess the sin committed and ask for forgiveness. The offender stays in a prostrate or kneeling position until the victim touches his/her head and says "I have forgiven you, get up and have a seat." The victim then calls for water and drinks some of it as an indication that his/her bad feelings have been "cooled down". Or he/she can spit out some of the water indicating that his/her bad feelings have been washed out. The climax of the process is a handshake and an embrace or the sharing a kola nut. All rituals of forgiveness are concluded with a warm handshake and an embrace. At times, the two parties also share a piece of kola nut.

When someone deliberately destroys an animal, bird or reptile, he/she is required to make a sacrifice in a ceremony called *kuloy ko ka kamalo* ("cleansing from an animal sin").

The victim of a "swear" must undergo either *adekeŋ kubulo* ("partial cleansing") or *kuloy/kugbilisi/kuloki/kusasi mandi*

("full cleansing"). Either ceremony can be performed by a specialist known as *batheki/baduku*, *badori/bathonkoni* ("a diviner"). If a community or family is experiencing the effects of a curse, the diviner first identifies the source of the curse, and when the culprit is found, performs an elaborate cleansing ceremony called *masiyaŋ* ("to throw water") to put an end to the contagion.

Sin against nature, spirits, or secret societies, and sexual sins of any kind are ritually absolved likewise by a full cleansing ceremony *kugbilisi/kuloy*. Sacrifices are also offered to the supernatural for the forgiveness of certain sins and offences.

As a result of these rituals and sacrifices, "the offender is re-accepted, reconciled, brought close to the party and to the wider community" (Mbiti 1989b:64). In the African *sensus communis*, the socio-religious well-being of the individual affects the well-being of the community. In other words, "the well-being of the community as such is a reflection of the morality of the individuals who constitute it" (Sawyer 1996:123). It is this state of personal and communal well-being that from the Limba point of view constitutes salvation.<sup>404</sup>

For the NPLC, the concept of sin is embedded in the doctrine of "The Fall of Man" (Statement of Faith: Doctrine 4):

Man was created good and upright; for God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." However, man by voluntary transgression fell and thereby incurred not only physical death but spiritual death, which is separation from God (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:17; 3:6; Romans 5:12-19).

Adam was created perfect, he sinned, and (like the Limba view of inter-generational sin) that action affected the whole human race. It is from this concept the Christian teaching of original/universal sin emanated (Gen. 3:1-19; Rom. 5:12-21). Every human being is born a sinner (Ps. 51:5), a fact that should not be contended (1 John 1:8).

Sin to the NPLC, like most other Evangelical Churches, is a "revolt or transgression and indicating a deliberate act of defiance against God" (Achteemeier 1996:1026). It is "a religious concept, because all sin is ultimately against God" (Achteemeier 1996:1026). Sin "may be a matter of act, of thought, or of inner disposition or state" (Erickson 1992:180, 196-97).

Sin is exhaustively addressed and specified in the Bible. There are sins against the supernatural: God (Exod. 20:4-7; Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-26), Jesus (Matt. 26:24), and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31-32). There are sins against humankind (Exod. 20:8-17; Matt. 25:31-46; Luke 16:19-31; Matt. 23; Acts 5:1-11). There is also cultic sin (the failure to observe ritual requirements); there are political, social, and spiritual sins (e.g., envy, hate, etc); and there are intentional (Num. 15:30-31) and unintentional sins (Lev. 5).<sup>405</sup> When a person commits any of these sins, he/she is guilty of transgressing not only the specific stipulation, but the whole law (Jas. 2:10-11).

Just as in Limba religion, in Christianity, sin has consequences. Sin is responsible for humankind's fall from God's glory (Rom. 3:23); incurred physical death (Gen. 2:17; 3:19; Rom. 5:12; 6:23); incurred spiritual death; and destroyed humankind's

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<sup>404</sup>Cf. Mugabe (1999:240).

<sup>405</sup>Achteemeier (1996:1026).

relationship with God (Gen. 1:26-30; 2:7-23; Gen. 3:8; Rom. 8:7). Further, sin also affects the sinner's relationship with his/her fellow human beings (Erickson 1992:193; Bediako 1994:102).<sup>406</sup> In the NPLC, a sinner is suspended for a period of time, and if he/she does not make any attempt or is unwilling to change, he/she is expelled from the church.

The NPLC's belief about the remedy to sin is entirely different from that of Limba religion. They believe that God first took the initiative to remedy the taint of sin by giving his son to die on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world (Isa. 53; Rom. 5:8-9; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). This action is described as a manifestation of God's love for humankind (John 3:16), and as a display of true love and friendship by Jesus (John 15:13; 1 John 3:16).

In order to stay protected from sin, Christians must walk continuously with God and "have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7). This is similar to the African concept of *sensu communis*. However, if the Christian falls, the NT has prescribed a remedy: "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). In Christianity, as all sins are ultimately against God (Bediako 1994:102), confession to him matters as much as confession to the victim of a wrongdoing. Even if one is not forgiven by a victim, God's forgiveness is ultimately more important.

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<sup>406</sup>See Erickson (1992:185-93) for further discussion on the consequences of sin.



#### 9.4 Salvation (*Kuyaŋkaŋ*)

For the Limba, *Kuyaŋkaŋ* ("salvation") is freedom from wrong doing, deliverance from evil forces, and a state of well-being with oneself, the supernatural, and the community. It is a "state of being at peace with the spirit world by living one's life in line with the traditional decorum..." (Okorochoa 1994:86). It is also a deliverance from the "physical and immediate dangers that threaten individual or community survival, good health and general prosperity or safety" (Mbiti 1989b:67). As we noted earlier, for the Limba, "good health and general prosperity" are blessings from God, and that is understood as *Kuyaŋkaŋ*. Dr. Siaka Stevens, the first Limba head of state, and the most corrupt politician in the history of Sierra Leone once said: "God has blessed me with children, grandchildren, power, wealth, good health and long life. This is what I call true blessing."<sup>407</sup> For Dr. Stevens, "salvation meant wealth, health, and prosperity with no reference to moral scruples" (Okorochoa 1994:63).

The African concept of salvation is highly based on "contemporary realities" (Okorochoa 1994:63). Salvation is not something to be experienced at "the end of time" (Mbiti 1989b:67; cf. Mugabe 1999:246). There is "no anticipation of a final day when the present cosmic order will be 'judged, or dissolved' and replaced by 'a new heaven and a new earth'", and "there is no clear hope of a hereafter free from suffering..." (Okorochoa 1994:85). Rather, salvation "has been experienced in the past, and it is being experienced in the present" (Mbiti 1989b:67). In a nut-shell, salvation is conceived "in terms of concern for the ills and successes of community life" (Asante 2001:359). To be saved is

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<sup>407</sup>Okorochoa (1994:63) shares a very similar story about a wealthy woman.

to be "delivered from sin into fullness of life," and be "empowered to live a community-centred life" (Asante 2001:360).

For the NPLC, in accordance with Doctrine 5, "The Salvation of Man":

Man's only hope of redemption is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

(a) Conditions to Salvation

Salvation is received through repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. By washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, being justified by grace through faith, man becomes an heir of God according to the hope of eternal life (Luke 24:47; John 3:3; Rom. 10:13-15; Ephesians 2:8; Titus 2:11; 3:5-7).

(b) The Evidence of Salvation

The inward evidence of salvation is the direct witness of the Spirit (Rom. 8:16). The outward evidence to all men is a life of righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24; Titus 2:12).

Salvation in the OT, "is seen both in God's act of delivering Israel from Egypt and in his protection and provision for Israel as the people journeyed through the wilderness to the promised land (Deut. 6:21-23)" (Asante 2001:357). In the NT, God and Christ are presented as Saviour, and agents of salvation. The concept of salvation is diverse; first, it is "redemption of sin and from the dominion of Satan" (Asante 2001:357) in order to regain fellowship with God. "Man's only hope of redemption is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the son of God" (NPLC Statement of Faith: Doctrine 5). For the Christians, salvation can only be achieved through Jesus (Acts 4:12). It is on account of this that the NPLC continues to tell Limba traditionalists that they are doomed to eternal destruction without Jesus. However impressive the traditionalist concept of salvation is, if they do not repent, confess, and ask Jesus for forgiveness, they

will never find salvation. Traditionalists respond saying: "Jesus did not die for our sins...how could Jesus be the only mediator for every race on earth? Jesus is not part of our culture and does not know us."<sup>408</sup>

The Christian concept of salvation is not, however, purely eschatological, the Greek verb *sozo* ("to save") also carries the meaning "preserve or rescue from natural dangers and afflictions", or to "save or preserve from eternal death" (Bauer 1979:798). The Christian concept of salvation, like the Limba concept, includes the "deliverance from the evils of this life" (Ferdinando 1996:125). Part of Jesus mission was to preach good news to the poor, "to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

### **9.5 Conclusion**

Limba communities are governed by rules which guide the socio-religious life of the community. Any breach of these rules is considered an act of wrongdoing or sin. The Limba despise sin because it destroys the spiritual and social well-being of the offender, the community, and in some cases the offender's family. Sin separates offender from the supernatural, and from fellow human beings. The Limba see sin of whatever nature as an offence against God and the ancestors. For these reasons, sin is frowned upon and is not treated lightly. For an offender to be restored, he/she has first to confess and accept the crime, and must be willing to go through a ritual or offer a sacrifice in order to be cleansed. Only then can the offender be forgiven, and restored.

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<sup>408</sup>Yelie Conteh (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

The offender's reconciliation with the victim, and with the supernatural, and his/her restoration to the community is regarded as salvation. It is a state of harmony within the self, the supernatural, and the community. Salvation is not only redemption from present ills; it is also a continued experience of well-being and peace, both internal and external, for the individuals and the community as a whole.

In Limba and Christian beliefs, sin is despised as antisocial, destructive and an offence against God, and in both belief systems, sin destroys the reputation and spirituality of the offender, and his/her relationship with the victim and God. Confession and seeking forgiveness for a wrongful act is an accepted remedy by Limba traditionalists and the church. Unlike Limba religion, the Christian teaches that every human is born a sinner due to an original sin of Adam. Also unlike the Limba tradition, the rules for the guidance of the socio-religious life for the Christian are sanctioned by God and Christ as contained in the Bible and God took the initiative to remedy humankind's sin. The Christians believe that only the shed blood of Christ can take away sins, not the powerless sacrifice of the traditionalists.

In Limba and Christian traditions, salvation is the state of being delivered from the evils of this life both spiritually and physically. The difference however, is that Limba traditional concept of salvation is based on contemporary realities, whilst the Christian's is based on both contemporary and eternal. Unlike Limba tradition, the Christians believe that the only source of salvation for every human being is through Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world. We shall now consider the various kinds of Limba sacred specialists, and their roles.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Sacred Specialists

#### 10.1 Introduction

Sacred specialists play an important role in Limba religion. In most cases, sacred specialists play a part in the traditionalist's life from conception to death. They are very important in the religious life of the community. They are helpers and guides to the people for the maintenance of the sacred values of the society. Sacred specialists are found in almost every Limba community. They are held in high esteem "because of their relationship with the supernatural"<sup>409</sup> and for the mediatory role they play between the people and the supernatural. Sacred specialists are believed to have received their special ability either from *Kanu* or from spirits, as the case may be.

The NPLC condemns sacred specialists as evil personages and workers of iniquity. They are considered to be the devil incarnate because they work under the influence of Satan to promote deception and false religion.

In this chapter, we shall study the various kinds of Limba sacred specialists, and their specific duties.

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<sup>409</sup>Hamusa Kargbo (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

## 10.2 Priests (*Banabeŋ*)

The Limba consider their Priests to be called apart for the purpose of relating with the supernatural on behalf of the people.<sup>410</sup> Their primary duty is to offer sacrifice. Limba priests may be either male or female.<sup>411</sup> Both male and female priests are allowed to marry.<sup>412</sup>

Priests may be either lay priests or professional priests. Lay priests may be the head of a household and officiate at domestic or family ancestral shrines where they lead in the presentation of household offerings and prayers and the pouring of libations for important events.

Professional priests, on the other hand, are responsible for all community rituals and spiritual matters. They minister in community shrines and at public rituals.<sup>413</sup> There are two categories in the professional priesthood. The chief celebrant at grand funeral ceremonies (e.g., when a chief or one of the big men in the community passes away) is called "*Bagbendekɔlɔ*." He is regarded as the Chief Priest. His assistant is known as "*Bagbayha*." Although the Limba say that the priesthood is open to both males and females it is rare for a female to become a Chief Priest. Professional priests can also perform a "swearing" ceremony on behalf of someone. In the men's *Gbangban* society, it is the duty of the ceremonial priest to invoke the spirits. He is referred to as "*Bakurɛ*."

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<sup>410</sup>Cf. Mbiti (1989a:183).

<sup>411</sup>Cf. Parrinder (1962:101).

<sup>412</sup>Cf. Mbiti (1989a:184).

<sup>413</sup>See Mbiti (1989a:183-84) for the duties of African traditional priests.

Regardless of rank, the goal of all Limba priests is the same. They connect people to the supernatural through sacrifices, prayers, offerings and libations. Some candidates for the priesthood are required to undergo long and rigorous training<sup>414</sup> which is conducted by more experienced priests and elders. Others enter the priesthood without such rigour. Those who are proven to be called by divine means through the ancestors or spirits do not require the same training. Some are set apart from childhood.

The NPLC has pastors instead of priests. The Ministry in the NPLC (Statement of Faith: Doctrine 9) is "a divinely called and scripturally ordained ministry" that has been provided by the Lord "for the threefold purpose of leading the church in: (1) evangelisation of the world (Mark 16:15-20), (2) worship of God (John 4:23-24), and (3) building a body of saints being perfected in the image of His Son (Ephesians 4:11, 16). NPLC pastors preach, teach, conduct infant dedications, adult baptisms, weddings and funerals. On rare occasions they also celebrate communion.

Like traditional priests, the NPLC pastors are believed to be divinely called to lead believers in the worship of God. However, there are great differences between the NPLC and Limba religion. The Limba priesthood is not scripturally based, nor is it evangelically focused, and it is not for their edification of the saints for the perfection in the image of Christ.

The main duty of priests in Biblical times was to serve "in the temple performing ritual functions and conducting the sacrificial services" (Achteemeier 1996:880). In the patriarchal period,

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<sup>414</sup>Cf. Parrinder (1962:101).

there was no official priesthood, but like a lay priest in Limba religion, the "head of the family performed sacrifices (Gen. 31:54)" (Achteemeier 1996:880).

Christians "transferred the role of the priest as mediator between God and humans onto Jesus whom they saw as both God and man. He became the eternal High Priest by God's appointment (Heb. 5:1-6) and supplanted the ancient sacrificial system by his own sacrifice (Heb. 7:27-28; 9:23-26" (Achteemeier 1996:881).

### 10.3 Diviners

Limba diviners, along with smiths, hunters, herbalists, twins and secret society officials, are gifted with *bathayaj* ("double eyes" or "four eyes") that give them a supernatural vision of the worlds that are normally invisible to ordinary eyes, namely, the worlds of the spirits, of the dead, and of witches (Shaw 1985:287). All people with double eyes are called *bekele* (Opala & Boillot 1996:6). A majority of Limba diviners are male, but there are a few female diviners.

A diviner is a "specialist who seeks to diagnose disease, or discover the solution to problems, by means of inspiration or manipulation of objects through various techniques" (Parrinder 1962:103). He/she is the agent of "unveiling mysteries of human life" (Mbiti 1989a:172). The diviner "stands at the crossroads between the spiritual and human worlds" (Danfulani 2000:87). In that regard, the diviner serves as "the intercessor, mediator, and bridge of communication between the two worlds. As an agent with access to both human and spiritual worlds, s/he explores and exploits the mystical world to normalize, ameliorate, restore, and reconcile estranged relationships for a harmonious and



habitable universe" (Danfulani 2000:87). In general, Limba diviners, like diviners in most African traditions, play the role of "counsellors, comforters, suppliers of assurance and confidence during people's crises, advisers, priests...seers, fortune-tellers and solve secrets like thefts, imminent danger or coming events" (Mbiti 1989a:172; Cf. Oosthuizen 1991:46, 48).

Diviners are feared by witches and evil spirits because of their ability to expose them and their evil plots. In most Limba communities, when an unexplainable misfortune does occur, a diviner is called to ascertain the cause of the misfortune and to prescribe the necessary solution, or to expose the thief.<sup>415</sup> Limba diviners are vital in helping their clients decipher various messages from the spiritual world that are intended for them, especially those from the dead.

The Limba have several "kinds of diviners, each with their own special methods" (Finnegan 1965:115) to manipulate and control "the spirit world for the benefit of human and spiritual communities" (Danfulani 2000:87; cf. Mbiti 1989a:167). Although each diviner has his/her own special divining method, all Limba diviners use objects as mediums to interpret their results.<sup>416</sup> The following are the most familiar kinds of Limba diviners and their methods of divination:

- (1) *Bathanki* are the blacksmiths, and are considered the most powerful among the diviners because they build or create most

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<sup>415</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:115).

<sup>416</sup>See Magesa (1997:220-34) for the methods of divination, and Zuesse (1975:158-68) for the forms of divination in Africa.

of the instruments and mediums used for divination and for the expulsion of malevolent spirits. Because *Bathanki* are "double sighted" people and they have created the "swears", they know all about their powers of divination.

- (2) *Bamandi* divine by the casting of stones in a process known as *n̄ski mandi* ("looking water").<sup>417</sup> The belief behind this method is that, as water is clear, the truth will be revealed clearly. During this process of divination, water is put into a receptacle to signify that belief.
- (3) *Bab̄ere/Balenki* are lower ranking sooth-sayers who also divine using stones.<sup>418</sup>
- (4) *Basakapi/Bawuȳo* divines and exposes witchcraft through a small receptacle believed to be inhabited by spirits.<sup>419</sup> They are renowned for handling complicated and difficult witchcraft matters and for cleansing<sup>420</sup> the defiled or cursed.
- (5) *Bad̄ori/bath̄onk̄oni* are those who own and use "swear".<sup>421</sup> The process of obtaining a "swear" is lengthy and expensive because the smith, who makes and sells the "swear," has spiritual powers, and will first have to prove that the customer possesses the power to operate a "swear." Several tests will be done to prove the customer's ability. If the tests are passed, the "swear" is purchased at a high price.

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<sup>417</sup>Finnegan (1963:14).

<sup>418</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1963:15).

<sup>419</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1963:14). In Biriwa Limba land, *Babare wo*, specialises in catching witches by applying the juice of the *kubar̄* tree into the eyes of a fowl, or into a banana stem (Finnegan 1963:15).

<sup>420</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1965:120).

<sup>421</sup>Cf. Finnegan (1963:15).

The NPLC opposes divination on the basis of Deuteronomy (18:10-12). It is the strong belief of the church that all believers and practitioners of divination are doomed to hell (Lev. 20:6; Rev. 21:8; 22:15).

Biblical divination like that of Limba tradition is "an attempt to secure information...by the use of physical means, about matters and events that are currently hidden or that lie in the future" (Achte-meier 1996:641). Divination was not uncommon in Biblical times. To "inquire of the Lord" (Judg. 1:1-2; 1 Sam. 10:22) through an oracle was acceptable. The official oracles used to "inquire of the Lord" were the Urim and Thummim<sup>422</sup> (1 Sam. 23:9-12; 30:7-8; Num. 27:21), and the casting of lots (Lev. 16:8; Num. 26:55-56; Acts 1:26). When "the LORD did not answer him, not by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets" (1 Sam. 28:6), King Saul resorted to necromancy by consulting the medium of Endor to bring up Samuel for him so that he could learn the outcome of the impending war with the Philistines (1 Sam. 28:7-14).

It seems that the oracular forms of Urim and Thummim and casting of lots were the only acceptable mediums for inquiry of the Lord. All other forms of divination were considered an abomination to the Lord (Deut. 18:10-12; Lev. 20:6; Ezek. 13:6-8; Rev. 21:8; 22:15).

#### 10.4. Herbalists

Limba herbalists (*bataling*) are men and women who cure the "sick using medicines made from wild plants gathered in the bush" (Opala & Boillot 1996:7). Herbalists, like diviners, are known as *bekele* because they are believed to be born with supernatural vision to

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<sup>422</sup>See De Vaux (1997:352-53) for a brief discussion on Urim and Thummim.

"see the devils in the bush that are invisible to others, communicate with them, and learn the powers of wild plants" (Opala & Boillot 1996:6. Cf. Shaw 1996:32). There is some overlap between the activities of herbalists and those of diviners, because both possess the gift of healing (Parrinder 1962:105). Herbalists are believed to have the "widest knowledge of the curative properties of herbs, plants, bark and roots" (Parrinder 1962:105). Limba herbalists like most African herbalists "dispense protective and curative medicines" (Magesa 1997:212). Limba herbalists are capable of curing minor, life-threatening, mental, and witchcraft related illnesses (Opala & Boillot 1996:6).<sup>423</sup> Herbalists "continue to serve the needs of many with their ability to deal with "unnatural" or spiritual illnesses" and through their ability to recognise the agency of witchcraft and the power of traditional symbols, they "serve to perpetuate traditional beliefs and practices" (Hackett 1991:145).

### **10.5 Conclusion**

Sacred specialists are people who are believed to have received spiritual abilities either from God or from the spirits. Because of their spiritual giftedness, sacred specialists play a vital role in the life of the individual and the community. They are human mediators between the supernatural and the people. In some cases they play a part in one's life from conception to death. They also help and guide people to maintain personal and communal religious values.

Priests, Diviners and Herbalists are the three main categories of sacred specialists in Limba religion. In the priesthood, there

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<sup>423</sup>See Opala & Boillot 1996:7-9) for a discussion of the methods Limba herbalists use to treat illnesses.

are lay and professional priests. Lay priests are usually heads of families/compounds without community status for their priesthood. Professional priests have community status and are believed to receive their call either from God or from the spirits, or have received training from an experienced priest or elder. Both kinds of priests connect people to the supernatural through sacrifice, prayers, offerings and libations. The Limba have male and female priests.

Diviners are people with outstanding spiritual eyes that enable them to see and know what transpires in the worlds of the spirits, of the dead, and of witches. Because of this capability, witches fear diviners. Diviners discover the solution to problems through inspiration or the manipulation of objects using various techniques. In addition to their role as fortune-tellers and seers, they also counsel, comfort, and give assurance and confidence to people; they expose thieves, and interpret messages from the spirits and from the dead. Although the five different kinds of Limba diviners use objects as mediums to achieve their results, they use different methods of divination.

Herbalists, as the name implies, are sacred specialists who use herbs and wild plants from the bush to make medicines for protective and curative purposes. They are believed to have an outstanding knowledge of the curative properties of herbs, plants, bark and roots. They are gifted in curing minor, life-threatening, mental, and witchcraft-related illnesses.

Limba priests, like Biblical priests are believed to be called by God, and are mediators between the people and God. In both systems, the main duties of the priests are to perform ritual functions and conduct the sacrificial services.

In the Bible, divination was also the attempt to get information about hidden or future events through the use of physical objects. The oracular methods of Urim and Thummim and the casting of lots were the only acceptable mediums for enquiring of the Lord, all other forms of divination were considered an abomination to God. Although the purpose and means of divination in Limba Religion and the Bible are similar, the two systems are not exactly the same.

Having finished our study of the fundamental concepts of Limba religion and their intersection with the Judeo-Christian tradition let us now move on to the final chapter to conclude this study.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Conclusions

#### 11.1 General

The issue of African Christians clinging tenaciously to their religious beliefs and customs, combined with their reluctance to give them up in place of Christianity and the resulting conflicts between ATR and Christianity is common to many parts of Africa. Kailing (1994:489) defined the tension between ATR and Christianity as the "African Christian problem." To a great extent, this problem has been blamed on Christian missionaries to Africa and their cultural insensitivity to African values which resulted in the transplantation of "an ethnocentric form of Christianity" (Eitel 1988:324). In other words, "Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that a Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom" (Taylor 1963:16). It did not make any attempts to answer the needs of Africans and yet enforced on its converts, a complete break from the African beliefs and culture that met those needs.

Although most foreign missions left Sierra Leone several decades ago, some African denominations still follow the practices and teachings they left behind. This is true of the NPLC, the largest Limba church in Sierra Leone, which even though it separated from the AOG four decades ago, still maintains the worldview of the AOG

as well as their preaching and teaching styles. Like their forebears, the African leadership of the NPLC have been insensitive to the views and practices of the traditionalists and are reluctant to study Limba religion in an effort to understand it or create opportunities for positive dialogue. This insensitivity and reluctance of the NPLC is largely responsible for the ongoing tension between the Church and Limba Christians.

Through a survey of published works, fieldwork consisting of consultations and interviews with experts, and my own experience as a Limba, this work has provided a systematic study of the fundamental concepts of Limba Traditional Religion, their continuity into the NPLC and the reciprocal effects between these systems in the past three decades in Sierra Leone, as well as the areas of intersection between African theology and Judeo-Christian theology.

An introductory chapter outlined, among other things, the objectives and structure of this study, the research methods, and a general outline of the study. This was followed by background information on the "Socio-History of the Limba," which identified their origin, present homeland and outside settlements, language, political administrative structures, and other socio-cultural characteristics. This background information gave us an overall understanding of our subject - the Limba people. With that in place we moved to the core of our study - a systematic account of the fundamental concepts of Limba Religion, where each topic discussed was, where possible, interspersed with the NPLC's position, and the Judeo-Christian teachings about these issues.

I will now recap our findings from chapters three through ten, the heart of this study. This will be followed by a discussion of the



causes of Limba Christian dual religiosity and tenacity, the resulting effects, and suggested recommendations for a positive dialogue and understanding between Limba Christians and the NPLC.

## **11.2 Recapitulation**

Our systematic exploration of the tenets of Limba religion, was intended to present a clear picture of the current state of the traditional Limba religious belief system and its components on account of internal and external factors that have affected, and continue to affect it. This provided the parameters in which the framework for our study was built.

To Limba traditionalists, as to most practitioners of ATR, religion is a way of life that is deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of the traditionalist, and is expressed through his/her words, actions and symbols as a means of maintaining a cordial relationship with the supernatural, the community, and the self. It is on this basis that in spite of the changes and challenges it continues to encounter, Limba Religion still thrives. Limba Religion is composed of a belief in a Supreme Being, Angels, Ancestral and Non-ancestral Spirits, religious objects, sacred places, social institutions, and sacred specialists and leaders. It also consists of the practice/observance of ceremonies and festivals, and the teaching of morals and ethical values. Limba Religion is not only sacred it is also functional.

The NPLC condemns Limba religious practices as false and believes that they are controlled by evil forces. The church therefore does not want to have anything to do with Limba Religion, like their AOG forebears; the NPLC continues to enforce on its members

a complete break from their traditional past, as a preventive measure against syncretism and nominalism (Olson 1969:192, 206).

Although Limba Religion and Christianity have different frameworks, it is justifiable to say they share affinities in terms of description and components.

Foremost in the Limba religious system is the belief in a Supreme Being known as *Kanu Masala* ("God Supreme"), who lives above in the sky. *Kanu Masala* is referred to by several other names and titles. These names and epithets of *Kanu* express various aspects of his being and the different relationships he has with the Limba. The attributes of *Kanu* portray his character and abilities as well as the qualities of his nature, and his activities show us that he is the ultimate causation of all existence who continues to influence the life and activities of humankind. On account of God's values and in appreciation of his continued provision for his creatures, especially humankind; the Limba offer worship to God as a means to stay connected and to maintain a relationship with him.

There are overwhelming similarities indicating that *Kanu* shares affinity with the Judeo-Christian God. On account of this affinity it is not unreasonable to conclude that the God of the Bible who is at work in the Judeo-Christian tradition is the same God worshipped by African traditionalists (Mbiti 1989b:61; Fashole-Luke n.d.:6).

At the first conference of African theologians in Ibadan, January 1966 on the theme, "Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs", a consensus was reached "that the God whom African religion

acknowledges is the same God as in the Bible" (Mbiti 1989b:61). This conviction was unanimously expressed by the participants in the following statement:

We believe that the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ...has been dealing with humankind at all times and in all parts of the world. It is with this conviction that we study the rich heritage of our African people and we have evidence that they know God and worship God. We recognize the radical quality of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ... This knowledge of God is not totally discontinuous with our people's previous traditional knowledge of God.<sup>424</sup>

Next in the Limba religious hierarchy are Angels. Although the Limba have clear teachings about Angels, this is not true of most other African traditionalists. Angels are spiritual beings that live with God. It is believed that they have wings and can assume human bodily form when they appear in dreams or to people in need. They can communicate in human language, and have human needs. Morally they manifest love, goodness, and kindness. Angels are the agents of God's will. Kanu transmits his messages to people through the mediatory role of angels. As God's messengers they function as caretakers, protectors, guides, guards and helpers of people. They carry those who are qualified to the place of the dead.

Although little is yet known about angelology in Limba Religion, what is known so far shares striking affinities with Judeo-Christian angelology, and there are only very few differences.

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<sup>424</sup>Mbiti (1989b:61).

In both traditions, angels are spiritual creatures that are capable of assuming human likeness. In human form, angels appear in dreams and physically to people, and they possess moral attributes. In Limba tradition, angels may be either male or female, but do not seem to have proper names. In Judeo-Christian tradition on the other hand, Angels have proper names, and only male angels are mentioned. Angels in both traditions are God's messengers or servants who carry out various functions as directed by God. They help and protect people; and serve as mediators, guides and guardians. The systems agree that Angels are not to be worshipped.

Just below the angels are the ancestors. These are the spirits of the venerated Dead who achieved their status through their outstanding contributions to the community while alive. They seek the welfare of the living and they are believed to be intermediaries between God and the living. In appreciation for their continued interest in the welfare of the living, the ancestors are venerated through sacrifices, offerings, and libations. Although the acts and rituals performed in veneration of the ancestors are often the same as those performed in worship of *Kanu Masala*, the Limba insist that they do not worship the ancestors, but suitably venerate them.

The question of whether or not the ancestors are worshipped has been raised by Africans and non-Africans alike. Sawyerr (1966:3) is one African theologian who strongly argues that ancestral veneration rites constitute worship. Contrary to this argument, a majority of scholars interested in African religion have commented that although the veneration offered to ancestors may exhibit signs of worship, in the mind of the African traditionalists who

carry out the practice, it is veneration. In that regard, "worship" has been challenged as an inaccurate label to apply to ancestor veneration, because the "Africans themselves know very well that they are not 'worshipping' the departed members of their family" (Mbiti 1989a:9). Ancestors are not objects of worship, rather they are intermediaries, and considered "a conveyor belt, a medium to reach an end, not the end itself" (King 1994:24). They are not venerated because they are dead; rather, the ancestors are venerated due to their proximity to God which gives them the ability to seek the interests of their families.

On account of Deuteronomy 18:11-12, and the position they inherited from the AOG, the NPLC condemns ancestor veneration as devilish, superstition and an abomination to God. Venerating the dead is a very ancient tradition. There is archaeological evidence that the ancient Israelites venerated their dead by depositing food near the tombs of their dead (De Vaux 1997:61). Some Christians in the West and in Africa also venerate their dead likewise. Some Christians in Sierra Leone make trips to the cemetery at least annually to go and venerate their deceased relatives. The Roman Catholic Church developed the Doctrine of *Latria* and *Dulia* to distinguish between the worship of God and the veneration of Saints. Like the Limba, Christians claim that they do not worship their dead but merely venerate them. There is no Biblical record of the heroes/heroines of faith contacting the living, in the way that Limba ancestors do.

Last in the hierarchy of the Supernatural are the Non-Ancestral Spirits. In Limba cosmology, the universe is believed to be inhabited by numerous non-ancestral spirits which have been classified into two categories - nature spirits and human spirits.

Nature spirits were created as such; human spirits are the spirits of dead humans and include ghosts, and witches.

Natural spirits may be ambivalent. Nature spirits associate with natural objects or phenomena like mountains/hills, rivers/lakes/streams, forests, caves, large trees, thunder and lightning, and storms. Personal and clan spirits also fall under the category of nature spirits, and are believed to seek the welfare of the individual and/or the community. The Limba have several of these. The acquisition of special skills and good fortunes is often attributed to good spirits. Suffering and misfortune are attributed to bad spirits. Offerings are made to nature spirits in thanksgiving, and for appeasement, in any of the places mentioned above.

Human non-ancestral spirits are usually considered to be malignant. Witches are feared because of their destructive acts. They sometimes associate with wild animals, poisonous reptiles, and nocturnal birds to perpetrate evil. The Limba go to extremes to get rid of witches. Ghosts are believed to be the spirits of wicked people who did not receive a proper burial. Offerings are not made to witches or ghosts.

NPLC members, like Limba traditionalists, believe that the universe is infested with benevolent and malevolent spirits. This belief is also evident in scripture. The church holds the traditionalists responsible for encouraging evil spirits by having personal and communal relationships with them, and for venerating them because of their powers. However, unlike Limba traditionalists, NPLC members feel that they do not need to fear malevolent spirits because, Christ has authority over evil

spirits, and has bestowed that authority on his disciples. Christian pneumatology is theocentric as opposed to Limba pneumatology which is anthropocentric.

Outside of the supernatural realm is humankind. *Kanu Masala* creates humankind from the earth with a body and breath, which is the source of life for the body. The spiritual nature of a human being gives him/her a yearning to be in constant harmony with God. Christians agree that humankind was created out of the earth with a body and a spirit, which makes the human a living being. To the Christian, humans are also created in the image of God.

Humankind shares the universe with God's other creatures. Humans, in Limba tradition, although they are superior to and more intelligent than all of God's other creature, are expected to embrace and live in harmony with the rest of creation: both animate beings and inanimate things. The Limba have a spiritual and physical connection to the earth, because it is not only their origin, but also the place where their ancestors were laid to rest. For this reason, the Limba exhibit an ecological consciousness. This same ecological consciousness is shared by Christians who believe they as the pinnacle of God's creation are called to live in harmony and with respect for all creation.

For the Limba, life is full of puzzles, none of which can be solved without the help of God. Therefore, the Limba dependence on God as the ultimate source and Sustainer of everything is evident throughout the entire lifecycle - from conception to death, and, in some instances, even after death. Throughout all of life's stages, God is a focal point. God is the source of skills and careers. He is the guide to making wise decisions and

good judgments. In all of life's challenges the Limba depend on God for sustenance and well-being. Christians exhibit a similar dependence upon God for guidance in their daily lives, in major decisions, and in times of trouble.

At the end of this life, the breath departs from the body, which is buried, and decays in the grave. The Limba have no common belief about the destiny of humankind after death, except for those who go on to become ancestors. Christianity, on the other hand, has extensive clear teachings about the eternal destiny of the soul.

As humankind tries to maintain a cordial relationship with the supernatural, other animate beings, and inanimate objects, there are rules for the guidance of the socio-religious life of the individual and of the community. These rules were established by the ancestors and the elders and any failure to follow these rules is considered an act of sin. The Limba despise sin because it is destructive to the social and spiritual well-being of the offender and his/her community. In that respect, sin is discouraged, and measures are taken to deal with it so that the offender may be forgiven and restored. There are prescribed procedures that the offender must follow. He/she must first confess to the crime, and must be prepared to undergo the rituals or offer the sacrifice required for forgiveness. When the offender is forgiven and reconciled with his/her victim, with the community, and with God, then he/she is considered to be saved.

Salvation for the Limba is a state of being in harmony with the supernatural, the community, and the self. It is deliverance from the physical and contemporary dangers that militate against the



individual or community existence. It is a state of spiritual and physical prosperity. Salvation in the African context is primarily based on contemporary realities. It is experienced in the here and now.

The Judeo-Christian tradition agrees that sin is destructive and similarly condemns it as an offence against God, but for a different reason. For the Christian the rules which guide his/her socio-religious life are given directly by God and Christ and are contained in the Bible. Christianity differs further from Limba religion in that it teaches that humans are born sinners as a result of Adam's sin, and that God took the initiative to remedy humankind's sin through the shed blood of Christ. It is through seeking forgiveness and accepting this sacrifice that one is saved. While Christianity does not completely ignore the present physical benefits of salvation, it does not limit it to this world or to the here and now, it is also an eternal experience.

In every Limba community there are sacred specialists who act as intermediaries between the supernatural and humankind. Sacred specialists are believed to be gifted with "double vision" that gives them the ability to see and reveal things in the worlds of the spirits, the dead, and witches, which are concealed from ordinary human eyes. They are also gifted with the ability to prevent the evil activities of malevolent spirits and witches, to communicate with dead, and to provide help for the physical, spiritual, and social well-being of people. The Limba have three categories of sacred specialists - Priests, Diviners and Herbalists. Priests and divination are also found within the Biblical Tradition.

In the Limba priesthood, there are lay priests and professional

priests. Lay priests are usually the heads of families/compounds and perform religious rituals within the family. Unlike lay priests, professional priests are believed to be divinely called, and some have undergone rigorous training. The Limba have male and female priests. Both lay and professional priests serve as intermediaries, connecting people to the supernatural through sacrifice, prayers, offerings and libations. Hebrew priests similarly served as mediators between the people and God by performing ritual functions and conducting sacrifices.

Diviners specialise in the solving of problems through inspiration or the manipulation of objects using various techniques to obtain information about future or hidden events. Their role entails fortune-telling, counseling, providing comfort, and giving people assurance and confidence; exposing thieves, and interpreting messages from the spirits and from the dead. Although the five different kinds of Limba diviners use objects as mediums to achieve their results, each category employs its own methods of divination. In a similar fashion, people in Biblical times practiced divination to obtain information through the use of physical objects. The Bible approves only two methods of divination - the use of Urim and Thummim, and the casting of lots. All other forms of divination are considered an abomination to God.

Herbalists are the traditional doctors of the community. They are gifted with the ability of knowing and providing protective and curative medicines from herbs and wild plants found in the bush. They cure a variety of illnesses ranging from minor to life-threatening illnesses, including mental and witchcraft related ailments. The Judeo-Christian tradition does not generally attach a spiritual significance to herbalists.

In general, through the study of the fundamental concepts of Limba traditional religion, this work has given us an understanding of the values of Limba religion, and their intersection with the Judeo-Christian tradition, which has helped us to discover the similarities and divergences between the two traditions.

We shall now look specifically at the causes of the religious duality of the Limba Christians, the NPLC responses, and the reciprocal effects on both traditions. Some of the findings stated earlier in this segment, will be reiterated, and further information will be provided through the responses of the interviews to Research Questions 6-8.<sup>425</sup>

### **11.3 Causes and Effects**

As stated earlier, my motivation in this study was to gain an understanding of Limba religion, and of the tenacious loyalty to Limba traditional beliefs and practices exhibited by Limba Christians who attend the NPLC, and to answer the following questions: "What is the power behind Limba religion that makes Limba Christians so reluctant to relinquish it for Christianity?" "What is lacking in Christianity that prevents Limba Christians from making a full commitment?" "What is so evil about Limba traditional practices that the NPLC does not want anything to do with them?"

#### *11.3.1 Reasons for Limba Christians dual religiosity and tenacity*

Earlier, in describing Limba religion, we discovered that religion and culture are intertwined. The word *Dina* ("religion") also

means culture. In other words, for the Limba, religion is culture, and culture is religion. Religion is a way of life. There is no sharp dividing line between religion and culture. More importantly, the Limba believe that their religion and their culture "originated from God,"<sup>426</sup> and was and is maintained by the ancestors. Traditional religion is their heritage, and the "Christians who brought their religion also met it...How can we leave it for something that we were not born into?"<sup>427</sup> For these reasons, to completely give up their culture for another culture, as the church requires, seems a very difficult task for Limba Christians. To give up their God given heritage in place of a foreign culture is tantamount to losing their entire heritage, identity, and place, both spiritually and physically within their religio-cultural community. It also means leaving "certainty for uncertainty."<sup>428</sup>

Since the advent of Christianity into Sierra Leone, it has continued to suffer from the misconception that it is a 'white man's religion' (Alie 1990:110) because it was brought in our time by Caucasian missionaries. For a majority of Limba Christians, even several decades after the white man has left, Christianity is still considered the "white man's religion"<sup>429</sup> that brought "new teachings and a new way of life" and attempted to "deliberately destroy" Limba culture.<sup>430</sup> Like in most Sierra Leonean cultures (Alie 1990:110), successive missionaries to the Limba attacked African culture, and required a complete abandonment of African culture and practices (Olson 1969:192). There are still a few surviving members in most Limba communities, who can attest to AOG

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<sup>425</sup>See Research Questions 6-8 on page 21 above.

<sup>426</sup>Bapaloh Samura (Interviewed July 2002: Kamakwie Town).

<sup>427</sup>Bapaloh Samura (Interviewed July 2002: Kamakwie Town).

<sup>428</sup>Momodu Turay (Interviewed July 2002: Kamabai Town).

<sup>429</sup>Yelie Conteh (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>430</sup>Momodu Turay (Interviewed July 2002: Kamabai Town). Cf. Alie (1990:110).

insensitivity to Limba culture from the late 1940s to the mid 1960s.

At present, Limba Christians are disappointed with the NPLC for continuing the hostile attitude towards traditional practices the church inherited from the AOG. As we discussed earlier,<sup>431</sup> the NPLC continues the tradition of destroying by fire the charms possessed by Limba Christians. For the Limba Christians, charms are tangible, physical protection against evil forces, and mischievous people. The use of charms means a lot to the traditionalists because they foster hope and security. The lack of religious charms in Christianity makes it less attractive to the Limba Christian.

The NPLC wants Limba Christians to abandon their past completely and replace it with Western religio-cultural practices, but the church lacks the expertise to go about the process due to theological and cultural deficiencies of the church's leadership. As an interviewee puts it: "...our failure to get the undivided attention of the traditionalist is that we are not theologically trained enough to relate the Bible appropriately. Or if we have the theological training to do the job, we do not have any clue about Limba traditional religious beliefs."<sup>432</sup>

The NPLC clergy introduced the use of western-styled preaching vestments for themselves and the choristers to portray the image of a Western type church.<sup>433</sup> The scripture is read in English and the message is preached in Krio, the common parlance of Sierra Leone. This process makes the Limba Christians feel that the

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<sup>431</sup>See page 16 above.

<sup>432</sup>Rev Macfoday Kamara (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown).

church is for those who understand English and Krio. As a majority of Limba Christians are non-literate, they feel marginalised, left out and unwelcome in the church.

For Limba Christians "Christianity seems strange and contradictory."<sup>434</sup> The traditionalists find it very difficult to accept certain fundamental teachings of the church. For example, they say "that Jesus was offered by God as a sacrifice for our sin. Then the very missionaries were the ones who were condemning the olden practice of human sacrifice. If human sacrifice is ungodly, why did God kill his son for us?"<sup>435</sup> The NPLC has still not been able to come up with an appropriate answer to this question. However, like their forebears the AOG, the church continues to condemn traditional sacrifices (Olson 1969:192) the core of Limba religious worship. Again the absence of sacrifice and other essential traditional rituals in the NPLC is another factor that makes the church of Christ less attractive, fulfilling, and void to the traditionalists.

NPLC teaching about the mediatory role of Jesus does not sit well with the traditionalists. The question continues to be asked "How could Jesus be the only mediator for every race on earth?"<sup>436</sup> For the traditionalists, Jesus is not part of their culture and does not know them. The ancestors are their mediators because they are still part of their community, and know them very well.

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<sup>433</sup>See pages 9 & 10 above.

<sup>434</sup>Yelie Conteh (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>435</sup>Yelie Conteh (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

<sup>436</sup>Yelie Conteh (Interviewed June 2002: Freetown).

We shall now analyse our findings for a general discussion:

*(1) The Limba believe that their religion is inherited from God and cannot be replaced.*

The claim that traditional religion is inherited from God, and cannot be parted with or replaced, is prevalent in ATR (Mbiti 1989a:1-2; Mulago 1991:127; Magesa 1997:4-14). For the African, to be without his/her religion "amounts to self-excommunication from the entire life of society" (Mbiti 1989a:2). Africans do not know how to exist without their religion, it is a way of life that African Christians, cannot part with, which is why they "do not always adhere to religious and ritual demands that are formulated and expressed by the leaders of their churches" (Magesa 1997:7).

*(2) Christianity is viewed as being imperialistic and culturally insensitive.*

The complaint that Christianity is a white man's religion abounds in Africa (Taylor 1963:14, 16; Mbiti 1989a:212; Mofokeng 1988:34). Even now "that the age of foreign missions in Africa" (Mbiti 1971:1) is over, Christianity is still "stigmatised throughout Africa as the white man's religion" (France 1979:34). Kato (1980:83)<sup>437</sup> has argued that "although missionaries from Europe and North America brought the gospel to Black Africa in modern times, they are not the first messengers of the gospel to our continent." He tried to prove that the advent of the gospel in Africa predates the coming of western missionaries, by tracing the history of Christianity in Africa to its Biblical roots, citing Africa's

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<sup>437</sup>See Mbiti (1986:1-2) also for a discussion on the advent of the gospel before

relationship with Palestine in OT times and Acts 13:1 in the NT. Therefore, Kato argued, "to claim that Christianity is a white man's religion only because white missionaries brought the gospel two hundred years ago is not historically accurate" (1980:35). As much as Kato's argument is solid, it does not address the situation of the Limba Christians in the NPLC, or of other African Christians who attend churches where indigenous leaders are still "espousing the same views and philosophy that the missionaries held" (Kailing 1994:492). Like the Limba traditionalists situation, the destruction of traditional objects by fire in other parts of Africa emanated from the white man.<sup>438</sup> For Limba Christians the NPLC under its current leadership "is the same car just a different driver."<sup>439</sup> This kind of cultural insensitivity is also displayed in the production of religious pictures, films and film-strips that are found almost everywhere in Africa portraying Jesus as a white man, from a white mother, and as the leader of white disciples.<sup>440</sup>

*(3) The NPLC exhibits a high level of Ecclesiological conformity.*

Like the NPLC, there are other African independent churches whose clergy and church officials have adopted the use of Western liturgical vestments, songs, music and musical instruments.<sup>441</sup> The African Christians attending these churches feel marginalised, and have constantly stigmatised the church for painstakingly aping the mannerisms of the western culture. Healthy interaction has resulted between the church and African Christians, in churches that have adopted "some aspects of traditional religion like the

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missionaries.

<sup>438</sup>Awolalu (191:113).

<sup>439</sup>Paul Mansaray (Telephone interview April 2004).

<sup>440</sup>Taylor (1963:13).

<sup>441</sup>Cf. Taylor (1963:15).



use of extempore prayer, drumming, singing, and dancing during worship.

*(4) Christianity is seen as being Novel and inadequate.*

As we have proven through this study, African theology shares affinity with Christian/Biblical theology in many areas. Although the divergences are few, they touch on the major teachings of the two systems. For Limba Christians, the Christian teaching about the death of Christ as a sacrifice for the propitiation of sin is strange because missionaries have condemned human sacrifice as sinful and inhumane. If human sacrifice has been condemned by the God, how then can he, as a loving and faithful God, change his mind and become a savage by offering his own son as sacrifice? For Limba Christians the teaching about Jesus' death as a sacrifice seems hypocritical.

This problem is not, however, confined to African Christians. Even in the west, many Christians have been challenging the rationale about the sacrificial death of Christ. Many western Christians no longer believe that a loving God could have offered his son as sacrifice for the sin of humankind. African Christians are not alone, "no people, ancient or modern, have found the whole of Christian thought congenial, or absorbed it painlessly into their own culture" (Fashole-Luke n.d.: 2).

As mentioned above, another aspect of Christian teachings that the Africans consider strange is the mediatory role of Christ. In general, Africans believe that their ancestors are able to act as mediators between them and God, because they know them and are part of their community. Christ, however, is seen as a stranger;

and as such, cannot serve as a mediator for people he did not know.

Most Africans feel that Christianity does not cater for the African spiritual appetite. The absence of protective charms and important African rituals in the church creates a spiritual void for the African.

### *11.3.2 The effects of Limba religion on the NPLC*

On a positive note, the religious devotion, and numerical success of the NPLC have been attributed to the traditional heritage of the Limba people. The heritage in question is the concept of religion being "a way of life" that all Limba were brought up into as a vital part of their culture.<sup>442</sup> Without that heritage, it is believed that the NPLC would not be renowned as one of the most religious groups, and the fastest growing ethnic church in Sierra Leone. Religious devotion is important in the NPLC. The doors of all their churches are opened for services at least six days a week. Unlike a majority of the Christian groups in Sierra Leone, for NPLC members, religion is not a matter of convenience, nor is it confined to Sunday. Religion plays a vital role in the daily lives of NPLC members. This religious devotion has been largely attributed to their traditional upbringing.

In their attempts to help recognise this tendency, several traditional ceremonies, like the naming and out-dooring of children, and the fortieth day funeral observance, have been adopted and modified by the church to portray Christian values.

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<sup>442</sup>See pages 59-50 above.

On a negative note, the youths/young adults are complaining that even these efforts show that the NPLC is compromising with traditional values, which are affecting the church nationally. Some evangelical denominations now consider the NPLC as "lost souls searching for salvation" because of their adoption of traditional values into their churches.<sup>443</sup>

### *11.3.3 The effects of Christianity on Limba religion*

Positively, credit should be given to the missionaries for their stance against the Limba traditionalists' inhumane practice of child sacrifice. "It was the missionaries who first condemned this outrageous act before the government stepped in."<sup>444</sup>

The negative effects of the NPLC on Limba traditional religion need not be overemphasised. There is no doubt that factors such as missionary policies or revolutionary ideologies that are still being espoused in Africa have taken their toll on traditional religions and continue to do so "by questioning their basic premises or outlawing certain practices" (Hackett 1991:146).

Throughout this study, we have seen the NPLC's position and reaction to traditional values. The primary cause for the church's negative attitude towards Limba Religion is, as noted earlier, to guard against syncretism and nominalism among its membership. A majority of the NPLC members do not think it is right to mix elements of traditional beliefs into Christianity because Limba religion is considered "crude, uncouth and

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<sup>443</sup>Hamusa Kargbo (Interviewed August 2002: Freetown). See also page 11 above.

<sup>444</sup>Sieh Sesay (Interviewed July 2002: Binkolo Town).

devilish,"<sup>445</sup> and any such incorporation would alter the church's spirituality. Therefore, "anything that would dilute or substantially alter the basic structures of Christianity" is strongly combated (Schreiter 1985:144). The NPLC continues to "take a rigid line on the question of any cultural accommodation whatsoever" (Schreiter 1985:145). This zero tolerance attitude has affected Limba religion considerably. Homes have been divided as older people stick to their past while younger people embrace Christianity as their new found way of life. The negative attacks on traditional values are destroying the foundation of the culture and the young Limba are being deprived of their cultural heritage.

#### **11.4 Recommendations**

In general, the ongoing discussions about the relationship between African Christianity and the gospel suggest "that there is still work to do in the area of relating the Christian message to African cultures" (Tienou 2001:161). It has been noted that Africa has enough tools and expertise to evolve a viable form of Christianity for African Christian (Mbiti 1977:30-31). However, this task is complicated by the lack of a clear consensus among African theologians/religionists/missiologists as to the appropriate method/approach of relating the gospel to the African Christian situation. "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

Rogers (1994) using the article of Young (1987) as his point of departure, categorised African theologians into two main groups based on the differences in their hermeneutical perspectives. The first group, which Rogers (1994:259) calls the "Old Guard," is

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<sup>445</sup>Yaluba Kargbo (Interviewed July 2002: Binkolo Town).

"somewhat at variance on the degree to which dialogue between Christianity and traditional religion is useful." The second group, which he calls the "New Guard," does not have such dialogue as a major theme on their theological agenda" (Rogers 1994:259). Analysing Mbiti's theological constructs for African theology and Kato's critique of those constructs, Eitel (1988) illustrated the contextualisation methods of Mbiti and Kato by evaluating and contrasting their thoughts, and concluded that:

African theology, as formulated by Mbiti, is context dominant and lends itself to the capricious whims of a syncretistic amalgamation of African traditional religions and Christianity that is neither African nor Christian. Kato, however, approached culture with the absolute standard of priori truth. His theocentric emphasis requires the Bible to dominate the contextualisation process. Scripture critiques culture and never the reverse (1988:334).

The debate lingers on not only in academic circles, but also in ecumenical platforms.

The NPLC is in a very similar situation. Leaders and members of the church have varying opinions on how to relate to the Limba Christian situation. On one hand, some leaders suggest a compromise in which some aspects of traditional spirituality would be included in the church's liturgy. On the other hand, a majority do not want anything to do with traditional practices. As of now, the churches in the hinterland and Freetown have no unanimous strategy for a reconciliatory end to the ongoing problem. In fact, they are only beginning to raise the discussion.

I will now make a few general recommendations. Although they may not be new in African theological circles,<sup>446</sup> in the context of the Limba situation, they may prove to be helpful guides to map out possible strategies for mutual understanding between Limba Christians and the NPLC:

- (1) On the basis that we can only speak about what we do know, the clergy and the elders of the NPLC must find ways and means to educate themselves about traditional values, and the methods of relating the Bible to these values as we have tried to do in this study.
- (2) As the church is already aware of the concerns of Limba Christians, its leaders should now be willing to sit and assess their method of approach to Limba religion and their treatment of Limba Christians.
- (3) The church must be willing to establish a dialogue with Limba Christians. The NPLC and traditionalists must be able to sit together and work out their differences. In order for this dialogue to be effective each side must be willing to listen to the other's ideas, and volunteer their own.

### **11.5 Conclusion**

We have achieved the objective of this study by providing, for the first time, a comprehensive and systematic study of Limba religious beliefs, practices and teachings. We were able to

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<sup>446</sup>For some of the published suggested guidelines for dialogue between Christianity and ATR, see Mbiti (1970b; 1971; 1977; Kailing 1994; Tienou 2001).

discuss the persistence of these issues in the NPLC, and to compare and contrast them with NPLC theology and Judeo-Christian traditions and teachings. All these we have already recounted in this chapter. We were also able to discuss the reasons why Limba Christians are reluctant to give up their religious heritage in place of Christianity, and the church's reaction to the stance of these Limba Christians. A few suggestions were provided as guidelines to foster better relationship between the Limba Christians and the NPLC.

Although the greatest divergences between Limba religion and Christianity hinge on the core teachings of each system (for example, ancestral veneration, sacrifice and rituals, and objects of worship for the traditionalists, and for Christians, the atoning death of Christ as the only source of salvation) both of these systems are based on faith and mystery. Because of these religious qualities, there are beliefs and practices in each of these systems that deny human logic and understanding. That God allowed his son to die for the sins of the world is a mystery that Christians believe and accept by faith. Similarly, the ATR belief in the power of sacrifice is a mystery that the practitioners accept by faith.

## APPENDIX A

### The National Pentecostal Limba Church (Formerly AOG)

## STATEMENT OF FAITH

### Doctrinal Teachings

The Bible is our all-sufficient rule for faith and practice. This Statement of Fundamental Truths is intended simply as a basis of fellowship among us (i.e., that we all speak the same thing, 1 Corinthians 1:10; Acts 2:42). The phraseology employed in this statement is not inspired or contended for, but the truth set forth is held to be essential to a full-gospel ministry. No claim is made that it contains all biblical truth, only that it covers our need as to these fundamental doctrines.

#### 1. The Scriptures Inspired

The Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to humankind, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:21).

#### 2. The One True God

The one true God has revealed himself as the eternally self-existent 'I AM,' the Creator of heaven and earth and the Redeemer of humankind. He has further revealed himself as embodying the principles of relationship and association as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10, 11; Matthew 28:19; Luke 3:22).

#### *THE ADORABLE GODHEAD*

##### (a) Terms Defined

The terms trinity and persons, as related to the Godhead, while not found in the Scriptures, are words in harmony with Scripture, whereby we may convey to others our immediate understanding of the doctrine of Christ respecting the Being of God, as distinguished from gods many and lords many. We therefore may speak with propriety of the Lord our God, who is One Lord, as a Trinity or as one Being of three persons, and still be absolutely scriptural (examples, Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14; John 14:16,17).

##### (b) Distinction and Relationship in the Godhead

Christ taught a distinction of persons in the Godhead which He expressed in specific terms of relationship, as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but that this distinction and relationship, as to its mode is inscrutable and incomprehensible, because unexplained (Luke 1:35; 1 Corinthians 1:24; Matthew 11:25-27; 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 1:3, 4).

##### (c) Unity of the One Being of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

Accordingly, therefore, there is that in the Father which constitutes Him the Father and not the Son; there is that in the Son which constitutes Him the Son and not the Father; and there is that in the Holy Ghost which constitutes Him the Holy Ghost and not either the Father or the Son. Wherefore the Father is the Begetter; the Son is the Begotten; and the Holy Ghost is the One proceeding from the Father and the Son. Therefore, because these three persons in the Godhead are in a state of unity, there is but one Lord God Almighty and His name one (John 1:18; 15:26; 17:11,21; Zechariah 14:9).

##### (d) Identity and Cooperation in the Godhead

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are never identical as to person, nor confused as to relation; nor divided in respect to the Godhead; nor opposed as to cooperation. The Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son as to relationship. The Son is with the Father and the Father is with the Son, as to fellowship. The Father is not from the Son, but the Son is from the Father, as to authority. The Holy Ghost is from the Father and the Son proceeding, as to nature, relationship, cooperation and authority. Hence no person in the Godhead either exists or works separately or independently of the others (John 5:17-30, 32, 37; 8:17, 18).

##### (e) The Title, Lord Jesus Christ

The appellation Lord Jesus Christ is a proper name. It is never applied in the New Testament either to the Father or to the Holy Ghost. It therefore belongs exclusively to the Son of God (Romans 1:1-3, 7; 2 John 3).

##### (f) The Lord Jesus Christ, God with us

The Lord Jesus Christ, as to His divine and eternal nature, is the proper and only Begotten of the Father, but as to His human nature. He is the proper Son of Man. He is, therefore, acknowledged to be both God and man; who because He is God and man, is Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23; 1 John 4:2, 10, 14; Revelation 1:13, 17).

##### (g) The Title, Son of God

Since the name Immanuel embraces both God and man, in the one person, our Lord Jesus Christ, it follows that the title Son of God describes His proper deity, and the title Son of Man, His proper humanity. Therefore, the title Son of God belongs to the order of eternity, and the title Son of Man to the order of time (Matthew 1:21-23; 2 John 3; 1



John 3:8; Hebrews 7:3; 1:1-13).

(h) **Transgression of the Doctrine of Christ**

Wherefore, it is a transgression of the doctrine of Christ to say that Jesus Christ derived the title Son of God solely from the fact of the Incarnation, or because of His relation to the economy of redemption. Therefore, to deny that the Father is a real and eternal Father, and that the Son is a real and eternal Son, is a denial of the distinction and relationship in the Being of God; a denial of the Father and the Son; and a displacement of the truth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (2 John 9; John 1:1,2,14,18,29,49; 1 John 2:22,23; 4:1-5; Hebrews 12:2).

(i) **Exaltation of Jesus Christ as Lord**

The Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, having by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, angels and principalities and powers having been made subject unto Him. And having been made both Lord and Christ, He sent the Holy Ghost that we, in the name of Jesus, might bow our knees and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father until the end, when the Son shall become subject to the Father that God may be all in all (Hebrews 1:3; 1 Peter 3:22; Acts 2:32-36; Romans 14:11; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

(j) **Equal Honor to the Father and to the Son**

Wherefore, since the Father has delivered all judgment unto the Son, it is not only the express duty of all in heaven and on earth to bow the knee, but it is an unspeakable joy in the Holy Ghost to ascribe unto the Son all the attributes of deity, and to give Him all the honor and the glory contained in all the names and titles of the Godhead except those which express relationship (see paragraphs b, c, and d), and thus honor the Son even as we honor the Father (John 5:22,23; 1 Peter 1:8; Revelation 5:6-14; Philippians 2:8,9; Revelation 7:9,10; 4:8-11).

**3. The Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ**

The Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. The Scriptures declare:

- (a) His virgin birth (Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:31, 35).
- (b) His sinless life (Hebrews 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22).
- (c) His miracles (Acts 2:22; 10:38).
- (d) His substitutionary work on the cross (1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
- (e) His bodily resurrection from the dead (Matthew 28:6; Luke 24:39; 1 Corinthians 15:4).
- (f) His exaltation to the right hand of God (Acts 1:9, 11; 2:33; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:3).

**4. The Fall of Man**

Man was created good and upright; for God said, .Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. However, man by voluntary transgression fell and thereby incurred not only physical death but also spiritual death, which is separation from God (Genesis 1:26,27; 2:17; 3:6; Romans 5:12-19).

**5. The Salvation of Man**

Humankind's only hope of redemption is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

(a) **Conditions to Salvation**

Salvation is received through repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, being justified by grace through faith, humankind becomes an heir of God according to the hope of eternal life (Luke 24:47; John 3:3; Romans 10:13-15; Ephesians 2:8; Titus 2:11; 3:5-7).

(b) **The Evidences of Salvation**

The inward evidence of salvation is the direct witness of the Spirit (Romans 8:16). The outward evidence to all men is a life of righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24; Titus 2:12).

**6. The Ordinances of the Church**

(a) **Baptism in Water**

The ordinance of baptism by immersion is commanded in the Scriptures. All who repent and believe on Christ as Saviour and Lord are to be baptized. Thus they declare to the world that they have died with Christ and that they also have been raised with Him to walk in newness of life (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 10:47-48; Romans 6:4).

(b) **Holy Communion**

The Lord's Supper, consisting of the elements bread and the fruit of the vine is the symbol expressing our sharing the divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:4); a memorial of His suffering and death (1 Corinthians 11:26); and a prophecy of His second coming (1 Corinthians 11:26); and is enjoined on all believers .till He come!

**7. Sanctification**

Sanctification is an act of separation from that which is evil, and of dedication unto God (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:12). Scriptures teach a life of .holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14). By the power of the Holy Ghost we are able to obey the command: .Be ye holy, for I am holy. (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Sanctification is realized in the believer by recognizing his identification with Christ in His death and resurrection, and by faith reckoning daily upon the fact of that union, and by offering every faculty continually to the dominion of the Holy Spirit (Romans 6:1-11,13; 8:1,2,13; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 2:12,13; 1 Peter 1:5).

**8. The Church and Its Mission**

The Church is the body of Christ, the habitation of God through the Spirit, with divine appointments for the fulfillment of her great commission. Each believer, born of the Spirit, is an integral part of the general assembly and church of

the firstborn, which are written in heaven (Ephesians 1:22,23; 2:22; Hebrews 12:23).

Since God's purpose concerning man is to seek and to save that which is lost, to be worshiped by humankind, and to build a body of believers in the image of His Son, the priority reason-for-being of the National Pentecostal Limba Church as part of the Church is:

- a. To be an agency of God for evangelizing the world (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16).
- b. To be a corporate body in which man may worship God (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- c. To be a channel of God's purpose to build a body of saints being perfected in the image of His Son (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 12:28; 14:12).

#### **9. The Ministry**

A divinely called and scripturally ordained ministry has been provided by our Lord for the threefold purpose of leading the Church in: (1) evangelization of the world (Mark 16:15-20), (2) worship of God (John 4:23-24), and (3) building a body of saints being perfected in the image of His Son (Ephesians 4:11, 16).

#### **10. Divine Healing**

Divine healing is an integral part of the gospel. Deliverance from sickness is provided for in the Atonement, and is the privilege of all believers (Isaiah 53:4,5; Matthew 8:16,17; James 5:14-16).

#### **11. The Blessed Hope**

The resurrection of those who have fallen asleep in Christ and their translation together with those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord is the imminent and blessed hope of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17; Romans 8:23; Titus 2:13; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

#### **12. The Millennial Reign of Christ**

The second coming of Christ includes the rapture of the saints, which is our blessed hope, followed by the visible return of Christ with His saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years (Zechariah 14:5; Matthew 24:27, 30; Revelation 1:7; 19:11-14; 20:1-6). This millennial reign will bring the salvation of national Israel (Ezekiel 37:21-22; Zephaniah 3:19-20; Romans 11:26-27) and the establishment of universal peace (Isaiah 11:6-9; Psalm 72:3-8; Micah 4:3-4).

#### **13. The Final Judgment**

There will be a final judgment in which the wicked dead will be raised and judged according to their works. Whosoever is not found written in the Book of Life, together with the devil and his angels, the beast and the false prophet, will be consigned to everlasting punishment in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:43-48; Revelation 19:20; 20:11-15; 21:8).

#### **14. The New Heavens and the New Earth**

.We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21-22).

## APPENDIX B

**Profile of Interviewees and consultants****Freetown**

Kabba Bangura Dialect: Thonko

Co-author: Limba Textbook and Reader for Secondary Schools, series 1-3; member: Limba Literacy Committee, Freetown.

Setigie Conteh Dialect: Biriwa

*Traditionalist*

Yelie Conteh Dialect: Safroko

*Traditionalist*

Rev. Dantheke-Kanu Dialect: Biriwa

Pastor NPLC; Translator: Limba Literacy Committee, Freetown.

Pastor David B. Kallon Dialect: Biriwa

Asst. Pastor: NPLC; Supervisor: Limba Literacy Committee, Freetown.

Pa Dauda Kamara Dialect: Biriwa

Diviner/Herbalist

Rev. MacFoday Kamara Dialect: Sonko/Biriwa

Assoc. Pastor: African-American Baptist Church, Freetown; co-author: Source Book for Sierra Leonean Languages.

Brima Kargbo Dialect: Thonko  
 College student: Limba Studies

Lamin H. Kargbo Dialect: Thonko  
 Language Programme Co-ordinator: The Institute for Sierra Leonean  
 Languages, Freetown

Hamusa Kargbo Dialect: Biriwa  
 Church Elder: NPLC; member: Limba Literacy Committee, Freetown

Madam Kumba Koroma Dialect: Safroko  
 Traditionalist/Limba Christian

Pastor Samuel G. Koroma Dialect: Safroko  
 Assistant Pastor: NPLC

Rev. T. A. Koroma Dialect: Safroko  
 General Superintendent: NPLC

Paul Mansaray Dialect: Wara Wara  
 Traditionalist/Limba Christian

Santigie Nyankuthęgbę Dialect: Sella  
 Diviner/Herbalist

Rev. S. S. Pahlor Dialect: Sella  
 Pastor: NPLC

Bagbon Samura Dialect: Sella  
 Traditionalist

Alie M. Sesay Dialect: Thonko

Church Elder: NPLC; member: Limba Literacy Committee, Freetown

Pa Alimamy Sesay

Section Chief, Freetown West

Santigie Sesay Dialect: Thonko

College student: Limba Studies

Alex Turay Dialect: Thonko

Co-author: Limba Textbook and Reader for Secondary Schools, series 1-3.

Ya Alimamy Turay

Female Chief, Freetown East

Sinne Thoronka Dialect: Sella

Traditionalist

**Binkolo Town: Safroko Chiefdom**

*Traditionalists:* Dottey Conteh, Dura Conteh, Mbompa Turay, Saray

Kamara and Yaluba Kargbo

*Limba Christian:* Pahlor Conteh

*Christian:* Sieh Sesay

**Kamabai Town: Biriwa Chiefdom**

*All Traditionalists:* Bakor Conteh, Bombolai koroma, kalawa Conteh, Molai Sesay, Saleme Kargbo, Momodu Turay and Alimamy Kamara

**Bafodea Town: Wara Wara Bafodea Chiefdom**

*All Traditionalists:*

Alimamy Mansaray, Yambah Mansaray, Banoi Kamara, Kulunkeh Sesay, Momdu kamara, Borboh Mansaray and Santigie Mansaray.

**Kamakwie Town: Sella Chiefdom**

*Traditionalists:* Sinneh Turay, Bapaloh Samura, Pa Alimamay Sumaila Kamara, Mucosay Conteh, Pa Momodu Luseni and Kandeh Samura  
*Limba Christian:* Kewulay Sesay.

**Madina Town: Thonko Chiefdom**

*Traditionalists:* Kutuyan Bangura, Abu Dumbuya, Siah Conteh, Sama Dumbuya, Sorie Sesay and Maco Conteh

*Limba Christian:* Kawuta Bangura.

Hamidu Mansaray      Dialect: Wara Wara

Seattle Washington

Former Research Assistant to Prof. Simeon Ottenberg.

**CONSULTANTS**

Professor Ruth Finnegan: Open University, England.

Professor Simon Ottenberg: Seattle University, Washington state, USA.

Officials of the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

## APPENDIX C

Sierra Leone in its setting in West Africa

[Reproduced from Fyle 1981]



APPENDIX D

Limba current traditional homeland in Sierra Leone  
 [Modified from Alie 1990]





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