



A STUDY ON THE CHURCH AS GOD'S FAMILY IN RELATION TO
THE CHEWA TRADITIONAL PRACTICE OF *NYAU* IN CENTRAL MALAWI

BY

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DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

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“Seek God in all things and you will find God in all things”

(St. Vincent Pallotti quoted in SAC 1988:8)¹

I acknowledge being influenced by the above quote from St Vincent Pallotti, the founder of the Union of the Catholic Apostolate including the subsequent Society of the Catholic Apostolate of which I am a member. The quote accompanies me in my spiritual search for meaning in life. I am pleased that this search had now taken me back home to reflect on my own tradition. At this point, I wish to thank all those who in various ways have helped and supported me during the writing of this dissertation.

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¹ SAC (*Societa Dell’Apostolato Cattolico*. Society of the Catholic Apostolate).

ABSTRACT.

This dissertation seeks to explore the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of itself as the Family of God² in Africa taken after the example of a traditional African understanding of family. The study highlights the nature of the traditional African family as a spiritual reality where the members are said to live their family life under spiritual influence – the acknowledgment of God and communion with the ancestors in their day-to-day life experience. Furthermore, the study values the nature of *Nyau* in placating the ancestors as a sacred phenomenon that ushers the Chewa people into the sacred presence of God. This understanding of *Nyau* and the traditional Africa family of the Chewa people will be studied comparatively with the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of God's family as meaning a people gathered in the presence of God and in communion with the saints.

The dissertation reflects first on how *Nyau* can be considered as fundamental to the Chewa people's understanding of themselves as God's family. Second, the dissertation reflects on how *Nyau* can be said to influence the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of the Chewa people's experience of God. Thirdly, the dissertation reflects on how the traditional practice of *Nyau* can be seen as a Christian practice. And finally, the dissertation argues that the Roman Catholic Church, in being the Family of God, is indeed in the same Family of God together with *Nyau*. This understanding of the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and *Nyau* has been explored against the background of conflicting relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau*.

It has been acknowledged that the Roman Catholic Church has moved from an era influenced, in its negative position on *Nyau*, by the scientific theory of evolution, the impact of western civilization and the theological maxim that no salvation can be found outside the Roman Catholic Church. The dissertation notes that the influence of western civilization on the Roman Catholic Church has not stopped – i.e. the Roman Catholic Church's new evangelization is using still using the western form of civilization. The prevalence of western civilization has bearing on Roman Catholic Church's efforts on inculturation and mission in Africa and still stands a challenge to dialogue between *Nyau* and the Roman Catholic Church in our contemporary time. However, the dissertation holds that the traditional practice of *Nyau* cannot be treated as an isolated item in the well-being of the Chewa converts to Catholicism in Central Malawi.

Key terms: *God's Family, Nyau, Inculturation, Roman Catholic Church, Christianity*

² "The Catholic Church, the Family of God in pilgrimage in Africa" (LM - preface page 2).

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“Those who join Nyau...shall be stopped from receiving sacraments.” (SSC 2006:57)³

INTRODUCTION

Central Malawi is largely occupied by the Chewa people who belong to a group of Bantu-speaking tribes of Central and Southern Africa. They are believed to have occupied Central and Southern Malawi in the period between 15th and the 16th Century AD having migrated from the Katanga area of the present day Democratic Republic of Congo (Phiri 1997: 22-23). In Central Malawi, the Chewa people are presently found in the districts of Lilongwe, Dowa, Kasungu, Nkhotakota, Mchinji and Dedza (Makumbi 1999: 8).

The traditional beliefs and practices of the Chewa people are very much similar to those of other Bantu tribes. The Chewa people are a matrilineal society⁴ and they express themselves in a life style that is social, political and religious (Phiri 1997:22-23). They practice subsistence farming and hunting; growing crops such as maize from which their staple food *Nsima*⁵ is made and that their beliefs, customs and traditions centre on farming and hunting (Pachai 1973:3-9).

As farmers, the Chewa people understand life as being in cycles like that of the rain season in a year. Fertility and rain are the essential and symbolic elements of life in the Chewa traditions which must be handled carefully with observances of the taboos, rituals, prayers, sacrifices, sacred dances, liturgies, spirit mediumship and harmonious relationships between people; the living and the living dead; between the people and God, between the people and creation at large (Boucher 2012:9).

The Chewa people believe in the existence of the Supreme Spirit that is responsible for creation, thus bringing creation into existence and sustaining it. Johan van Breugel (2001) testifies that the Chewa people believe that all the good fortune comes from relating with the supreme spirit whom they have given attributes such as *Namalenga or Mlengi* (Creator), *Chauta* (Big bow), *Mphambe* (Almighty powerful and Rain giver), *Leza or Mlezi* (Care taker), *Matsakamula* (the Rain giver), and *Chisumphu* (Rain Maker), *N'theradi* (almighty one), *Chanjiri* or *Nanjiri* (Strong one) (van Breugel 2001: 25-31). James Amanze (2002) points out that the western missionaries identified the God the Chewa worship as the same One God of the Hebrew Bible although there were some noted differences with the Chewa people in the method of approaching God (2002:133).

³ *Synod Steering Committee* for the Lilongwe Mini-Synod Document (SSC)

⁴ *Mitundu ya Mfumu ya kwamayi* (Paas 2010: 675) meaning the tribes that practice chieftainship from the mother side in a family. Dominance is on the mother side in a marriage relationship. Extensive explanation is found on (Aquila 1994:36)

⁵ *Nsima* is “Stiff maize Porridge” (Paas 2010:299)

For the Chewa people, therefore, the role of the traditional practice of *Nyau*,⁶ the Spirit Mediumship, the rain making, the rain dance, rites of passage, death and burial rites, the elders, the traditional healers, the diviners, the oracle people, the ritual elders, the chiefs, the animals and creation at large play a greater significance in their interpretation of life events and the existential meaning (Boucher 2012:7-2).

This paper focuses on the traditional practice of *Nyau* which is said to affect all spheres of the Chewa people's life style: social, political, cultural, psychological and religious and has great impact on the life style of the people and the way the Church takes care of them pastorally (van Breugel 2001:126). The concept of family among the Chewa people is inseparably linked with *Nyau* since the traditional practices of *Nyau* are said to enhance the understanding of the Chewa family in symbolising the presence of the ancestors, who are also the moral guardians, the spiritual masters, and the masters at the celebration of life events (van Breugel 2001: 130). The traditional practice of *Nyau* therefore will be considered in this paper as the point of theological dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of God's Family⁷ and the Chewa people's understanding of family. The image of the Church as God's Family in Africa offers the basis of the study looking at how the Church in Africa understands itself as God's family, in an African context. The paper will examine the application and implications of God's family image while using the Chewa people of Central Malawi in their traditional practice of *Nyau*.

However, the 2006 Lilongwe Diocese Mini-Synod document prohibits the Catholic Christians in Central Malawi from participating in the traditional practice of *Nyau* stating that "those who join *Nyau*...shall be stopped from receiving sacraments" (SSC 2006:57). The same document adds a prohibition to dual affiliation (SSC 2006:57). The documents insists that one has to choose to be either a Christian or a mask dancer, but not both (SSC 2006:57). It is in the interest of this paper that this prohibition cannot be underestimated for it challenges the core foundation of the Chewa people's way of life.

Furthermore, the prohibition to participate in the traditional practice of *Nyau* is observed not only in the Roman Catholic Church. There are similar objections raised by other churches, organisations and individuals. The Nkhoma Synod of the Churches to Central African Presbyterian, disciplines the members who participate in the traditional practice of *Nyau* (Mhango 2012:3). The Muslims holds the position that "Islam and *Nyau* culture cannot be one set" (Shilawi quoted in Mhango 2012:2). In another observation, the *Nyau* dance is denied connection with Christianity because it is believed to be "full of evil spirits and dangerous" (Dyson Gonthi qoted in Masina 2010:1) and these views are noted by Brian Mhango (2012:2).

⁶ Masked dancer

⁷ As articulated in *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Africae Munus*

Dean (2012) observes that the *Nyau*'s practice of spirit possession (of the dead ancestors) has a theological conflict with the Church's teaching on the Holy Spirit and he recalls that based on the bible teaching, the early missionaries opposed to *Gulewamkulu*⁸ as the unclean spirits interfering with the Holy Spirit (2012:6). This view is also shared by Julian and Caroline (2013:1). Linked to this view of looking at *Nyau* as demonic, the *Nyau* dancers have been described as a "bunch of people who dress up in crazy outfits and run around doing things they wouldn't usually be allowed to do" (Dean 2012:3). In a similar observation the *Nyau* dancers are described as being obscene, violent and criminal (Cees and Mirjam 2013: 2013:2).

In another observation, *Nyau* is described as a religion (Dean 2012:3, Mhango 2012:3) and that incorporating it into Islam and Christianity would mean dealing with two religions and defying God (2012:2-3). Furthermore, the traditional practice of *Nyau* has been observed to be an instrument of resistance to change (Cees and Mirjam 2013:2; Julian and Caroline 2013:1) and that it is an opposing challenge to the preaching of the gospel (Julian and Caroline 2013:1). Brian Mhango (2012) expressed an observation of the practice of dual participation among Christians. Some Christians participate both in Christian life or Islamic life and also participate in the *Nyau* practice (2012: 1). Based on this dual participation, Brian Mhango suspects the possibility that *Nyau* and Christianity as well Islam live together in the same household (Mhango 2012:1).⁹ And Dean (2012) inquires whether to become a Christian means abandoning one's own culture and that then if one abandons one's own culture which one must be the replacement (2012:6).

The conclusion to this problem at this point may appear to indicate that *Nyau* cannot live side by side with Islam or Christianity as in the words of Davison Makhole,¹⁰ the "Chewa should renounce their traditional beliefs and join Christianity, rather than mixing the two" (Davison Makhole quoted in Masina 2010:2). On the contrary, Brian Mhango (2012) observes that *Nyau* has prevailed in spite of the attacks and the condemnations (2012:1). However, Mhango does not say how the *Nyau* survived. Thomas Strasser and Christopher Dinhlol (2013) points out the flexibility of the *Nyau* to adopt aspects of other non-Chewa practices like Christianity (2013:3) as the reason for *Nyau* survival during the colonial era. Strasser and Dinhlol did not give the nature of the *Nyau*'s adoption of the aspects of Christianity and whether it was it for a good motive or not.

⁸ Big Dance or Great dance (Boucher 2012:1)

⁹ "*Nyau* the religions such as Islam and Christianity share the same bed?" (Mhango 2012:1)

¹⁰ The deacon of the Nyasa Mission of Evangelical Church of Malawi in Blantyre.

Brian Mhango (2012) points out to other developments in the *Nyau* traditional practice. He notes that there are some scholars and Chewa people who insist that the traditional practice of *Nyau* is neither bad nor a challenge to Christianity hence dual participation should not be a problem (2012:3). This view is shared by Gilbert Mongo¹¹ who insists that *Nyau* is a blameless traditional way of morally educating the young people traditional manners (Gilbert Mongo in Mhango 2012:2). Mhango laments that *Nyau* is just a victim of westernisation (2012:3). In a related observation on changes in *Nyau* practice, Dyson Gonthi confesses that *Nyau* is going through a transformation from within (Gonthi quoted in Masina 2010:1).¹²

In a different observation, Mhango (2012) presents that the Church does not condemn *Nyau* in its messages because the Church's focus is on preaching Jesus Christ and hoping that hearing the message of the gospel people will convert to Christianity and leave their traditional practices like *Nyau* (2012:3). Dyson Gonthi points out that "Jesus came for everybody," (Gonthi quoted in Masina 2010:2) and Davison Makhole adds that Jesus came for all people, "including the *Nyau* people" (Makhole quoted in Masina 2010:2). It would be interesting to find out whether Gonthi and Makhole meant that *Nyau* can be part of the Christian community. These noted debates present the nature of the ongoing search for possible solutions to the dialogue between *Nyau* and other religious traditions. At this point it cannot be ruled out, based on these debates, whether *Nyau* is good or bad except for the fact of a directive from the Roman Catholic Church advising the faithful to refrain from participating in the traditional practice of *Nyau*. However, the room for further dialogue induced by these debates can be acknowledged and appreciated. It is within this possibility of further debates that this paper intends to investigate the possibility of not only looking at *Nyau* as the enemy of the Roman Catholic Church but also as the possible partner of the Roman Catholic Church in God's mission to the Chewa families.

MOTIVATIONS FOR THE STUDY

Central Malawi is occupied by Chewa people who take up 90 % of the population and that 80% is till the rural area (Minto and Knottnerus 2008:192). This means that the influence of traditional practices of *Nyau* are still prevalent and strong in Central Malawi. There is the need for dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau* in forming the image of God's family that offers the pastoral answer to issues related to healing,

¹¹ Group Village headman who heads Mongo Village in Nathenje area, 20km south of Lilongwe City.

¹² "We want to get rid of charms, and the way we talk, because sometimes we use obscene language...we also want to avoid looking naked and doing away with [using the dance] as punishment when someone misbehaves in the village, and we take an opportunity to...even put him to death" (Gonthi quoted in Masina 2010:1) However, Gonthi does not indicate whether he is speaking as a *Nyau* or a member of the *Nyau* Secret Society. He does not indicate too whether it is the *Nyau* itself doing all those or the members of the *Nyau* Secret society. *Nyau* Secret Society is defined as the secret association of masked dancers (van Breugel 2001:126).

reconciliation, justice, peace, moral regeneration, evangelization, upholding the dignity of humanity and re-humanization (EA 40-41, AM 12, LM 74, IL 2009:14-15). The dual affiliation among the Chewa people (SSC 2006:57) spells the *Nyau*'s prevailing direct influence on the Chewa people which might be attributed to the following reasons in the consciousness of the Chewa converts to Catholicism:

Firstly, the struggles that the Chewa person, who is converted to Catholicism, lives needs to be considered. The Chewa Christian is, by directives of his/her Christian religion against the traditional practice of *Nyau*, compelled to live isolated from the family, village, community, traditional experience that has nurtured him/her, that had presented him/her to the world, that had shaped his/her being, that has shaped his/her understanding of reality, that has shaped his/her understanding of relationship, the experience that explains of his/her mysterious relationship with nature (IL23).

Secondly, there is a need to consider the difficulties that a Chewa person meets in understanding the justifications for his/her being cut off from the emotional, psychological and spiritual attachment to the people he/she is related to and loves. The Chewa person also finds it difficult to understand how the faith he/she has adhered to since his/her birth is now seen as evil, satanic or not worthy of salvation, not worthy of morals, not worthy of human rationality and not worthy of living (Kok 2005: 221-34).

Thirdly, there a need to consider the struggles that a Chewa person faces in his/her effort to balance his/her practice of the faith and of his/her contribution in the village community such as in times of important feasts and festivals, rituals celebrations and ceremonies that require the initiated members. Here is a need to consider how the uninitiated Chewa person stand the exclusion easily form traditional Chewa society - exclusion from participating in the joys and sorrows of his/her fellow villagers and the exclusion from the mysteries that he/she does not know in spite his/her age? (Phiri 1997:56; de Kok 2005:32-35).

Fourthly, there a need to consider the struggles that a Chewa person faces in balancing his/her Catholic faith in the face of the problems like sickness that have no western medical and psychological explanations except in the traditional ways - the ways that are forbidden by the Roman Catholic Church. It may as well be considered how shameful it looks for someone to be discovered living a dual affiliation and to be barred from the sacraments (de Kok 2005: 25).

Fifth, there a need to consider the challenges that the Chewa people face in front of a Roman Catholic Church members who ridicule them for adhering to the traditional religious practices of the *Nyau* cult of ancestors (de Kok 2005:27, Phiri 1991: 4-5). It may as well be considered how the Chewa person stand the confrontations

of this kind in private homes and public places: perhaps in schools, markets, public transports and the violence that erupts as a result of such differences?¹³ It may also be considered how confused the Chewa convert to Catholicism becomes upon discovering that the values proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church as Gospel values are the same as that of his/her condemned tradition?

Lastly, there is a need to engage in dialogue with the *Nyau* as an insider than an outsider (Kalilombe 1999: 119; Kiaziku 2009:129). A challenging factor in interreligious dialogue is the openness and willingness not only to affirm the good values but also to mix with those in the actual practice of those religious traditions whose value the Roman Catholic Church affirms. There is always a recourse to accept the values at a distance, thus proclaiming by lips and refusing by action.¹⁴ There is a need to come close to the adherents of *Nyau* and look at their values clearly enough to understand at a considerable degree of their perspective and of their explanations.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The Key Research Question

This research project investigates how the Church, understood as God's Family articulated in *Africae Munus*, impact on the implementation of the 2006 Lilongwe Diocese Mini-Synod document while focussing on the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the traditional practice of *Nyau* among the Chewa people of Central Malawi.

The Sub-questions

In pursuing the key research question, the project will consider: firstly, the Church's understanding of the notion of the Family of God as articulated in the document *Africae Munus* and in the 2006 Lilongwe Diocese Mini-Synod document. Secondly, how the Church's understanding of the Family of God, as articulated in *Africae Munus*, impact on the Chewa understanding of family. Thirdly, how the traditional practice of *Nyau* contributes to the Chewa understanding of the family. Fourthly, the Church's attitude towards the Chewa traditional practice of *Nyau*. Finally, the project will consider how the concept of the Church as the God's family articulated in *Africae Munus* and understood in the light of inculturation among the Chewa people,

¹³ As in the example given by Linden (1974:125) which are still prevalent in most parts of Central Malawi.

¹⁴ A similar point came out in de Kok's research (Kok 2005: 34)

help resolve issues of conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau* Secret Society and consequently help in addressing the ‘duality’ among the Chewa Christians?

The Objectives of the Study

This research project aims firstly, at drawing from the current Church's perspective on family of God the issues relevant and relating to its pastoral orientation in the African context, as well as to draw from the Church's understanding of the notion of the Family of God as articulated in the 2006 Lilongwe Diocese Mini-Synod document and *Africae Munus*. Secondly, the project aims at drawing from the Church's understanding of the Family of God the possible areas of inculturation of the Church into the Chewa world view on family. Thirdly, the research aims at exploring the role of *Nyau* in the family life of the Chewa people. Fourthly, the project aims at exploring the areas of conflict between the *Nyau* and the Church, looking at the historical developments in their relationship and how it affects the Church's pastoral work. Finally, the project aims at exploring the *Nyau* and the Church meeting point in their relation to the Chewa people and identify the possible joint mission as an integrated pastoral approach to the Chewa people. In following all these aims the focus will be on the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Chewa traditional *Nyau* practice.

The Theoretical Framework

The project has used the theoretical framework of ‘Method in Contextual Missiology’ provided by Stuart C. Bate, (1998) which takes a phenomenological approach. In this method, human experience is considered to be communal, cultural, and contextual, which also illumine the individual experience (Bate 1998:158). For this reason this method incorporates the inculturation model which has been considered as a tool to evaluate and engage with the 2006LDMSD in its directive towards the Roman Catholic Church relations with the Chewa traditional practice of *Nyau*. The method has been engaged in three parts also relevant to the three steps in the process of inculturation - See, Judge and Act (Bate 1998:153):

The first part of the method which is the ‘see’ part involves understanding the phenomenon through collection and analysis of data. A wider literature review has been used to help make the phenomenon appear clear, yet without making judgement at this stage (*epoche*) (Bate 1998:159). This part of the method has offered a critical study of the 2006LDMSD which has been identified as speaking of Roman Catholic Church's encounter with the traditional practice of *Nyau* as to be facilitated through inculturation (SSC 2006:55-59). Inculturation is understood as “the intimate transformation of cultural values through their integration in Christianity” (SSC 2006:56; EA 59) and then “the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures” (SSC 2006:56; EA 59).

The 2006LDMSD has also been noted as stating that the early missionaries came with Christianity that operated under the influence of western civilization and education (SSC 2006:55) and for this reason the missionaries “were limited and failed in some areas of inculturation” (SSC 2006:55), hence this part identifies the phenomenon as originating from inculturation related challenges.

The second part is the ‘judge’ part where the researcher has articulated a description of the observed phenomenon that has, by now, been interpreted, and classified by the framework (Bate 1998:215) with consideration of the beliefs and values people shared and of which are concerned with this phenomenon, whether in Sacred Scripture, Gospel, faith, the Magisterium of the Church, the witnesses of the faith, the sayings of the saints or the understanding of the Church (Bate 1998:168). As an inculturation model, this method has taken the analysis of the phenomenon coming from a pastoral context in seeking to transform the Church and the pastoral situation (Bate 1998:171). This approach has allowed the context to become more Christian and the Church becomes more local (Bate 1998:173). This part of the method has facilitated a critical study of the Church document *Ecclesia in Africa* from which the model of the Church in Africa has been identified as the Family of God and applicable in an African context. The method understands *Ecclesia in Africa* document’s understanding of inculturation as being based on the theology of incarnation, where Christ became human in a defined human situation, circumstances, culture and history (EA 60; Bate 1998:151). The method has considered that God’s plan of salvation through incarnation is meant for all humanity across all cultures (EA 60; Bate 1998:153), to reconcile humanity with God through the purification and transformation of cultures according to the gospel values (EA 61; Bate 1998: 156-157). The method also considers that human cultural values, in being purified by the gospel values, be restored to “full meaning” (EA 61; Bate 1998:157). This part of the method echoes Aylward Shorter’s suggestion that dialogue with African tradition must be done in a living tradition which is as well dynamic (1977:12) where Shorter acknowledges that new areas of application may emerge in an evolving tradition but there must also be flexibility of continuity with the past (1977:12) as Stuart Bate (1998) explains in looking at theology as history (1998:153). As in Vincente Kiaziku (2009) the method has considered the four-stage strategy to inculturation which involved (a) identification and knowledge of the culture to be engaged (2009:91), (b) identifying the compatibility of the culture with the gospel (2009:92), (c) the actual preaching of the Christian message (2009:92) and finally, (d) the engaging the Church the main agent and reason of the preaching (2009:92). However, this part of the method has also considered Justin Okpong’s challenging understanding of inculturation who argues that inculturation also offers a new understanding of the gospel in the light experience of the new cultures (Okpong in Kiaziku 2009:107) thus echoing Stuart Bate’s assertion that the context becomes Christian and the Church becomes local (1998: 173). This part of the Method had empowered this paper to reflect critically on how the traditional practice of *Nyau* can give new meaning to the Christian gospel.

The third (or last) part of the method is the ‘act’ part which provides the research with an insight to exert a practical judgement leading the researcher into action. The research project has been moved to judge the worthiness of what has been found to be of value. Therefore, the whole method has been designed to portray a pastoral practice that is thought about, reflected upon and acted out of conviction (Bate 1998:182). This part of the method has guided this paper to understand the Roman Catholic Church’s contextual understanding of inculturation to facilitate pastoral practical judgement and action. This paper identifies the Roman Catholic Church contextual understanding of inculturation as a tool for reconciliation, justice and peace within God’s Family (EA 63; AM 38; IL 2009:27; LM 37). This understanding points to a critical study of the conflicting relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Chewa traditional practice of *Nyau*. Hence this paper identifies the *Ecclesia in Africa* document as addressing the Church as the Family of God in Africa through inculturation (EA 48, 63), highlighting the traditional belief in ancestors as one of the traditional pillars that facilitates the strength of African families and an area of inculturation that might be the element to strengthen the Church in Africa as the Family of God (EA 43). The method has identified the Church’s understanding of the role of the ancestors in the traditional Africa as a preparation for the belief in the Communion of Saints (EA 43) and that through inculturation African will become “a new homeland for Christ” (EA 56). Through this method, this paper has also identified the Roman Catholic Church’s criteria for inculturation as being based on the compatibility of the cultural values with the Christian message and in communion with the universal Church (EA 62; SSC 2006:55). The paper has also identified the Roman Catholic Church’s purpose of grounding evangelization in the cultures of the people as being so that “the Word of God penetrate into the many cultures and express it according to their languages, their concepts, their symbols and their religious traditions” (IL 2009:38). Aylward Shorter and Francis Oborji affirms the African symbolisms as the African way of expressing religious and life world view (Shorter 1977: 7; Oborji 2005:12). Laurent Magesa and Francis Oborji affirms that the African world view manifests the African understanding that life is sacred, the mystery of creation is to be respected, respect for human being, a human person belongs to the family, no person lives alone but in a community and in solidarity with others, every person must be a participant in community activities, with emphasis as well on fertility, sharing of life, friendship, healing and hospitality (Magesa 1997:55; Oborji 2005:75, 96). However, this paper has engaged a critical study of inculturation based on the observation of Aylward Shorter (1977) who points out that African symbolism has been challenged by western scientific standards and warns that if symbolism is lost the intuition for the sacred is lost too (1977:35) and further that there is a need to revive symbolism (1977:35) while Francis Oborji echoes Patrick Kalilombe in insisting that African world view must not be judged according to western standard rather on its own merits (Oborji 2005:31). The method has guided this paper, therefore, to conclude with a study on Johan Van Breugel (2001) affirmation that the traditional practice of *Nyau* is the heart of the Chewa people’s understanding and expression of their world view (2001:126) hence it cannot simply be

dismissed or ignored in the consideration on the Roman Catholic Church's relationship with the Chewa traditional practice of *Nyau*.

Data Collection and Analysis Methodology

Data collection has been done by literature review, through the Libraries of University of Kwazulu- Natal Pietermaritzburg Campus, St Joseph's Theological Institute and St Vincent Pallotti Formation House in Merrivale. Preference was given to the research that was published in the peer-reviewed journals, and books (Rogers et. al. 2005:372), and the rationale involves in using the collection of data in a range of perspectives, approaches and theories (Rogers et. al. 2005:373). In other cases data has been collected from established newspapers, internet websites and Church documents relevant on the topic.

The collected data has been analysed using the Critical Discourse Analysis method offering a critical study of the literature review identifying and assessing the impact of ideologies, the constitutive elements of the society and culture, the situation and history, power relations, the social-cognitive approaches and the relations of the data collected (Rogers et. al. 2005:373). The analysis has been done in an interpretive way; however in some matters descriptive, and explanatory methods have been engaged while using the systematic methodology of Contextual Missiology.

The Test for Validity

According to Stuart Bate the validity of theologizing using the Method in Contextual Missiology is tested against successful establishment that the phenomenon under investigation can indeed be incorporated into the mission of the Church in fulfilling the five pastoral goals of: *Martyria Diakonia*, *Koinonia Leitourgia*, and *Kerygma* (Bate 1998: 176). This project has set to test if the theology used has satisfactorily turned the phenomenon into the mission between the Church and the *Nyau* among the Chewa people, following the five pastoral goals such as how is the joint mission enhancing Christian witness, service, communion, celebration of God's presence, and preaching the good news while maintaining the Church's nature, as: One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic (Bate 1998:176).

Limitations of the Study

Firstly, being a textual work, the study it will lack the freshness of empirical data. However, as this project is building on other previous works on *Nyau* done by other researchers, it will be considered that relevant extracts

of interviews from previous researchers incorporated into this project maintains its freshness. Secondly, the study will also lack *emic* input. However, I am doing this project as an insider in the three categories; as a Catholic priest, as a Chewa person and as an initiated person in the *Nyau* secret society. Hence I will be dealing with the data collected in the project not as a neutral anthropologist but as a theologian who has religious insights and meaning behind the themes involved, and my departure point will always be based on being a Chewa person in the light of the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Finally, the study does not intend to cover all that can be said about the traditional practice of *Nyau*, the family and the Roman Catholic Church but only those aspects relevant for the purpose of this study.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF NYAU

“Nyau is the heart of the Chewa identity.”

(van Breugel 2001:126).

INTRODUCTION

Aylward Shorter (1987) defines culture as the name given to “the system of conceptions and values which clothed in symbolic forms govern the behaviour of human beings and orient them to each other and the world” (1987: 6). Aylward Shorter goes on to elaborate that culture includes “a system which society teaches its members and which in turn, confers a particular identity on the society: culture is therefore part of human phenomenon and every human being is culturally conditioned” (1987: 6). The Chewa people are culturally conditioned by the significance of the traditional practice of *Nyau* which Johan van Breugel (2001) calls “the heart of the Chewa identity” (2001:126). This chapter suggests a study of the phenomenon of *Nyau* to discover its relevance and importance to the pastoral and cultural challenge in the lives of the Chewa people.

1.1 Definition of *Nyau*.

Throughout the history of the Chewa people, efforts have been made to define the phenomenon of *Nyau*. The result of such efforts have not only pointed to understanding its meaning but also to the multiplicity of names such as:

1.1.1 *Nyau, Vinyau and Gulewamkulu.*

*Nyau*¹⁵ (Paas 2010:283) or *Vinyau* as noted by Philip Short (1974:10) has been given a description as “*Gulewamkulu*” (Linden 1974:121; Paas 2010:115; Boucher 2012:1; Korpela 2011:31) because it is not an ordinary dance, rather a ritual dance that has a “religious significance” (van Breugel 2001: 130). It is a dance the Chewa people perform at the funeral and initiation, at the political rallies, and at the installation of Chiefs (Paas 2010:118). This observation gives an impression of *Nyau*’s spiritual relevance to the spiritual life of the Chewa people.

¹⁵*Vinyau* (Short 1974:10) also noted by Linden (1974:121). as “*Gulewamkulu*” or ‘the Great Dance’ (Paas 2010:115)

1.1.2 Nyau Secret Society, Secret Association of Masked Dancers, and Masonic Brotherhood.

Nyau is also known to be a product of the *Nyau* Secret Society also referred to as the Secret Association of masked dancers (van Breugel 2001:126). This understanding is linked with the definition of *Nyau* as a Masonic brotherhood because of its secretive nature where it is only accessible to the initiated (2001: 128). Johan van Breugel observes that the traditional practice of *Nyau* is done with strict observation of secrecy over what happens in its preparation and performance (2001:129). Revelation of the *Nyau* secrets goes with punishments mostly severe punishment (Korpela 2011:32). Bregje de Kok (2005) observes that *Nyau* belongs to those who are initiated only (2005:24). However, there is a great difference between the *Nyau* itself and the *Nyau* Secret Society. The problem lays in distinguishing who is who and who is doing what, between the *Nyau* and the *Nyau* secret society. Problems with the *Nyau* secret society may not necessarily be the problem of the *Nyau* itself. A member of *Nyau* secret society is not automatically a *Nyau* Character. It is also true that one cannot be a *Nyau* Character without being a member of the *Nyau* secret society first (2005:24). Several instances in the *Nyau* literature has given a poor observation of this difference. *Nyau* has been portrayed as equal to the *Nyau* secret society. Johan van Breugel for example refers “*Nyau* as the Secret association of dancers” (van Breugel 2001:126). This section highlights the awareness that comes with confusing the roles of *Nyau* and the *Nyau* secret society. It points out to the fact that mixing the roles of the two may contribute to a force image being conferred upon the traditional practice of *Nyau*.

1.1.3 The Masked Dancers or Masquerade.

In some documents of the Roman Catholic Church *Nyau* has appeared as “Masked dancers” (SSC 2006:57). *Nyau* dancers are called Masked Dancers because the identity features of performers are hidden with the masks (van Breugel 2001: 129). Johan van Breugel adds that revelations of the identity of the dancers deeply destroys the sacred nature of the dance – its spiritual representation (van Breugel 2001: 130). This observation emphasizes the protection of the sacredness of the traditional practice of *Nyau* (Moto 1994:24). Hence *Nyau* is a sacred reality among the Chewa people.

1.1.4 The Devil Dancers of Terror.

Nyau has also been referred to as the “Devil Dancers of Terror” (Paradis quoted in Linden 1974:127) based on Fr Ernest Paradis recording of what he understood to be the abuses that went on during the *Nyau* dance (Linden 1974:127). However, Linden did not present the list of the abuses claimed by Fr Ernest Paradis. Melvin Page (1980) however, expresses Fr Paradis action as based on prejudice against *Gulewamkulu* after his failure to make the colonial officials ban *Nyau* (1980:181). Melvin states that Fr Paradis likened

Gulewamkulu to John Chilembwe's uprising in 1914-15 in order to provoke the colonial administration in Britain itself to act against *Nyau* (1980:181).

1.1.5 A *Vilombo* a *Chisumphi*.

A *Virombo*¹⁶ a *Chisumphi* is another description of the Chewa traditional practice of *Nyau* given in a context of the Ngoni hegemony (Linden 1974:58). The *Nyau* dancers are referred to in this citation as the "wondering groups of dancers" (Linden 1974:58) and the *Nyau* dancers are understood in this context as the agents of *Chisumphi* (the Chewa Rain God). This observation gives the direct link between God and the tradition practice of *Nyau*.

1.1.6 *Zilombo*.

David Korpela (2011) explains the term *zilombo* as translating "wild animals" (2011:32) and the term *zilombo* is referred to *Nyau* because of the *Nyau* "large animal constructions and face masks" (2011:32). Johan van Breugel explains the term *zilombo* as describing *Nyau* based on its resemblance to the wild animals from the forest (van Breugel 2001:130), and Martin Ott (2000) points out that, in resembling the wild animals from the forest, the *Nyau* "re-enact symbolically the very disaster, which separated humans from the animals and the spirits in the beginnings" (2000: 183). David Korpela (2011) regards re-enactment as "a reconciliation between man and animas before the cataclysm or fall of man" (2011:31). Here *Nyau* is considered as a symbol and practice of reconciliation among the Chewa people.

1.1.7 *Obwana*.

In some instances the *Nyau characters*¹⁷ are called *Obwana* at performance. The word "*Obwana*"¹⁸ comes from the word *Bwana* literary means "Boss," (Pass 2010:24).¹⁹ Its origin and how it came to be used is unclear. However, one can relate its origin as based on the Chewa people's use of the word *bwana*²⁰ to accord respect to the colonialists (Nthala 1933:87). As the Chewa people used to disapprove of the attitude of a colonial

¹⁶ *Virombo* is a slight change to the name *Zilombo*, which means Wild animals in English (see van Breugel 2001:130)

¹⁷ As used by Claude Boucher to indicate the individual *Nyau* structure or masked dancer in action (Boucher 2012:29). The term also distinguishes between one masked dancer from the other based on their role in the performance and the spirit they are said to possess.

¹⁸ The addition of "O" to the term "*bwana*" denotes highest respect in the Chichewa language.

¹⁹ from my experience as a Chewa person I know of the use of this term in reference to *Nyau* characters

²⁰ *Bwana* is a Chewa word for *Boss* in English (Paas 2010:24)

officer, *bwana*, they would personate that colonial official as a *Nyau* character (Linden 1974:121). In this way, the *Nyau* becomes the *bwana*. In calling out *bwana* to that *Nyau* character a sign of acknowledgement of the superiority of the *Nyau* character is provoked on the one hand. On the other hand calling *Nyau* character *bwana* would provoke ridicule of the colonial personalities being represented in that same *Nyau* character. My understanding, therefore, had been that the term *bwana* is used for negotiating peace with the *Nyau* character by invoking its superiority and also at the same time the term has been used in provoking the *Nyau* characters to play by provoking the behaviour that was disapproved by the Chewa people in the attitude of a colonialist personified in the *Nyau* character (Linden 1974:121).

1.1.8 The Great Prayer, Apparition of Spirits of the Dead, Re-incarnation of the Dead, as a Cult of Ancestors and the Heart of the Chewa Identity.

Whenever the *Nyau* dance takes place there is the presence of the ancestors who are regarded as the great intercessors. Hence the *Nyau* dance is the great prayer (Schoffeleers 2000:11; van Breugel 2001: 125, 136; Linden 1974:117). The ancestor reincarnation of the *Nyau* makes it again to be described as a “cult” (Linden 1974:117). Johan van Breugel identifies the *Nyau*’s reincarnation of the ancestors as making *Nyau* the crucial component of the Chewa Traditional Religion which he rightly indicated in his research (van Breugel 2001: 125-168). While Matthew Schoffeleers described *Nyau* as the “Storehouse of religious ideas” (Schoffeleers 2000: 13) Johan van Breugel similarly viewed *Nyau* as “the heart of Chewa identity” (van Breugel 2001:126). This observation emphasizes on the idea that the traditional practice of *Nyau* cannot be treated as an isolated phenomenon from the lives of the Chewa people.

In conclusion, these different definitions of *Nyau* portray the different perspectives people have of the phenomenon of *Nyau*, both as insiders and outsiders. Such perceptions haven in one way or the other shaped the present attitude shown towards *Nyau* perhaps as “controversial and feared” (de Kok 2005:24) or as the “mysterious and unknowable society, mistakenly mixed with politics or witchcraft” (Laurel Birch de Aquilar quoted in Schoffeleers 2000:13).

1.2 Historical Origin of Nyau.

Anusa Daimon (2007) speculates that the traditional practice of *Nyau* originates from historical origins of the Chewa People in Lubaland (Daimon 2007:6) or Katanga (van Breugel 2001:133) in the 16th -17th Century AD. The *Chichewa dictionary* speculates 1200 AD to be the probable time when the traditional practice of

Nyau started (Paas 2010:118). A.G.O Hodgson says *Nyau* dance is “as old as humankind ... God gave the dance to women” (Hodgson quoted in van Breugel 2001:132).

Anusa Daimon (2007:6) speculates that a person called *Kalanzi Phiri* started the dance while Johan van Breugel (2001) reports of William H.J Rangeley speculating that a man called “*Nyanda* invented the dance” (van Breugel 2001:134) and yet both authors agree on the fact that *Nyau* had initially been practiced in return for favours in time of famine, noted as well by Francis Moto (Moto1994:22).

Johan van Breugel (2001) reports that a man called *Akundaliro* and a woman *Akumatewa* invented the animals’ structures to facilitate initiation for girls which later became the *Nyau* practice in the rites of passage among the Chewa (2001:134). In another version, it is believed that a rain priestess *Makewana* gave *Nyau* to chiefs in order to facilitate respect for chiefs (2001:134). However, Francis Moto points out that although the stories of origin of *Nyau* differ in many authors, all the authors agree on *Nyau* being male dominated in the later developments (1994:22). Moto observes that *Nyau* started with purpose of responding to a crisis (1994:22). Desmond Phiri (2004) presents the place called *Phokera*²¹ as the place where *Gulewamkulu* originated (2004:31).

This section shows that *Nyau* is a reality among the Chewa people that has a history and manifests how the Chewa people have responded to God’s involvement in their history.

1.3 Developments in the Traditional Practice of *Nyau*.

The developments in the traditional practice of *Nyau* points to a later stage where the *Nyau* came to be used as identity feature for the Chewa people. Anusa Daimon (2007:15) says that *Nyau* is a construct among the Chewa people that has developed to define their identity while Johan van Breugel (2001) expresses a similar observation that *Nyau* is the heart of Chewa identity (2001:125) and that this identity feature of *Nyau* became clear in the period the Chewa people encountered the Christian Missionaries, the colonialists and the invasions of other tribes in around the 18th - 20th Century AD.

Johan van Breugel (2001:127) notes that on encounter with the invading tribes and colonialists, the *Nyau* secret society took the political and sociological roles. He observes that *Nyau* secret society had been used as a political tool and that it survived the colonial influence (2001:127). Rau (1999) contends that the *Nyau* society was “not a strong political entity” (1999:140) for the Chewa people. In fact, it was as a result of the political weakness of the Chewa people that made it easy for the Ngoni people to conquer the Chewa people.

²¹ It is not clear in his book where *Phokera* as a geographical place is located.

Ian Linden (1974) suggests that, through the *Nyau* practice, the Chewa people resisted the Christian missionaries' influence noted that while some *Nyau* characters resemble the Christian characters (1974:120) others resembled the colonialists whose "devotion to duty was not appreciated by the Chewa" (1974:121). Samuel Josiah Nthala (1933), a Chewa Christian convert, contested the paramount role of *Nyau* in the Chewa society, holding that, without the traditional practice of *Nyau*, the Chewa people can get a better identity from the western form of education, "*amene afuna mzinda achoke pano. Ine ndufuna kuti anthu onse atsate sukulu*"²² (Nthondo quoted in Nthala 1933: 97). Steve Chimombo (1989) points out that Samuel Josiah Nthala "either did not want an integrated Chewa character, or wanted Nthondo's conversion to be effected only in the Christian context" (1989:54).

Josiah E Phiri (1991), another Chewa convert to Christianity, held similar views to Josiah Nthala although Phiri (1991) does not recognise the importance of *Nyau* in the formation of the Chewa identity. Josiah Phiri disapproved the traditional practice of *Nyau* as best way to form the identity of a Chewa person because *Nyau* is "*gule wauve, wonyasa, wovina popanda zovala, zochititsa manyazi. Gule wanyawu ndi woipa kwenikweni. Nyimbo zake ndi zotukwana, ndipo ovinawo ndiwo odzesa manyazi. Nanga ubwino wake uchokera kuti?*"²³ (1991: 4).

In his ritualistic perspective of the Chewa people, Archibald J Makumbi (1999), another Christian apologetic, recognises the traditional practice of *Nyau* as being central to the Chewa traditional beliefs, "*mnyamata akakula, makolo ndi amalume ake amapangana kuti mnyamata ayenera kupita ku nyau. Uyu ndiye gule wa Achewa...*"²⁴ (1999:8). However, Makumbi points out that the traditional practice of *Nyau* has much flaws in its belief systems due to the Chewa people being ignorant of the western civilization and western Christianity, "*posadziwa za makhalidwe olongosoka ndi Mulungu woona*"²⁵ (1999: Preface).

Isabel Apawo Phiri (1997), a contemporary Christian scholar among the Chewa concedes to the role of *Nyau* in the formation of the identity of the "Chewa Christian women" (1997:44), as the custodian of the Chewa

²² "Those who wish to have the *Nyau initiation* school must get out of here. I want all people to follow the western form of school." These are the words Samuel Josiah Nthala put into the mouth of the character called Nthondo.

²³ "The dance is dirt and bad, they dance naked...shameful. The dance is really bad, the songs are full of obscenity, the dancers are shameful, and where is the goodness of it?"

²⁴ "When the boy has advanced in age, the parents together with the uncle decide that he must go to the *Nyau*."

²⁵ For not knowing the civilized way of life and the true God."

identity that holds the people together as an integrated whole. However, Phiri warns that because of its corrupt practices, “of ritual sex” (1997:56),²⁶ the traditional practice of *Nyau* deserves to be treated with caution, its structures adapted into the Christian way of living, while purified from corruption and manipulation (1997:140-141).

This section portrays the impression that the traditional practice of *Nyau* is reflective and not a stagnant practice. It is a dynamic practice always responding to the signs of the time. The section also gives, on the one hand, credits on some *Nyau* practices while on the other hand points out to the practices that need reform.

1.4 The Significance of *Nyau* and the Role of the *Nyau* Secret Society.

Francis Moto (1994) believes that *Nyau* holds a theological importance in the life of the Chewa people (1994: 23). Moto believes that the presence of *Nyau* explains the mystery of the beginning of all life (Creation and initiation) and an ideal way to live in a society (1994: 23). Francis Moto clarifies that “the original harmony of creation is the key to the meaning of the *Nyau* ... affects the whole life cycle from birth to death” (1994: 25) besides being a socially moral force in the society of the Chewa people.

There are four major identified events in the life of the Chewa people when the presence of the *Nyau* becomes crucial: initiation, burial, enthronement of a chief and healing.

1.4.1 *Nyau* and Chewa Initiation.

Steve Chimombo (1989) defines Chewa initiation as a religious rite that “ensures acceptance into adult society” (1989:54). The *Nyau* characters, at the initiation, confirm the initiates in the transition to their new status. Thus confirming the initiates as new adults and full members of the community, making them true members of the tribe and strengthening them in their traditional identity. Being the store house of the Chewa traditional beliefs and practices, the *Nyau* have the task of teaching the traditional values and beliefs to both the initiates and the society at large through their performances (Schoffeleers 2000: 13). *Nyau* teaches about good behaviour, the way to a happy life, the way to live together with the community of the living and the

²⁶ It has to be noted here with reference to the understanding of role of “*fisi*” (Boucher 2012: xxvi), “a surrogate husband for the purpose of ritual intercourse to awaken sexually an initiated girl who does not have a husband” (2012: xxvi), that this is not an act of a *Nyau* character. A *Nyau* character is not involved in sexual intercourse to avoid a taboo disease (Lindeni 1974:119; Rangeley 1949:48; Boucher 2012:11; Boucher 2002:55). Isabel Apawo Phiri (1997:56) is not referring to any of the *Nyau* characters doing the ritual sex.

ancestors (Ott 2000:191). The *Nyau* disciplines the children and teach them about the world: the human body, sexuality, respect and acceptable behaviour in the Chewa world-view of morality (Ott 2000:191).

Salaun affirms that *Nyau* initiation had been “an integral part of the structure and life of the tribe in a sense that in the old days all the boys had to go through the *Nyau* initiation before marriage” (Salaun quoted in van Breugel 2001: 129). Failure to be initiated into *Nyau* practice a young man “would never had an adult male status,” (Salaun quoted in van Breugel 2001: 129) and further that, “he would never be considers a full member of the clan, and he would never have any influence in the in the village life" (Salaun in quoted in van Breugel 2001: 129). Among the Chewa people “a man not belonging to the *Nyau* is not fully adult but ‘a small child who does not know anything at all,’ they are children, all they do is childish" (Salaun quoted in van Breugel 2001: 129). In a similar observation, Johan van Breugel noted that the young men among the Chewa people “want to become men...do not want to remain in some way strangers to the life of the clan...they want to know the things that men know" (van Breugel 2001: 129).

M. Yew noted that the *Nyau* initiation has to do with the matrilineal structure of the Chewa society, for it is a "formal incorporation into the matrilineal kin group and separation from the fathers' skin group" (M. Yew quoted in van Breugel 2001:142). Similarly, van Breugel (2001) noted that "the *Nyau* community into which a young man will be initiated is more often the one in which he will find his father and other paternal uncles" (van Breugel 2001: 142). The *Nyau* initiation had also been linked with the Chewa economic system. Johan van Breugel noted that the tradition of ‘*Kugula njira*’ is the payment of a tribute to the chief” (van Breugel 2001:143)²⁷.

Lastly, the *Nyau* initiation takes a spiritual aspect of the Chewa well-being. *Nyau* is not just an ordinary dance, rather “a ‘mime’ which aims at explaining the presence of and activity of the *mzimu*” (van Breugel 2001:149). *Nyau* is a “mystery-play by means of which the traditional beliefs of the people are kept alive" (van Breugel 2001:149). Johan van Breugel observed at female initiation that the *Nyau* characters “come to punish and to frighten. They symbolically bury the initiates in order that from now on they may be adults” (van Breugel 2001:149). The presence of *Nyau* characters too has “the intention of obtaining fertility” (van Breugel

²⁷ “*Kugula Njira*” translated as "to buy their way" (van Breugel 2001:143), a form of payment made at initiation of *Nyau* so that the *Nyau* characters will not harass or trouble the person having done it.

2001:151), so that “they intercede with Chauta that the young women will have many children and healthy children” (informant quoted in van Breugel 2001: 152).

1.4.2 *Nyau* and Chewa Burial.

Johan van Breugel (2001) observes that the *Nyau* characters perform at the funeral of the chief or any member of the *Nyau* secret society (2001:149). At the funeral, the *Nyau* characters represent the “*mzimu*²⁸ who receives the spirit of the deceased person in their midst” (van Breugel 2001:149). Breugel (2001) noted further that the presence of the *Nyau* characters at the funeral, “is also a way of asking the *mizimu* at a funeral not to come back and make people suffer” (van Breugel 2001:150).

At the burial and anniversary commemoration of the dead, the *Nyau* preside over the transformation of the deceased into an ancestor - a protector of the group (Boucher 2002:55-56). The presence of the *Nyau* characters help the community to welcome the new spirit in transition to ancestorhood and accept its spiritual assistance (Boucher 2002:56). However, at some time the spirit of the deceased may come back and ask that *Nyau* dance be done in his/her honour, since he/she was buried like as "a small child"²⁹ (van Breugel 2001: 150) and the ceremony of the commemoration of the dead is celebrated.

1.4.3 *Nyau* and Enthronement of Chewa Chiefs.

Just as at the initiation so is the role of the *Nyau* presence at the enthronement of a new chief (van Breugel 2001:136; Boucher 2002:54). Among the Chewa people, the chiefs are closely connected with *Nyau*. A Chewa chief is no ordinary person. A chief is a spiritual leader of the village community. This spiritual role makes the chief a partner in the spiritual function of *Nyau*. The chief of the village is also the head of the *Nyau* society (van Breugel 2001: 136). However, not all the Chewa chiefs have the initiation schools. Only those chiefs who are granted *mzinda*³⁰ have the right to have *Nyau* and to run the initiation schools (van Breugel 2001: 136). Breugel (2001) states that Chewa chiefs as the "owners of the land" (van Breugel 2001: 136) are also

²⁸ *Mzimu* is the Chewa word for *spirit* in English. This is in reference to the function of *Nyau* in representing the *mzimu* of the Ancestors. The *mzimu* of the ancestors welcomes the *mzimu* of the deceased into the spiritual world.

²⁹ It means to be buried without the *Nyau* traditional ceremony. A ‘small child’ here also refers to the person who was not initiated into the *Nyau* and into the Chewa tribe. The implication is that the deceased was buried as a person who did not belong to the Chewa people.

³⁰ “Rights granted to the Chewa chiefs to have *Nyau* Secret Society and also the place of initiation for *Nyau*” (Paas 2010:274)

the "owners of the *Nyau*" (van Breugel 2001: 136). The chiefs have the direct influence over *Nyau* (van Breugel 2001: 136). The chief as the spiritual master of the village community has also the responsibility of directing such matters as identifying the places to bury the dead and also appointing and taking care of the places of worship (van Breugel 2001: 136). At the worship event, the chief leads the worship service in interceding to God for the people and in consultation with the spirits of the ancestors. The chief is also a guardian of morals and traditional practices. At the funeral right, the chief makes sure that the deceased has a descent funeral to avoid the spirit of the deceased coming back to the village and causing problems (van Breugel 2001:136).

1.4.4 *Nyau* and Chewa Healing.

The *Nyau* presides on the healing ceremony of '*kubwebweta' mizimu*'³¹ (Ott 2000: 179). This sickness come when a member of the family or community dreams about the deceased person or is possessed by an evil spirit. At times a deceased person may appear in the dream of a living members of the family making a request for some rituals to be done. In this case, *Nyau* becomes the ancestors listening to the wishes of another ancestor so to execute the right response. At other times, the spirits of the deceased people who were bad may possess living members of a family and thus causing hurt. In this case the *Nyau* have the duty to perform the ritual of exorcism. A similar observation is reported by George Sembereka (1996), where the eldest member of the *Gulewamkulu* is said to make a negotiation with the spirits to leave the possessed (1996:18).

Besides these identified major events, there are also two other important roles of *Nyau* important observation: *Nyau's* contribution towards the Chewa resistance to outside influence and also the *Nyau's* contribution towards psychological relief among the Chewa matrilineal family system.

1.4.5 *Nyau* and the Chewa Defence (and Resistance).

The *Nyau* have also the important task of forming a defence or resistance mechanism to protect the Chewa tradition from foreign influences and disturbances (Boucher 2002:56). This view is shared by Cees and Mirjam (2013) who viewed *Nyau* as embodying a culture of resistance (2013:2). Melvin E Page (1980) points out that *Nyau* has independent jurisdiction (1980:172) which adds to it not being outwardly going for influences. This

³¹Translated from Chichewa as being 'possessed by spirit' (it is not indicated whether good or bad).

nature of *Nyau* practice not only made *Nyau* survive the Ngoni hegemony (1980:172) but also showed that *Nyau* is a stability pillar for the Chewa people's culture.

1.4.6 *Nyau* and Chewa Psychology.

The Chewa people are a matrilineal society where women have dominance over men (Paas 2010:675). Hendrina Kachapila (2006) points out that a husband in a Chewa matrilineal society *mkamwini* (belonging somewhere else) has no power or authority neither over the wife, children and even over the wife's village (2006:327). His wife becomes his security to say in the village and also based on his ability to father children. Furthermore, the brother of the wife, *malume* (or Uncle) is the owner of the children— for the *Malume* is the *mwini mbumba*.³² Similar observations are shared by Kings M. Phiri (1983) who notes that in the Chewa culture “the mother is supposed to remain united with her brothers and sisters, and together with them to retain rights of possession over the children” (1983:258). The only time the *mkamwini* would exert authority over a woman in the village is through the practice of *Nyau* (Kachapila 2006:328). It can be pointed out, in this case, that *Nyau* functions to maintain a healthy balance of family relations in the *mkamwini*'s influence and relations with the owners of the village in a Chewa matrilineal family. Hendrina Kachapila (2006) point out that the practice of *Nyau* enabled the men to gain ritual dominance over women (2006:319). *Nyau* has helped a lot of Chewa men to get out of women's domination in the matrilineal culture as a means of psychological balance and entertainment. Johan van Breugel (2001) observes that the *Nyau* dancers gain a considerable degree of freedom and control over the women to such an extent that the dancers become sarcastic over the women and “especially at the mother in law,” (van Breugel 2001:148). Furthermore “the avoidance rules between father-in-law and son-in-law are suspended” (van Breugel 2001:148). In another observation, Leroy Vail says that *Nyau* functioned “to unite the people in time of social stress” (Leroy Vail quoted in Kachapila 2006:320).

This section has emphasized the crucial roles of the traditional practice that make the Chewa people feel at home with themselves and their culture. The section also shows that some roles of *Nyau* cannot in anyway be avoided by the Chewa people even those who convert to Christianity – such as the cultural identity function.

1.6 The Prevalence of the Traditional Practice of *Nyau*.

Francis Moto (1994) observes that the power of the *Nyau* is not diluted at all (1994: 23). It is still in effect and attracting a lot of people in its performance without diluting its theological importance. Similar observations have been shared by Brian Mhango (2012) who observes that *Nyau* is still an important part of the Chewa

³² “Owner of the village” as observed by Hendrina Kachapila (2006:328) and also Kings M. Phiri (1983:260).

tradition in spite of the assaults, attacks, condemnation, and being dismissed as a pagan worship (2012:1). Thomas Strasser and Christopher Dinhobl (2013) expressed a similar observation that Christian missionaries failed to ban this practice in Chewa communities because of its flexibility to adapt to other practices like Christianity (2013:3). Julian and Caroline (2013) observation that the Chewa converts prefer dual participation to abandoning the traditional practice of *Nyau* completely (2013:1). Brian Mhango (2012) expressed a similar observation to Julian and Caroline noting that the members of the cult also belong to established religions like Islam and Christianity to such an extent that Mhango goes even to suspect of an interreligious encounter with *Nyau* at the household level (2012:1). This section testifies the fact that *Nyau* remains a crucial component of the Chewa life that cannot come to a simple end or prohibition.

SUMMARY

It has been established in this chapter that the traditional practice of *Nyau* has spiritual relevance to the spiritual life of the Chewa people. The traditional practice of *Nyau* has a direct link with God and that it is a sacred practice and a sacred reality among the Chewa people that deserves reverence and dignity. *Nyau* is a historical reality that has a history of how the Chewa people have responded to God's involvement in their life throughout their history. The traditional practice of *Nyau* has been understood as being reflective and dynamic, always responding to the signs of the time. The *Nyau* has also been understood to have crucial role in making the Chewa people feel at home with themselves and their culture. While it has been acknowledged that some roles of *Nyau* cannot in anyway be avoided by the Chewa people even those who convert to Christianity – such as the role of cultural identity and the practice of reconciliation, there has been also an acknowledgment that some traditional *Nyau* practices need reform especially with reference to the ordinary members of the *Nyau* secret society. However, it has also been established that an awareness of the distinction between the *Nyau* and the *Nyau* secret society is crucial to the understanding of the importance of traditional practice of *Nyau* in the Chewa society. Confusing the roles of *Nyau* and the *Nyau* secret society may contribute to a false image being conferred upon the traditional practice of *Nyau*. Finally this chapter has established that the traditional practice of *Nyau* cannot be treated as an isolated phenomenon from the lives of the Chewa people and it has been testified that the traditional practice of *Nyau* remains a crucial component of the Chewa people's life that cannot come to a simple end or prohibition.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH POSITION ON NYAU IN CENTRAL MALAWI.

“To what extent should converts adopt western ‘civilization’?”

(Isichei 1995:93)

INTRODUCTION

The contributions of the missionaries towards the development of Central Malawi cannot be ignored. A journey through Central Malawi cannot not end without noticing the contribution of the Roman Catholic Church has made in sectors such as: Social Communications, Justice and Peace, Development, public Health and Education (SCC 2011:34-38).³³ These contributions have been part and parcel of the Roman Catholic Church's mission to Central Malawi in the effort to bring into the Malawian society: the preservation of human dignity; the improvement of the people's wellbeing; the equal distribution of the country's resources; preservation of the unity of the nation; the freedom of the people; and solidarity among its citizens (SCC 2011:34-38). This is also done in fulfilling the Roman Catholic Church's proclamation and observance of the core values of: the Gospel, sanctity of life, human dignity and equality; the integrity of creation; the responsiveness; justice and peace, solidarity; dialogue, ecumenism and interfaith cooperation; self-reliance; moral integrity and accountability; confidentiality; professionalism, efficiency and effectiveness, and finally, ongoing formation (SCC 2011:34-38). Central Malawi is indeed privileged to have an improved education system, improved health facilities and improved road networks of which the missionaries' contribution cannot be left out.

However, in as much as the good can be acknowledged about the contributions made by the missionaries to Central Malawi, so too are the negative consequences that came alongside the missionaries' endeavours. As Christianity came alongside western civilizations there have also been challenges that were brought to the Chewa people of Central Malawi (Kalilombe 1999:113). Western civilization came with the demand that the Chewa people who convert to Christianity must abandon their traditional ways of life (Kalilombe 1999:113). This demand has been acknowledged to have contributed to the missionaries' attitude of looking down upon the Chewa traditional ways of life and discouraged them (Kalilombe 1999:113). It also contributed to the dehumanizing status that the missionaries had put before the local people and their traditional practices, calling them 'savage, primitive and satanic' (McCaffrey 1981:42), heathens and demonic (Daimon 2007:12), pagans (Kalilombe 1999:119) and clinging to “backwardness” (Daimon 2007:14). The result of the abandonment of

³³ SCC stands for Social Communications Commission that published the 2011 Malawi Catholic Directory.

traditional life by the Africans has been acknowledged as the cause of the “cultural confusion and alienation” (EA 48) that continue to affect the “dual affiliation” (AM 93) of African converts to Christianity, like the Chewa people (SSC 2006:57; Kalilombe 1999:127,131).³⁴

The Roman Catholic Church's conflict with the *Nyau* in Central Malawi gives a good example of the missionaries' attitude towards the Chewa traditional life which can be seen as a conflict that emerged as one of the by-products of evangelization that come alongside western civilizations. This chapter considers that the conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and *Nyau* has been as a result of the conflict between the Chewa traditional education and western civilizations. The chapter maintains the view that the missionaries measured the seriousness of conversion by how much “the converts adopt western ‘civilization’” (Isichei 1995:93) and finally submits that, as long as the two forms of civilization don't recognize each other and come to terms with each other, the conflicting relationship between the Church and *Nyau* will hardly come to rest.

2.1 The 2006 Lilongwe Diocese Mini-Synod Document.

The 2006 Lilongwe Diocese Mini-Synod Document³⁵ came after 30 years from 1975 Lilongwe Diocese Mini-Synod (Mkhorri 2010:52). This was as a result of the local Synod of the Lilongwe Diocese that took place at St John's Secondary School in Lilongwe from 29th July 2006 - 12th August 2006. This local synod made the resolutions and recommendations that are being implemented by the current Archdiocese of Lilongwe. It was by its nature a local Synod to address local pastoral challenges (SSC 2006: iii).

The purpose as indicated in the document was to remind the clergy, the faithful and lay ministers of the pastoral guidelines outlined in the first local synod in 1975. It was also designed to remind the baptized that they have a joint role to play in the preaching of the good news. The document does not indicate directly to be as a result of the 1994 African Synod of Bishops.³⁶ However the document has made a few references to the African

³⁴ Kings M. Phiri described culture as the "sum total of a people's way of life" which include "visual arts and craft, music and dance, literature, drama, dress, language and religion" (Phiri 1983: 19). Noted that among many Malawians, there is a growing cultural alienation caused by the "influences of western education, urban life with its imported life-styles, development of new communication networks, and proliferation of capitalist values" (1983:19). SSC stands for Synod Steering Committee that compiled and published the 2006 Lilongwe Diocese Mini-Synod Document.

³⁵ 2006 Lilongwe Diocese Mini-Synod Document (2006LDMSD)

³⁶ The Synod of African Roman Catholic Bishops that dealt with matters relating to the African continent. It was also at this Synod of African Roman Catholic Bishops that the Church in Africa chose to adopt the image of the Church as the Family of God. The same assembly of Bishops also proposed the way of inculturating the chosen image of God's Family (EA 6).

Synod, especially on the areas of self-reliance (SSC 2006:39) inculturation (SSC 2006: 55) and dialogue (SSC 2006: 45). This project focuses on the areas of inculturation and dialogue.³⁷

The 2006LDMSD recognizes that the first missionaries, much influenced by the western civilization in their time, failed in some areas of inculturation (SSC 2006: 55). It also acknowledges the Church's universal norms governing the family of God throughout the world as also "applied to Malawi" (2006: 55). The document appeals for a "need for the research on what constitutes a truly Christian family and a truly African Family" (2006: 58). In relation to the issues about *Nyau*, the document notes that the traditional practice of *Nyau* has positive contributions to the Chewa society that can also apply to the life of the Catholic Church. However, there are also bad things that take place within the same *Nyau* practice hence the following resolutions and recommendations are applied to guide the Catholic Church's relationship with *Nyau*:

2.1.1 The Resolutions.

1. Confrontation with mask dancers does not work. We need to coexist in peace and harmony (2006:57).
2. Research on mask dancers has been completed. The diocese has to act (2006:57).
3. The youth should not join *NYAU* (2006:57).
4. We need dialogue with the traditional leaders (2006:57).
5. Those who join *Nyau* or subscribe to witchcraft or engage in "zafisi" shall be stopped from receiving sacraments (2006:57).
6. Punishment for those who join "*Nyau*" shall be moderate to allow for peaceful co-existence (2006:57).
7. Those who become chiefs following the *Nyau* inauguration shall be stopped from receiving sacraments (2006:57).
8. Double dealing shall not be tolerated. You are either a Christian or a mask dancer (2006:57).
9. Christians who practice witchcraft and their clients shall be barred from the sacraments" (2006:57).

2.1.2 The Recommendations.

1. The Church must enter serious dialogue with Traditional Chewa Chiefs (2006:58).

³⁷ There were also other pastoral challenges discussed such as general concern over the failure to consult the pastoral directives of the diocesan synod of 1975, the clergy and the faithful alike (SSC 2006:2); The clergy lacked ongoing formation, medical health scheme, financial support, and the involvement of the clergy in income generating activities. (SSC 2006:2); the religious were consulted on the part of the diocesan pastoral policies regarding their work (SSC 2006:2); lastly, the lay faithful were side-lined in pastoral formation and meaningful participation in the pastoral commitments of the diocese (SSC 2006:2).

2. We need more information on witchcraft. Afisi³⁸ pose a serious threat to marriage and are a health risk (2006:58).
3. The Church must expose the dark side of ‘Gule wamkulu’ (2006:58)
4. The Synod recommended Christian inauguration/installation of Christian chiefs (2006:58).

It is noted that this document, expresses the Catholic Church’s awareness of being involved pastorally within the community that adheres to the traditional practice of *Nyau* –the community of the Chewa people. Through this document, the Roman Catholic Church has noted some of the traditional practices of *Nyau* that raises concern for the welfare of the Chewa people and of the challenges to the Church’s missionary endeavours in Central Malawi.

However, these resolutions and recommendations in the 2006LDMSD do not appear from nothing. They have been a concern of the Roman Catholic Church’s mission over a period of time and through historical contexts. This research project submits, therefore, that a study on the historical context of the Roman Catholic Church in Central Malawi will be necessary in order to understand the influence in which the 2006LDMSD with its position on *Nyau* was produced. The project is of the opinion that the Roman Catholic Church’s current treatment of *Nyau* is in continuity with the historical relationship that existed between the *Nyau* and the Roman Catholic Church. Jesse N.K. Mugambi (1992)³⁹ has given a historical framework of the early missionary historical context found to be useful in evaluating the 2006LDMSD.

2.2 The Influence of Western Civilization on the Church's Position on *Nyau* in Central Malawi.

There are three events that happened in nineteenth century that affected the western missionaries’ encounter with the local people in Africa. Jesse Mugambi (1992) calls them “the industrial revolution, the transformation of political systems into modern nations, and the expansion of political and economic influence of European nations outside the continent of Europe to Asia, Africa, South America and Oceanic islands” (1992:21). The influence of these events affected “the Church - within both the protestant and Roman Catholic Church” (1992:20) and that “the presuppositions underlying the Christian missionary enterprise of the nineteenth

³⁸ *Afisi* (plural) – *Fisi* (singular) is a Chewa word for a “hyena” but in this case it refers to a “surrogate husband for the purpose of ritual intercourse” either to generate a child in a childless marriage or to awaken sexually an initiated girl who has no husband (Boucher 2012: xxvi) or “a man called to perform ritual intercourse with a girl at the end of her initiation” (van Breugel 2001:21).

³⁹ Jesse Mugambi writes the experiences of the missionary enterprise in East Africa which I consider to have a considerable impact on the pastoral understanding of Catholicism in Malawi as the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM) is part of the Roman Catholic pastoral region governed by the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA). The ECM shares AMECEA’s pastoral reflections (SCC 2011:23).

century, were nurtured under the impact of these features” (Mugambi 1992:20).⁴⁰ This paper will focus on the impact the Theory of Evolution (1992:21), the Success of Science (1992:25) and the Supremacy of Europe (1992:27) had on the life and mission of the western missionaries in their encounter with Africans, like the Chewa people in Central Malawi.

2.2.1 The Theory of Evolution.

The theory of evolution is "understood to refer to the belief that both the animate and the inanimate, the organic and the inorganic aspects of this universe are in a continuing process of change, and that through this process, the various components of the universe are changing progressively from lower to higher quality” (Mugambi 1992:21). This theory made an impact on the life of the missionaries as much as “most Europeans since the second half of the nineteenth century believed that Europe had reached the highest peak of the evolutionary process and that the rest of the world was far below them in the ladder of evolution” (Mugambi 1992:21).

Firstly, this theory has an implication on the creation of a human person which further problematizes the missionaries’ relations with Africans. The theory of evolution stated that “man (sic) was not created by God...man (sic) as a species appeared on earth through a long process of natural selection, in which the living organism changed in their internal and external structures so as to survive in their particular and changing environment” (Mugambi 1992:22).

Secondly, the theory has the implications on how the missionaries saw themselves among the Africans. Jesse Mugambi points out that “the missionaries who went to Asia and Africa considered themselves to have attained the highest possible level of civilization, which the 'primitive savages' were expected to copy in order to 'develop' from 'paganism' to 'civilization'” (Mugambi 1992:23).

⁴⁰ The first, “Missionaries were nearer to God in heaven than Africans” (Mugambi 1992:5). The second, “African Christians have been taught to embrace Christianity as a culture, rather than a challenge to every culture” (Mugambi 1992:6) and the third, that “Nothing valuable in African cultural and religious heritage, and that the African background must be ignored or abandoned by any African who chose to become a Christian” (Mugambi 1992:5). There was also a fourth observation “Churches as social institutions... have structures that have been developed for long time according to different traditions, so that the main Church denominations have within their administrative structure and their liturgy features that can be traced to the cultural roots of those denominations. At the same time, the Church as a social institution has certain relationships with other social institutions in a particular society. Very often in history, the Church has tended to support and provide theological justification for the existing structures, within other institutions” (Mugambi 1992:16).

Thirdly, the theory has another implication on how the converts were made to look at Christianity in relation to African traditional religion. Jesse Mugambi (1992) notes that Christianity had been portrayed as “the highest religion for all mankind to follow, and that west European Christianity in particular is the highest form of expression which the rest of mankind must accept” (1992:24).

Mugambi’s missionary context had also been noted at the coming of Catholicism in Malawi. Around the same nineteenth century, the Missionaries of Africa, who are also known as the White Fathers, brought Catholicism to Central Malawi (Ott 2000:220). They were guided in their missionary endeavour by theological developments in Europe which included the use of scholastic theology, the dogma of the papal infallibility and the use of the maxim “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*”⁴¹ (Ott 2000:220). Furthermore, the early missionaries had an exclusive understanding of the term Church to mean only the Roman Catholic Church. Only the Roman Catholic Church is the One, Holy, Apostolic and Catholic Church outside of which no salvation could be attained (Ott 2000:221). I C Lamba (1985) laments on the missionary endeavour in Central Malawi was influenced by the theory of evolution and ‘Victorianism’ in which there was “much theorising about Africans in vogue” (1985:62). Harry W. Langworthy (1970), concludes that the missionaries, under this ‘Darwinian’ and ‘Victorian standards’ the missionaries placed their observations they encountered among the Africans in a wrong context and gave them wrong interpretations (1970: 32). This paper submit therefore that the theory of evolution was applied by the missionaries in in Central Malawi as well and that it points to a number of assertions that the missionaries made regarding the traditional practice of *Nyau* masked dancers which could most probably be different.

2.2.1.1 *Nyau* and Spirit Possession.

First, is the assertion the missionaries made about the nature of the Holy Spirit in relation to African Traditional Religions like *Nyau* (Mhango 2012:2; Julian and Caroline 2013:1; Dean 2012:6; Cees and Mirjam 2013:2). Similarly the conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and *Nyau* regarding spirit possession is based on the compatibility of the spirit the *Nyau* is said to possess - is it the Holy Spirit or the evil spirit? (Boucher 2012:35-36). *Nyau* had been described “as an atavistic representation of evil spirits” (Lamba 1985:69) and further “as evil and degenerate’ in an environment of paganism” (Lamba 1985: 69). *Nyau* has also been referred to as demonic (Mhango 2012:2).

⁴¹ Translated from Latin to mean “Outside the Church there is no salvation” (Ott 2000:220).

However, besides these negative assertions about *Nyau* there has also been a positive observation about *Nyau*. *Nyau* has been understood to have a religious significance for the Chewa people. It plays the role of representing the invisible spirit world - the spirits of the dead (van Breugel 2001:147). David Korpela (2010) asserts that *Nyau* characters are the "actual spirits, not simply performers... a serious matter to claim that 'actors' are 'deceiving' the audience in the masquerade ritual by simply portraying or representing spirits" (2010:35). At a funeral the *Nyau* is believed to "embody the spirit of the deceased *ciwanda*, which is believed to stay on the earth and roam even after the corpse is buried" (Yoshida 1993: 37). *Nyau* Characters are understood as having the role to "oversee the transformation of the dead into ancestral spirits" (Smith 2001: 191). The basic duty of the *Nyau* in all these instances is to ensure a peaceful transition of humans into the ancestral world and also to protect the living from harmful spirits that come back to disturb people in the village. Rangeley's views that "*Nyau* was designed without doubt to ensure that the departed spirits ceased to worry the community" (Rangeley 1949:38). However, there are three issues to be considered in dealing with *Nyau*'s spirit possession:

First, is that *Nyau* characters possess the spirits of the ancestors (Boucher 2002:55). The spirits of the ancestors are not regarded as bad spirits among the Chewa people. Martin Ott (2000) equates them to the saints as understood in the Roman Catholic Church (Ott 2000:454). Previously the discourse on ancestors has been considered as *ziwanda*, or ghosts or bad or evil spirits (Paas 2010:70). Development has taken place on the study of ancestors and it has come to general agreement of their positive spiritual significance in the lives of the African people (Nyamiti 2010:62).

Secondly the *Nyau* characters are believed to have the power to control and manipulate the spirits of the deceased at the time of funeral so that the spirits of the deceased do not become the wondering *ziwanda*,⁴² attacking people (Yoshida 1993:37; Rangeley 1949:38). In this regard, the *Nyau* cannot be said to incarnate the bad spirits than being the exorcists of those bad spirits. The same is said of those who become possessed of bad spirits, where the *Nyau* characters are called upon as exorcists (Sembereka 1996:18).

Thirdly, the *Nyau* Characters are believed to have the power to welcome and introduce the spirit of the deceased into the ancestral world (Yoshida 1993:40, Smith 2001:191; Boucher 55-56). Considering Martin

⁴² *Ciwanda* (singular) means same as *Ziwanda* (plural) referring to the evil wondering spirits and the spirits of the witches, as well as the demons (Boucher 2012:xxvii; Paas 2010:70)

Ott's equating of the ancestors to the saints (2000:454), this role of *Nyau* would be equated to the canonization of the saints, where the Roman Catholic Church declares people who have lived an exemplarily life before their death, into sainthood (Casarella 2013:61; Moss 2009:57,65-74). This role of *Nyau* is not in conflict again with the Christian practice of the communion with the Saints (EA 43).

Looking at these points and assessing them, this paper submits that the Roman Catholic Church needs to reconsider how these tasks of the *Nyau* spirit possession pose a challenge to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church regarding the Holy Spirit.⁴³ It further submits that the Roman Catholic Church's position on *Nyau* regarding spirit possession has been influenced by the Darwinian theory of evolution. The paper asserts that the Roman Catholic Church still considers the *Nyau* practice as having nothing to do with the Holy Spirit after the traditional practices of the Chewa people had been measured far below the evolution level by the western civilization. The primitives had no reason and right thinking hence they could not be said to have the Holy Spirit and so were their traditional practices like *Nyau*. This research project submit that the missionaries, strayed by this theory of evolution, denied God's self-expression in the traditions of African beliefs and systems – including the traditional practice of *Nyau*. This paper puts the question that, if the missionaries held that God created a human person and breathed in that human person the Holy Spirit from the foundations of the world (Gen. 1:1-2), then how could they have treated the traditional practice of *Nyau* in relation to *Nyau*'s spirit possession function?

2.2.1.2 *Nyau* and Secrecy.

Secondly, the Roman Catholic Church has concern over the obligation of the adherents of traditional practice of *Nyau* to keep secrets of the *Nyau* because of the death threats that comes with it. The Roman Catholic Church noted that “to take liberty with *Nyau* was to meet death” (Rangeley 1949:44) in other words the members of the *Nyau* secret society are told not to “reveal them (*Nyau* secrets) or anything about *Nyau* in public” (Rangeley 1949:44). In return, the members of the *Nyau* secret society would obey strictly the rules regarding secrecy “for fear they may be killed” (Rangeley 1949:44). However, the converts to Christianity, especially the teachers “divulged the *Nyau* secrets to school children and encouraged disrespect” (Linden 1974:128).

⁴³ St Robert Bellarmine stressed that reason is a “holy inspiration from God and the use of reason means the reception of the Holy Spirit which alone enables the saving grace, justification and salvation” (Bellarmine in Sullivan 1992:90). Paul VI says that “the Holy Spirit does the works of salvation to all people in a manner known to God alone” (Paul VI in Sullivan 1992:8). John Chrysostom says that Jesus before he was born was “already known in the world by those who used the reason to live an upright life” (Chrysostom quoted in Sullivan 1992:17).

This paper agrees with the Roman Catholic Church on the rules regarding *Nyau* secrecy and with the *Nyau* secret society as a secret society (Boucher 2012:13). The paper considers that *Nyau* secrecy poses a big challenge if nature of *Nyau* has to be studied systematically as a subject in western education system. Its nature of secrecy still makes it difficult to have all of its pros and cons exposed to the public. However, secrets about *Nyau* are there to prevent the flaws in the spirit possession function of *Nyau* for "if the identity of the individual dancer could be established, the effect of reincarnation was destroyed and...the workings of the spirits became obvious frauds" (Rangeley 1949:38). However, this paper is of the opinion that the secretive nature of *Nyau* is one of the elements of African Traditional religion that makes it not to be a scholarly discipline but a lived experience (Chirwa 1994:58). The Chewa people join *Nyau* as it is part of their lived experience. Francis Moto (1994) views *Nyau* secrecy as a way to maintain the mysterious and sacred function of *Nyau* (1994:23). This paper submits therefore that the Roman Catholic Church's view on *Nyau* with regard to secrecy is based on the western standard of education and culture where secrets have to be brought to the chalkboard in classroom.

2.2.2 The Success of Science.

The success of science in Europe had an impact as well on the way the missionaries related with the missionary lands. The advancements in science made it possible for "missionary societies who launched their work in Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, advocated the establishment of simple industrial centres in which African converts would be given technical skills as part of their recruitment into European Civilization" (Mugambi 1992:25). This pastoral approach had an implication that those to be employed in the simple industrial centres had to be African converts skilled enough in the demands of western life. Hence the conversion "to be a Christian meant to be 'civilized'" (1992:25) and "to be 'civilized' meant abandoning African life which was described as 'primitive' and 'savage,' and copying the west European way of life" (1992:25). It follows also that the African converts had to take on "this new way of life characterized not only by new moral code, but also by new technology, new norms in dressing, and new means of communication through writing ..." (1992:25).

This paper acknowledges the goodness that came with this missionary approach: cars, good roads, developments of towns, improved health facilities, schools, improved personal hygiene, beautiful clothes, and descent looking. In some other cases and places there was improved sanitary systems and a good income for those who manage to get employed. However, the paper notes that the success of science invalidated some practical traditional solutions to problems and other traditional concerns. Science has made the missionaries dismiss these traditional practices as merely superstitious on the basis of scientific assertions - such as the use of traditional medicine was discouraged (Makumbi 1999:58). The fears about witchcraft, taboo diseases and

traditional solutions to them were dismissed too as superstition - of course if they were without scientific evidence (1999:58).⁴⁴

This paper submits that getting employed at the missionary industrial towns, was part of the evangelization strategy, a remuneration for rejecting African Traditional beliefs and advocating European values. Patrick Kalilombe (1999) testifies that there had been times when works of charity by the Roman Catholic missionaries were used as an instrument and incentive for conversion to Christianity (1999:114). Elizabeth Isichei (1995) notes that at the very heart of the missionary enterprise was the tireless effort to help the African converts assimilate the western civilization (Isichei 1995:93). Kalilombe (1999) observed that in spite of conversion to new religions and churches, the converts still practiced a dual practice of life, both Christian and traditional (1999: 127). Similar observations are also shared by Rangeley (1949: 47). Kalilombe (1999) insists that the crucial issue in dealing with the converts who retain to the traditional practices is to find out the relevance of those retained traditional practices and not at converts' failure to adhere to western Christianity (1999: 127). This paper agrees with Kalilombe on this point since such an observation will lead to discovery of essential values that Christianity can learn from the traditional practices. Such can be a way of Christianity addressing the Chewa people holistically.

2.2.2.1 Nyau and Manners.

This paper submits that the success of science shaped the way the missionaries understood *Nyau* with regard to morality and manners (language, dressing, behaviour) and that the Church's position regarding manners has been shaped by the expectation of changing *Nyau* to adopt western manners. The Roman Catholic Church holds that the traditional practice of *Nyau* is "immoral based" (Baur 2005:321) considering sexual provocative nature of the songs, nakedness of the dancers and suspicion of possible adultery happening among the society members after performances (Linden 1974:119). However, both Ian Linden and Rangeley agree that the missionaries were aware that *Nyau* dancers had a moral obligation to abstain from sex until the end of the *Nyau* performance (Linden1974:119; Rangeley 1949: 48). Certainly, these suspicions could not be substantial to make a general conclusion of immorality at the *Nyau* performances.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Similarly, Josiah Phiri (1991:4-5), Samuel Josiah Nthala (1933:96-97), and Archibald J Makumbi (1999:58-59) advocated for the new manners of the new civilization.

⁴⁵ I wish to emphasize again here that the *Nyau* characters (masked dancers) were not and are still not involved in any sexual intercourse while performing, they are in a transformed state which is a spiritual state (Boucher 2002:55). And again that once they remove the masks they cease to be *Nyau* but ordinary members of the *Nyau* secret society.

The function of *Nyau* as the intermediary for fertility in the Chewa culture makes it unable for the *Nyau* to escape the sexual related functions. It is part of the initiation rite to teach the initiates issues about sex including all other life lessons (Smith 2001:190). In the female initiation the sex lessons are taught through songs and dance performances. The Chewa people believe that the young women must understand issues about sex in order that they may grow with womanly manners and also know what child bearing mean (Yoshida 1993:43). The Roman Catholic Church's concern over the spread of HIV/AIDs is a valid concern not only in the *Nyau* practice but also to everyone engaging in sex (SSC 2006:58). This also concerns the issue about obscenity and bad manners at the *Nyau* performances. Obscenity has a ritual meaning when performed by the *Nyau* characters (Yoshida 1993:37)⁴⁶ while the bad manners at the *Nyau* performances are considered as reversal behaviours that only show to the society the moral gap and that the society needs to respond positively (van Breugel 2001:154). The bad behaviour of *Nyau* characters, in this case, has nothing to do with what they have been previously referred to as 'devil dancers of error' (Linden 1974:127).

2.2.2.2 *Nyau* and Superstition.

The conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and *Nyau* with regard to magic, traditional medicine and witchcraft is based on the implication involved in the nature of *Nyau* performances (Masina 1010:1; Mhango 2012:2; Kachapila 2006:323; van Breugel 2001:147; McCaffrey 1981:42). It was not surprising that those who are newly converted to Catholicism had been discouraged by the missionaries from associating with witchcraft (Groves 2012:12). However, it is noted as a common practice in traditional Africa as is among the Chewa people that ritual performances are accompanied by a prescription of traditional medicine which are meant to enhance life – either healing or protecting (Faulkner 1988:31; Chirwa 1994:57; Oborji 2005:29).

This paper submits that the traditional *Nyau* practice had been perceived negatively for the sake of competition to gain more converts to Catholicism and western civilization. It further submits that the advancement of science and improved medical facilities had contributed to this perception of traditional practices. The paper takes note of the zealous catechists (Linden 1974:125) who did a good job of gaining more converts to Christianity at the expense of downplaying blameless traditional medical practices (1974:125). Laurel Birch de Aquilar testifies that the *Nyau* societies had been painted witchcraft by mistake (Laurel Birch de Aquila

⁴⁶ Kenji Yoshida (1993) observes that the mention of genitals among the Chewa people can in one way be an insult and yet acceptable if exchanged "between relatives in a joking relationship, especially between across cousins, the exchange of insults between Kasinja and women suggests that the living, represented by women, and the spirit of the deceased, embodied by Kasinja, have entered into a very close relationship, similar to that of joking and marriage partners. This is supposed to console the spirit of the deceased" (1993: 37).

quoted in Schoffeleers 2000:13). Johan van Breugel (2001) understands the role of *Nyau* in the healing ceremonies of the Chewa people as at times involving traditional herbs (van Breugel 2001:230). Kenji Yoshida (1993) testifies that *Nyau* character would play the reversal behaviour of sorcerers to teach against witchcraft (Yoshida 1993: 38). This paper submits then that the traditional practice of *Nyau* has for its purpose to heal than to hurt, to bring life than to take away life. The superstitious observations made to *Nyau* had only been as a result of forcing people to appreciate and use western health facilities.

2.2.3 The Supremacy of Europe.

The supremacy of Europe on the ladder of evolution meant other implications on the missionary encounters in traditional Africa. Jesse Mugambi (1992) finds that “the missionaries shared the excitement and ambitions of their respective home countries to dominate the rest of the Europe, and if possible, the rest of the world” (1992:27). This paper submits that this Supremacy of Europe rested in the Europeans’ confidence to have reached the highest peak of life. They believed they would exert their influence in any area of traditional Africans’ life without opposition, even if it meant destroying the traditions that bound African peoples’ life together. There has been such a distortion of traditional practices that gave Africans purpose and meaning in life, as illustrated in this section. This research project share the views of the African East African scholars who refused to accept the theory of evolution (1992:27). The theory has been rejected based on the understanding that it mean to promote the European way of life as dominating over traditional Africans’ life. It has been noted that the early missionaries were influenced by this theory of evolution to such an extent that evangelization was not isolated from western civilization (1992:27). Traditional Africans were regarded as the heathens who had to be taken “out of darkness into light” (1992:27). In a similar observation, in Malawi the missionaries brought Christianity in a manner that was European, intolerant to African traditional practices and strict (Ott 2000:221).

2.2.3.1 *Nyau* and Chewa Identity.

Firstly, the concern of the missionaries over *Nyau* initiation rite was based on the freedom of the individual Chewa persons to join the *Nyau* “with liberty of the subject” (Kachapila 2006:338) and not by being forced (2006:338). The missionaries’ concern regarding initiation was to make sure that the boys join *Nyau* at free will not as a result of pressure from the *Nyau* secret society or fear from offending the ancestors (van Breugel 2001:143). However, Patrick Kalilombe (1999) illustrates that the missionaries also had a considerable strategy of forcing people to join Christianity by way of incentives where freedom of the individual to join the Roman Catholic Church was compromised (1999:114).

Secondly, the missionaries had the challenge of the *Nyau* initiation rite being an unavoidable institution among the Chewa people. Among the Chewa people, the Christians who are not initiated to *Nyau* are marginalised in the Chewa society and have no voice or traditional contributions to make since uninitiated persona among the Chewa people is regarded as a child (Chimombo 1989:54). *Nyau* and the family at the village level have had conflicts with the Roman Catholic Church based on the question - who has power and over the family member, dead or alive – the Roman Catholic Church or the *Nyau*? (Linden 1974:125).

Thirdly, the conflict between the *Nyau* secret society and the Roman Catholic Church involved the enrolment of young boys into the mission schools (Linden 1974:121). The missionaries had introduced western form of education which became rival to the *Nyau* initiation school (1974:121). The missions and the *Nyau* secret society fought over the education of the youth so much so that “the missions sought to win the hearts of the children at mission schools before *Nyau* could 'demonize' them,” (Smith 2001:203) and again that “the *Nyau* leaders tried to see that the boys became included within the Chewa society before they were turned against traditional matters and 'polluted' by Christianity” (Smith 2001:203). For the Chewa people, polluting the youth meant teaching the children “to despise their elders”⁴⁷ (Roy Murry quoted in Linden 1974:126) and that would tantamount to overwhelming the “Chewa culture in the classroom” (Mkandawire 2010: 39).

In being challenged by the initiation process among the Chewa people, it can be concluded that the Roman Catholic Church had a challenge with the process of making of the Chewa persons. The process of the making the Chewa person involved imparting on the person the Chewa identity, not from the western education, but from the *Nyau* traditional practices. It was noted that “in the membership of *Nyau* were the important people of the community, the people whose duty was to keep the customs of the tribe and to hand down the history of the community”⁴⁸ (Rangeley 1949:49). The missionaries “frowned on African dances because of their associations with traditional religions” (Collingwood 2001:125) hence any “religious opposition to *Nyau* thus struck at the leaders of *Cewa* [Chewa] society and at *Cewa* tribal custom” (Rangeley 1949:49). However, in spite of the fact that “the missions frown on *Nyau* and discourage it ... nevertheless some of their members are also members of *Nyau*” (Rangeley 1949: 47). This dual affiliation suggests that the Chewa people do feel the need to belong to their roots. A proud Smart Banda, a Chewa person from Zambia, declared that “my training would make me strong, courage and obedient, and I would be taught various arts” (Smart Banda

⁴⁷ It is also a concern of *Africae Munus* in which “African appreciation of old age should inspire Western societies to treat the elderly with greater dignity” (AM 47).

⁴⁸*Nyau* is “the single storehouse of Chewa traditional culture and history” (Schoffeleers 1976:61).

quoted in McCaffrey 1981:40). If demonising the youth by the *Nyau* means what Smart Banda says or meaning an “obstacle to the development of the native by keeping children away from school” (Hodgson quoted in Kachapila 2006:338) then the act of demonising the youth by *Nyau* initiation remains a debate.

Fourthly, the missionaries had the concern over the alleged abuses that went on at the *Nyau* initiation schools. The Roman Catholic Church has been concerned over the ‘beating up’ or the ‘new boy tortures’ of youth at their joining *Nyau* (Rangeley 1949:42) while at the female initiation, the abuse involved “the physical intimidation and degradation of Chewa women” (Kachapila 2006:334). However, among the Chewa people, there no abuses at the *Nyau* initiation because the hardness experienced at the initiation school reflected the harshness of daily life they are going to face – it is to prepare the youth to face the difficult situations in life (van Breugel 2001:149; Short 1974:10). However, the 2006LDMSD maintains a prohibition of the youth from joining the *Nyau* altogether (SSC 2006:57) and promotes the youth to join western education (2006:33-38).

2.2.3.2 *Nyau* and *Nyau* secret Society.

In a conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and *Nyau*, Bishop Guilleme wrote the District Commissioner for Lilongwe describing *Nyau* as a "secret society the first purpose of which was lubricity and robbery by performing a dance ceremony for the dead" (Guilleme quoted in Linden 1974: 124). Assessing this assertion from Bishop Guilleme, this paper submits it as typical example of a testimony indicating that the conflict was not between the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau* itself but between the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau* secret society. It is true that it is from the *Nyau* secret society that the *Nyau* characters come from. However, this paper submits that the nature of *Nyau* and the nature of the *Nyau* secret society are not the same. *Nyau* has been portrayed as having its own role than that of the *Nyau* secret society. It may reasonably be pointed out that the problems referred to by Bishop Guilleme relating to *Nyau* secret society may not necessarily be the problem of the *Nyau* characters themselves. It is also true that one cannot be a *Nyau* character without being a member of the *Nyau* secret Society (De Kok 2005:24). This paper submits therefore that if the Roman Catholic Church considers the role of *Nyau* as *Nyau* not as the *Nyau* secret Society, then the Roman Church would realise the independence of the religious significance *Nyau* has in the Chewa religious life and would recognise that such religious significance is not in conflict with Catholicism. This paper submits therefore that treating *Nyau* as *Nyau* would be like treating a Roman Catholic Priest as a religious figure different from his weaknesses as a human person. This paper proposes that the Supremacy of Europe has had a great impact in shaping the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the traditional practice of *Nyau*. The missionaries defended their European supremacy in many ways one of which is indicated in the way the traditional practice of *Nyau* had been condemned (Page 1980:181).

2.3 The Church's Challenge in Our contemporary Time on the Position on Nyau.

The Second Vatican Council⁴⁹ brought into the Roman Catholic Church a change of attitude towards other non-Christian religion and traditional practices (Mandala 2011: 74). The missionaries begun to change their attitude towards the African indigenous traditions. The Roman Catholic Church in Malawi, more particularly in Central Malawi, too had joined the whole world's revolution, a revision of theological principles in approach to missions: no longer looking for example, at traditional Africans as savages but dignified human beings, not as demonic or satanic but spiritual and religious people and not primitive or illiterate. The Roman Catholic Church in other words is no longer establishing Christendom or the Christian empire. Rather The Roman Catholic Church is considering its mission to the Chewa people of Central Malawi as being to the rational, free, literate, and dignified human beings. And the Church recognises the Africans' involvement in enriching Christian theology as collaborators in the missionary journey of the Roman Catholic Church by incorporating their culture into Christianity (Mandala 2011:74). The transformation of Malawi from colonialism to a multiparty system of government has also offered the experience of the freedom of expression, thought, association, religious freedom, cultural and promotion of cultural traditional without coercion (Kok 2005: 30-34). This experience is seen through the records of Roman Catholic Church's activities, in the dialogue and relationship with the local people and also the development in the Catholic Church at all levels (LG 13; AG 7; GS 22; NA 2; Sullivan 1992: 184; Kiaziku 2009:134).⁵⁰

As part of the Roman Catholic Church's activities in Central Malawi, there are more schools and even new strategies of evangelization that are working closely together (EA 67-77; SSC 2006:28; AM 159-171; EG 94-141).⁵¹ Beside Roman Catholic Church activities we also have the phenomenon of globalization where the world is becoming a "global Village" (EA 71) with the influence of western culture dominating (EG 62, McGarry 2002:13-22; AM 86-87). There are now advanced hygiene methods, medication and advanced health facilities with the influence of the Roman Catholic Church (SSC 2006:29-32; AM 139-141). The young people now have the opportunity to pursue their ambitions focussing on a new status in society through education (SSC 2006:33-38; EA 102-103; AM 134-138). Through the programmes of New evangelization, traditional Africans themselves have stopped despising their own culture, and are now looking for ways to deepen the

⁴⁹ Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965

⁵⁰ **LG** (*Lumen Gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church); **AG** (*Ad Gentes Divinitus*: Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity); **GS** (*Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World); **NA** (*Nostra Aetate*: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions).

⁵¹ **EA** (*Ecclesia in Africa*: The Church in Africa); **SSC** (Synod Steering Committee); **AM** (*Africae Munus*: Africa's Commitment); **EG** (*Evangelii Gaudium*: The Joy of the Gospel).

Christian faith in their own culture (AM 36-38; EA 41-56; EG 61-75; SSC 2006:55-59). There is also a developed awareness of the cultural crisis, identity crisis, globalization, cultural erosion and the recalling of the old traditional African values (EG 66; SSC 2006:57; AM 93; EA 48). Furthermore there is a condemnation of *Nyau* but with a difference based on some limited tolerance and need for more research on *Nyau* (SSC 2006:57-58). This paper submits that these observations can influence the way of the Roman Catholic Church's mission to move towards advancement in the positivity towards traditional African practices on the one hand and on the other hand the Roman Catholic Church may be tempted to re-live the history of the missionaries. The western culture still influences the ways of evangelization. It still stand a challenge for the Catechists and evangelizers who are trained in western culture to promote honestly and freely the local traditional practices condemned previously by the Roman Catholic Church – like *Nyau*.

SUMMARY

This research project draws a conclusion that the conflict between *Nyau* and the Roman Catholic Church has been as a result of two and opposing ways of attaining education. On the one hand education system based on western civilization that came with the missionaries and on the other hand, the traditional ways of educating practised by the Chewa people in the traditional practice of *Nyau*. The western civilizations had appeared to dominate the way of being a Christian and of what it means to belong to the true religion. The western Christianity showed superiority to all other African Religions and practices including *Nyau*. The western civilization had been presented as and the only true expression of true religion. This project submits therefore that the traditional practice of *Nyau* has been the challenge to the western form of culture and the western form of Christianity by its strict observance of traditional practices and symbolisms in the face of western civilization. The *Nyau* has been a challenge to the Roman Catholic Church for remaining faithful to the Chewa religious tradition. It also submits that traditional Chewa education is indeed education in its own right and has to be respected. The dialogue between *Nyau* and the Roman Catholic Church still lays a challenge because of the Roman Catholic Church's continued engagement with western culture and western form of civilization. The next chapter will propose some insights into a further step towards reconciliation between *Nyau* and the Roman Catholic Church.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 NYAU AND GOD'S FAMILY

"*The African family is for all intents and purposes, a spiritual entity and a 'cult-group'*" (Hagan 1999:57).

INTRODUCTION

In traditional African society religion and culture are not separated. Life is held in totality (Chirwa 1994:58). It is from this perspective that this research project presents in this chapter the religious significance of *Nyau* to the Chewa traditional life considering how *Nyau* influences the Chewa people both in their ordinary life and in their spiritual life.

Firstly, the project submits in this chapter that *Nyau* is the spiritual hub that holds and strengthen together the totality of life for the Chewa people. Secondly, the project submits that *Nyau* as a religious figure influences the Chewa people's understanding of community spirit, communal identity, personal relationships, life of true reconciliation, rootedness in God and the Chewa people's understanding of traditional family as God's mission at the service of humanity.⁵² *Nyau* will be studied in this case as a necessary element in the traditional Chewa worldview of the family that cannot be ignored. Thirdly, the project submits that the Roman Catholic Church,⁵³ viewed as God's Family and understood in the traditional African perspective of the family, supports the role of *Nyau* in the traditional Chewa understanding of family. The traditional Chewa family will be studied as a "spiritual entity" and a 'cult-group'" (Hagan 1999:57) whose presiding masters are the *Nyau* characters. This will also be taken as a point of dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau*. Finally, for purpose of study in this chapter, *Nyau* will be considered as distinct from the *Nyau* secret society – the focus will be on the role of the *Nyau* characters themselves.

3.1 The Ecclesiology of God's Family.

The understanding of the Roman Catholic Church as God's Family has been described by the two documents *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Africae Munus* as the Roman Catholic Church taking on the expressions of the

⁵² Also considered to be the characteristics of the African Family the Church considers to be the point of dialogue with the traditional African Family (Locheng 2011:168-176).

⁵³ Any reference made in the name of the *Church* will strictly refer in this this chapter and the rest of the thesis onwards to mean the Roman Catholic Church.

traditional African family (EA 6; AM 7).⁵⁴ *Ecclesia in Africa* points to the need for dialogue with various African traditional practices that builds the African community as a solid family (EA 42-43). Among other traditional African values *Ecclesia in Africa* exhorts are such as the worship of one God, the veneration of the ancestors, love of children, the role of the extended family, the sense of solidarity, the sense of community life and respect for human life (EA 42-43). A similar observation is also expressed by Joseph Healey (Healey1995: 45).⁵⁵ The document *Africae Munus* highlights the renewal of these traditional African values with the sense of promoting “the care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust” (AM 7) as the way to justice, peace and reconciliation in an African context that has been torn by many afflictions (AM 12, 15).⁵⁶

To illustrate how the traditional practice of *Nyau* is supported by the Roman Catholic Church image of God’s family the project has used the Ecclesiology model of the Family of God as presented by Callisto Locheng (2011). Locheng understands the Roman Catholic Church as the family not as it would be understood in traditional African context strictly speaking of clans and tribes. He proposes that the Roman Catholic Church as a family should be looked at as an open family, an inclusive family. He argues that family membership Africa can be obtained “by birth, adoption, marriage or friendship” (2011:169) and that the ultimate source of family is God irrespective of being natural or the Roman Catholic Church (2011:169). Locheng then presents the ecclesiology of God’s family in five highlights: firstly, the ecclesiology based on family as understood in traditional African context; secondly, based on village community as understood in an traditional African way; thirdly, based on the traditional African understanding of community life; fourthly, based on the traditional African family’s rootedness in God; and lastly based on the understanding of the Trinity as an eternal covenant of the traditional African Family.

3.1.1 Family as Understood in Traditional African Context.

The ecclesiology of God's Family considers the African understanding of family where living in solidarity and community is of great value (Locheng 2011:168). Solidarity is understood to be an attitude of doing things

⁵⁴ **EA** (*Ecclesia in Africa*), **AM** (*Africae Munus*).

⁵⁵ Joseph Healey pauses the document *Ecclesia in Africa* on its notion of the Church as the Family of God (**EA 6**) in which is believed to originate from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council II (**LG 6**) on the Church as the People of God. The document applied this view as meaning the family of God accommodates all people belonging to human family as the one family of God. The application to African understanding is based on the nature and values of African family such as extended family, celebrations of life, unity, ways of reconciliation, school, upbringing, religiosity, ancestors, love for life, (Healey1995: 45).

⁵⁶ Wars, Conflicts, racism and xenophobia (**AM 12**)

together such as attending to the needs of the family together (Chakanza 2000:222).⁵⁷ It is in a family where these values are put in practice that no one feels lonely in any given situation. Every member receives due support from the other members of the family. Solidarity is exercised in a community. Community and solidarity brings into the African⁵⁸ community the attitude of hospitality which the Church considers to be in line with the Gospel. This understanding of the Roman Catholic Church is meant to iron out challenges that are taking place in Africa - the infiltrating values of individualism. Individualism does not make room for community sharing. There is always the tendency of each person attending to personal concerns and having nothing to do with others. This is the challenge that weakens the bonds of relationships in a given context of the Roman Catholic Church's mission (AM 11-12; EA 46-49; IL 2009:30-33; LM 67-81).⁵⁹ Furthermore individualism promotes the spirit of 'dissatisfaction' leading to malpractices such as accumulation of wealth and corruption (LM 81).

3.1.2 Village as Understood in a Traditional African Way.

The ecclesiology of God's Family considers the traditional African understanding of the village community (Locheng 2011:169). In a traditional African village there are different families living together even though they are not from the same kinship (2011:169). However, people know each other very well and they have deeply bonded personal relationships. Such deep personal bonds makes it that the people have genuine feelings for one another. There is a deep sharing of togetherness in the faith of the mystery of Christ (2011:170). They share the common source of resources which also becomes a reason for common sharing...generously (170). Certainly this is the aspect of African Ecclesiology that highlights the importance of living together as a community – a community that is aware of each one's needs (LM 40). It is a community that ministers to itself rather than having no feeling for the suffering of one another. In Africa, the Roman Catholic Church has suffered the rise of corruption, robbery, xenophobia, which come as a result of individualism, false national or tribal pride and selfishness (EA 40-41; AM 12; LM 74; IL 2009:14-15). This is the human attitude that tears the Roman Catholic Church apart. This aspect of African Ecclesiology will help the Roman Catholic Church members learn to respect the gospel values not only because they come from written Bible but because the Africans are witnesses to it even before the coming of Christianity (Oborji 2005:31).

⁵⁷ The Chewa people have a proverb "*mutu umodzi susenza denga*: one head does not carry a roof" (Chakanza 2000:222) which emphasizes co-operation, unity and dependency.

⁵⁸ Any reference made in the name of the Africa and African will strictly refer in this this chapter and the rest of the thesis onwards to mean the traditional Africa and the traditional African.

⁵⁹ **IL** (*Instrumentum Laboris*); **LM** (*Lineamenta*).

3.1.3 The Traditional African Understanding of Community.

The ecclesiology of God's Family also considers the concept how the traditional African society understands community (Locheng 2011: 173). In urban areas people tend to form communities and associations as a way of establishing the harmonious relationships. These communities offer an opportunity for each members to practice his/her role. Each member feels personally responsible on behalf of the community. These relationship however may be regulated by some constitution or terms of conditions and the like. In an African society the sense of the whole community is immediately in the consciousness of the people, in the conversations people identify themselves with the 'we' communal aspect rather than the individualistic 'I' (Phiri 2011:23). This aspect of the African Ecclesiology prevents the development of the ethnic divisions in the Church (AM 41).

3.1.4 The Traditional African Family Rootedness in God.

The God's Family ecclesiology considers the scriptural roots of family and that God is held to be the source of the family (Locheng 2011: 174). The Roman Catholic Church considers the family as a continuation of God's service to humanity. The family is also called the domestic Church (Locheng 2011:174; Hagan 1999:57; Phiri 2011:63). The family becomes the school of life. The family community becomes involved in the passing of to the young ones the secrets, the skills and the tradition of the community. The Roman Catholic Church regards the family setting in Africa as a suitable place where people learn the culture of "forgiveness, peace and reconciliation" (AM 43). There are some other two aspects that need to be considered in understanding this aspect of ecclesiology. First, that God created the family through the promises made to the spiritual ancestors such as Adam, and Abraham, hence as the current members of the Roman Catholic Church we are the spiritual lineage to our ancestors in faith (Locheng 2011:172). Secondly, God creates the family that is inclusive since through the marital covenant with Adam, God's covenant with all humanity was established (Locheng 2011: 174).

3.1.5 The Trinitarian Aspect of Traditional African Family.

Lastly the God's Family ecclesiology considers the understanding of the Trinity as pointing to the family with an eternal covenant (Locheng 2011: 175). In a traditional African situation, what unites people as members of one family is not only the flesh and blood but also the common family ancestor, clan and tribe. Similarly, in the Roman Catholic Church in African, it is through the sacrament of the Eucharist which is the flesh and the blood of Christ that as Christians we are united with one another (LM 39). Furthermore, we are united with one another through the sacrament of Baptism, which is consider to be the rebirth and adoption into God's Family - the universal Church. As Christians we get incorporated into God's family in the name of Trinity

(Locheng 2011: 175).⁶⁰

3.2 The Critique of the God's Family Ecclesiology.

Callisto Locheng (2011) has a good analysis of the Ecclesiology of God's Family and his application to the Roman Catholic Church in Africa. Locheng appears to put much emphasis on his premises that a person in traditional Africa does not belong to Family by birth alone, but also by adoption, marriage, or friendship and he considers all these elements as present in the Roman Catholic Church and in the traditional African natural family. Locheng in his conclusion raises an important point that God is ultimately the source of family both in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Traditional African context (2011:167). However, some of the concerns and concepts have been mixed up by Locheng considering basically that the Roman Catholic Church is moving from the western perspective of understanding family and trying to adopt the traditional African family model (EA 6, 80-77; AM 7, 42-48; LM 38-40; IL 2009:42-62).

Firstly, Locheng in his premises emphasizes the use of western terminologies that are foreign to African traditional understanding of family. The use of such terms as 'friendship' and 'adoption' or even 'marriage' do not immediately apply in an African context. Some terms are new to traditional African understanding of family – hence this paper submits that the term adoption is new to African understanding of family. Adoption previously never existed in Africa because it has been understood in Africa that the whole village is a parent to a child (Mbiti 1975:115). It may equally be said here that there had not been such terms as orphans in African Traditional family and no adoption (Chakanza 2000:228).⁶¹

Secondly, belonging to a family by marriage and friendship needs to be exhausted. In an African context, a friend remains a friend and not a member of the family. Only on a condition of sharing the common ancestral roots can one become a member of the family. For example, the friend could be from another village but of the same tribe or clan and share the common ancestor hence such a friend is as good as a member of the family (Phiri 1983:259).

Thirdly, marriage can be debated too. In a matrilineal Chewa society, the husband is never part of the family in strict sense of the term given to him as *mkamwini* which means "someone who belongs elsewhere" (Phiri

⁶⁰ The Trinity is considered to be a model of Family since in nature, God is not alone. God's nature has the essence of Fatherhood, Sonship and the essence of the family which is Love (Locheng 2011: 175).

⁶¹ The Chewa people emphasize this attitude with a proverb that "*mwana wanzako ndi wako yemwe*: the child of your neighbor is yours too" (Chakanza 2000:228), thus implying impartiality and indiscrimination.

1983:260).”⁶² The same also applies to a Chewa woman who is taken by a husband to live in his matrilineage home village and through a process called *chitengwa* (Phiri 1983:262). The woman becomes *ntengwa* (Boucher 2012: xxvi)⁶³ and she has the right to return to her family just as the *mkamwini* reserves the right to return to his matrilineal family. It becomes easy when they both share the common ancestral root like marriage between cousins. However, at some stage, it may be denied as a marriage if the ancestral lineage is too close (Phiri 1983:259).⁶⁴

It is understood that Locheng’s use of the term adoption is meant to solve an urban situation where people commune as multiracial, multi-tribal and multinational as in Lilongwe noted by Danie and Musyoka (Danie and Musyoka 2012:57). It is also understood that Locheng is using these western terms to indicate how unique to African understanding of family the Roman Catholic Church is. The Roman Catholic Church is understood as an entity foreign to the traditional African family system in being multicultural and multi-ethnic. This project however regard this concern as an issue affecting the Chewa family in Central Malawi and whose solution would be to incorporate *Nyau* into the Family of God as understood by the African Roman Catholic Church. This project therefore submits that Locheng analysis of God’s family ecclesiology fits the intention of the Synod fathers in proposing the Roman Catholic Church as God’s Family in Africa on the general problems affecting Africa (EA 40-41; AM 12; LM 74; IL 2009:14-15). The project submits further that the Roman Catholic Church in Africa has also to acknowledge that the problems affecting the particular local Churches (Dioceses and Archdioceses) will be addressed using the same model of the Roman Catholic Church as God’s family but with premises that differ depending on the context. God’s family model, however, remains fundamentally a spiritual reality.

3.3 *Nyau* understood as a Component and Facilitator of God's Family.

In Central Malawi, the concerns about the Archdiocese of Lilongwe are not about war or genocide. The situation in Central Malawi is about the Roman Catholic Church’s relationship with *Nyau* (SSC 2006:57-58) which is considered to be affecting the matrilineal society of Chewa people in their understanding of community spirit, communal identity, personal relationships, life of true reconciliation, rootedness in God and the Chewa people’s understanding of family as God's mission as at the service of humanity. This paper submits that the understanding of the Roman Catholic Church as God’s Family supports the role of *Nyau* in the

⁶² Kings M Phiri says the *mkamwini* “has little control of his wife and children” (Phiri 1983:258-259), and that a “Chewa family is seen as an integral part of the wife’s rather than the husband’s lineage” (Phiri 1983:259, 260).

⁶³ *Ntengwa* is the English term for daughter-in-law (Boucher 2012: xxvi) on leaving her village to live in her husband’s matrilineage. In common Chichewa, the term *Ntengwa* in my translation means ‘someone who has been picked from somewhere else’

⁶⁴ Chewa matrilineage is “incomplete without taking into account the institution of marriage for through it a matrilineage acquire the productive and reproductive services of other lineages” (Phiri 1983:259).

traditional Chewa understanding of family.

The traditional Chewa family manifests as the family of God based on its feature as a spiritual entity. George Hagan (1999) describes the traditional African family as “the spiritual entity” (1999:57) and “a cult group” (1999:57). This premise, in traditional Chewa context of family, will hinge on the religious significance of *Nyau* as a representation of the ancestors, who are the guarantors of community cohesion. David Plath (1964) suggests that God’s family is a community of those living and the living dead (1964:313). It is called the family of God in relation to the religious relationship between the living members and living dead members of the family (1964:313).⁶⁵ Similarly George Hagan (1999) has also insisted that an African family is by its nature of being a family, a spiritual entity, and a cult group (:57).⁶⁶

3.3.1 *Nyau* and the Sacredness of the Chewa family.

Firstly, the *Nyau* characters makes the community gathering at an event a holy gathering. Among the Chewa people of Central Malawi it is the spiritual participation of *Gulewamkulu* on rituals of the community that reinforces the idea that the ritual gathering of the people in the Chewa communities are not mere secular gatherings but spiritual assemblies.

The ritual gathering of the Chewa people points to the communion of the living and the living dead. This is the "inalienable feature of Christian ritual as well" (Ott 2000: 461) based on the understanding of the traditional African family as being in communion with the ancestors on the one hand and on the other hand the Roman Catholic Church in Communion with the saints (Ott 2000: 462). This is considered to be the necessary link between the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau* tradition in the understanding of the God's Family - and as "the people of God" (Ott 2000: 462). The *Nyau* facilitates the Chewa family as God’s family on the basis of “kinship,' 'sacredness,' 'mediation' 'exemplarity' and title to regular sacred communication with one's descendant through prayer and ritual offer" (Nyamiti 2010:62). This is where the traditional African family is explained as a spiritual entity and a cult group. The ancestors have a greater role to play in the lives of Africans. They are considered as the mediators and the exemplary of conduct. Because of their sacredness, they are considered to: solemnise ritual events; unite the members of their kinship; make a sacred encounter with the living at the time of prayer and rituals (Nyamiti 1990: 130).

The role of *Nyau* characters can also be looked at manifesting the role of Jesus Christ as the ancestor. In an analogous way, Charles Nyamiti looks at roles of the ancestors as rightly performed by Jesus Christ in the

⁶⁵ Plath calls it “household religion” (1964:313)

⁶⁶ A spiritual entity in its rootedness in God and a cult group in its spiritual communion with the ancestors (Hagan 1999:58).

lives of the present day African Christian. Africans are brothers and sisters to Christ and therefore the kinship is justified. Christ offers Africans the claim to be the sons and daughters of the Father (God) who is the parent ancestor and Jesus being the descendants to the Father. Christ with the power of the Holy Spirit mediates for Africans in prayers and rituals. Christ again plays the role model from whom humanity imitate the will of the God (Nyamiti 1990: 130). According to Charles Nyamiti, the concept of the ancestors in Africa therefore is not alien to Christianity rather it supports Africans in understanding the role of Christ as one of the person of the Holy Trinity (Nyamiti 1990: 130-131). Furthermore, George Hagan points out that the ancestors connect the tribal lineage and the creator (Hagan 1999:58). Martin Ott presents the *Nyau* characters as being the ancestral spirits that identify themselves with the living people and at the same time live in the presence of God (Ott 2000:454). According to Ott, the *Nyau* characters can be said to be living within “the circles of ‘God’s advisors,’ the family of *Chauta*, and the Communion of saints” (Ott 2000:454). Robert Kuloba Wabyanga (2014) argues that ancestors reflect continuity of God's presence as in the “God of ancestors” from the Jewish tradition (2014:117).

The Ancestorship of Jesus Christ does not only link Christians to God but also links universal humanity to God. Christ’s Ancestorship connects universal humanity through the link with the lineage of Adam who is the ancestor of all humanity on earth (Nyamiti 2010: 327). Jesus Christ is the perfection of the fallen Adam, according to Charles Nyamiti, Christ is “the incarnate redeeming Ancestor” (2010:327). Vincente Kiaziku points out that inculturation of the gospel values in all cultures is with Jesus of Nazareth who is the Christ as the reference point (Kiaziku 2009: 68). Therefore based on the link between the saints and the ancestors and that Jesus Christ is the representation of a perfect Ancestor, this paper submits therefore that the traditional practice of *Nyau* also manifests Jesus Christ as the Ancestor who brings good news to the traditional Chewa society.

3.3.2 *Nyau* and the Completeness of the Chewa family cycle.

Secondly, the *Nyau* characters defined and completes the basic structure of the Chewa family, making it a cycle of life and animate the traditional Chewa community life (Kachapila 2006: 332; Aquilar 1994a:15-35; Chirwa 1994:58; Boucher 2002:49). The Chewa people believe in community life that is nurtured in a permanent life cycle. Life is understood as a continuous cycle: from birth to death to ancestorhood, and through some form of reincarnation, life is believed not to come to an end but continues to flow.⁶⁷ The community life of the Chewa people is understood as a relationship between those to be born, those born and those who have reached the point of ancestorhood (Chirwa 1994:58; Boucher 2002:49). At birth, there are clear symbolic connections with the death of those who had gone before, for the connection with the world of

⁶⁷ The ancestors come back to dance with the living embers of the family in the village, thus reincarnation (van Breugel 2001:125).

the spirits are important at every stage of initiation (Phiri 2011:24). A human person among the Chewa people therefore is understood in a pattern as: pregnancy, birth, puberty, and adulthood, and marriage, position of authority, death and finally *uzimu*⁶⁸ (Chisale 1994: 27). The spirits are represented by the *Nyau* characters. All this happen within the context of a traditional Chewa family. No person lives alone except in community of others.

Life challenges are dealt with in a context of a community, in solidarity and love for one another. Community life is formed and strengthened by the sense of communal identity. In many traditional African societies life is conceived as a dynamism that follows the process of birth, death and rebirth; what is, was, and will be hence the rights of passage such as the initiation rites, marriage rites, funeral rites and feasts etc., “have been designed in African Traditional Religion⁶⁹ to celebrate, rejuvenate and increase the dynamism of each phase of the cyclic process” (Oborji 2005:21). This is a function of *Nyau* noted by Claude Boucher (2002:22).

In linking the Chewa family to the common ancestral lineage, the *Nyau* characters animates the personal relationships in the Chewa understanding of the family. African traditional families are a great help in strengthening the bonds of oneness in the Church. In a traditional African family the members have a deep and personal link with one another (Phiri 2011:23). This is a personal link that goes beyond the biological family, rather extending into the extended families of the village community. The Church’s understanding of God’s family, considers the sense of the village community as practiced in the traditional African family. The sense of community facilitates knowing one another even though coming from different kinship (Locheng 2011:169). the Synod of fathers (the Bishops) emphasized that “the Church-Family concept of the Church is to remind everyone in Africa that they are brothers and that they all the duty to seek in all things what contributes to building fellowship, peace, and Justice” (LM 37).

3.3.3 The *Nyau* and the facilitation of the Communal identity of the Chewa family.

Thirdly, the *Nyau* characters facilitates the communal identity of an individual. In an African proverb, “*umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu*” (Bandawe 2010:17) there is an emphasis in the communal identity of individual even at the existential level “a person is a person through persons” (Bandawe 2010:17). Among the Chewa people the communal identity comes with a common affiliation to a common ancestor or clan. The role of *Nyau* characters at the initiation is very crucial as part of a person’s attainment of the community identity. It is

⁶⁸ Transforming into a spirit being.

⁶⁹ ATR as African Traditional Religion, defined by Bolaji Idowu defines ATR as “the body of institutionalized patterns of beliefs and worship practiced by various African communities from time immemorial, in response to the ‘supernatural’ as manifested in their different environments and experiences” (Idowu quoted in Oborji 2005:28).

through initiation that a Chewa person is regarded as a person - a member of the community or family. Just as in the traditional African setting that the role of initiation is very paramount, so is the role of the sacrament of initiation in the Roman Catholic Church. At initiation and through the traditional practice of *Nyau* the initiates are incorporated into the Chewa community. In the Roman Catholic Church, one is born by baptism into new life and in a new community – a community that has its own heroes and ancestors – the saints (Locheng 2011:171; CCC 1213).⁷⁰ Here the African family is praised for its process of incorporating the new members into the society through the roles of initiation and the rites of passage.

Furthermore, the *Nyau* characters as the reincarnation of the ancestors act as the guarantors of belonging to the Chewa Family. The Chewa family is a mark of identity for an individual where an individual finds himself or herself. He or she always identify himself or herself in relation to the parents, to the family, to the community, to the clan, or to the ancestors and that an individual who detaches himself or herself from the family does not only lose his or her identity but also isolates himself or herself from the source of life. Such a person is considered as good as dead. Hence “the progress, harmony and happiness of the life of an individual depends more on the ties one has with the family, the community and the clan” (Phiri 2011:25). The spiritual influence of *Nyau* at the initiation rite makes even the *mkamwini*, the orphan and the adopted child (as it is common practice now in our contemporary time) belong to the Chewa family. At the initiation rite, the initiates have the direct encounter with the ancestral spirits who accept, acknowledge and incorporate them into the Chewa family. It is through the traditional practice of *Nyau* that a foreigner to the Chewa tribe or clan can reincarnate the ancestors of the Chewa people and consequently feel belonging to the traditional Chewa family. For example, Claude Boucher is a Roman Catholic Priest of Canadian origin who has been incorporated into the Chewa clan of Chisale after being initiated into the *Nyau* secret society (Boucher 2012:xi). The *Nyau* characters, as the reincarnation of the ancestors imprint on the initiate the traditional Chewa character⁷¹ and belongingness to the Chewa family. The character that offers the young initiate a spirit of belonging to the Chewa family in the same way baptism offers the baptised the Christian character and a status of belonging to the Roman Catholic Church.

3.3.4 *Nyau* and Chewa Family Rootedness in God.

Fourthly, the *Nyau* characters facilitates the Chewa family’s rootedness in God. It is from history that the *Nyau* characters have been identified with unbroken reference to God (Chirwa 1994: 57; Moto 1994:23; Nielsen 1994:10; Boucher 2002:77). In an event among the Ngoni people, *Nyau* has been referred to as *avirombo a*

⁷⁰ “incorporated into the Church” (CCC 1213); CCC (Catechism of the Catholic Church)

⁷¹ Character in this case refer to the traditional behavior identified with the Chewa people.

Chisumphi understood as the agents of *Chisumphi*⁷² (Linden 1974:58). The Chewa people believe in one God, the creator of all humanity and the rest of creation (*Namalenga*).⁷³ The function of *Nyau* in this understanding the family to effectuate the sacredness a traditional Chewa family as not just an ordinary family but a holy family. In reincarnating the ancestors the *Nyau* characters show God's concern, God's polite and God's delicate attention to humanity (Boucher 2002: 16). The *Nyau* characters are the teachers of life and the masters of discipline. Each spirit character points out either directly or through caricature, the correct way a person should act with regard to his/her neighbour as a way of conforming to God's will (Boucher 2002:55). The *Nyau* characters therefore portray the values to be followed and the vices to be avoided in order to help the family maintain the way of life laid down by *Chauta* (Boucher 2002: 16). Among the Chewa people God is approached through the mediation of ancestors who are in many occasions represented by the presence of the *Nyau* characters. By principle in African traditional religion, the ancestors are the mediators through whom human persons make supplication to God (Oborji 2005:14).

3.3.5 *Nyau* and Life of True Reconciliation.

The *Nyau* characters facilitates the life of true reconciliation among the Chewa family (Nielsen 1994:10; Moto1994:22; Boucher 2002:77). African traditional family has been understood as the ability to remain in strong family ties even in the aftermath of a conflict. Callisto Locheng (2011) in an African family, there is a sense of a life of true reconciliation. Locheng observes that the Roman Catholic Church values the element of "good personal relationships which promotes genuine self-expressions towards each other, and a life of true reconciliation" (2011:170). The document *Africae Munus*, recommends the family as "the best setting for learning and applying the culture of forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation" (AM 43). Through the traditional *Nyau* practice of the ritual re-enactment of the events of creation "symbolized by the performance of *Gulewamkulu*" there is the re-establishment the people's close bonds to the mythical events of the primordial harmony: the harmony between God and people, harmony among the people themselves and also harmony between humanity and creation. In the ritual presence of the very first ancestors in the *Nyau* dance, the people expect reconciliation, new life and fertility. Symbolically, there is reconciliation between the ancestors played by the *Nyau* and those of the Christian vignettes - the ancestors of the Chewa represented by the masks of *Gulewamkulu*, and the founder generations of Christians, represented by the vignettes of community life, receive their vital strength from the common Proto-ancestor, Jesus Christ (Ott 2000: 456).

⁷² *Chisumphi* is an attribute name of God of the Chewa as the Rain God (van Breugel 2001:21).

⁷³ Theologians pick in African Traditional Religion the notion of one God conceived as the creator of humanity and the universe hence we talk of one God who is "the Father of us all" (Oborji 2005:14).

3.3.6 *Nyau* and the Family of God Understood as God's Mission at the Service of Humanity.

Through the traditional practices of *Nyau* the Chewa people understand God's mission as at the service of humanity within their traditional family (Boucher 2002:56; Moto 1994:23; Faulkner 1988:28) which is better understood in line with the statement "God wills to save Africa" (EA 27). The traditional practice of *Nyau* offers a wider services to humanity, both social and religious. The *Nyau* characters offer to the Chewa family: the healings services in a context of different sickness such as taboo sicknesses, and the exorcism of the evil spirits. The *Nyau* also give consolation to the grieving family with an assurance that the departed family member will be present again as the living dead. The *Nyau* characters offer intercessory services in times of afflictions (Boucher 2012. At the initiation the *Nyau* characters offer the young people lessons about life and all its life-giving values. The *Nyau* characters also are the moral guardians of the community so that people will orientate towards the will of God. The *Nyau* characters are also the guardians of the people from evil forces and evil spirits. They *Nyau* protects the society from the ill intentions of the witches through the ritual practices. The *Nyau* characters help in socialization of the people and also offer the Chewa people some entertainment. The *Nyau* characters give a psychological relief in times of society stress. The *Nyau* also solemnises the human events making them sacred events. All these services are understood in a holistic Chewa religious family – the family of God. This research project submits that the *Nyau* characters partake in the mission of the Church as the sacrament of salvation (Martos 1981: 11)⁷⁴ where through the traditional practice of *Nyau*, the family of God in Africa is playing "an active role in God's plan of salvation" (EA 29).

SUMMARY

The chapter has argued for the Roman Catholic Church understood as God's Family to be the way of being the Roman Catholic Church that is traditionally relevant to Africans. It has been argued that the Roman Catholic Church in looking at the traditional African family can not only consider the values that are present in the traditional African family and disregard the process by which these values are regenerated and maintained in the traditional African society. In this case, this paper insists that the role of the ancestors cannot be disregarded as the custodians, the teachers, and the guardians of traditional values. Among the Chewa people of Central Malawi, therefore, the role of the traditional practice of *Nyau* understood to be the reincarnation of the ancestors, and their roles consequently as the ancestors cannot be disregarded too.

Furthermore, based on the African Spirituality, it has been shown that traditional African family is understood in a context of African Traditional Religion. Hence, it has been understood that the role of the ancestors, in the nature of the traditional Chewa family, like all other traditional African families, corresponds to God's

⁷⁴ Sacraments are there in "every religion" (Martos 1981: 11).

revelation, God's salvific value, and God's mission in the world as a call to community, call to Holiness and call to preservation of life (Phiri 2011: 63). This paper has also argued Jesus understood as an ancestor makes it possible that the Chewa understanding of the role ancestors in the traditional practice of *Nyau* does not go against the Roman Catholic Church teaching on the Communion of the saints. Hence, it had been explored that the traditional Chewa family is one of those African families whose inculturation into the Roman Catholic Church cannot disregard the contribution of *Nyau*. *Nyau*, being at the centre of the Chewa description of family, is by nature of its role in the understanding of the Chewa family a crucial component of the Roman Catholic Church as God's Family in the Central Malawi.

It has also been argued that the earlier attempts to inculturate *Nyau* into the Roman Catholic Church had been taken in partial and has only contributed to the split personality of the Chewa Christians. The need for further debates has been recognised on the inculturation of *Nyau* into the Roman Catholic Church as a pastoral concern in ministering to the Chewa people of Central Malawi. The next chapter proposes the way forward to the implementation of the inculturation process in Central Malawi.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 TOWARDS THE UNITY OF *NYAU* AND THE CHURCH IN GOD'S FAMILY.

"No single culture has a monopoly of God just as no single culture has a monopoly of human experience"
(Berinyuu 1988: 96).

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I would like to propose that the traditional practice of *Nyau* cannot be treated as an isolated item in the well-being of the Chewa converts to Catholicism. The paper will bring into consideration that God is central to the Chewa people and that the Chewa people have their image of God (Kasambala 2006: 28) they have a way in which they understand God's revelation and communication to them. The paper considers the traditional practice of *Nyau* as a way in which God reveals and communicates with the Chewa people at a degree proper to the Chewa people (Chirwa 1994:57; Nielsen 1994:10; Moto 1995:25). Hence the paper will base this Chewa people experience of God as the point of unity between the Roman Catholic Church and *Nyau* in the understanding of God's family Image (EA 6; AM 7). It is from this perspective that this research project argues that *Nyau* is the crucial element in the pastoral life to the Chewa people as well as a crucial component of the Chewa Society hence the Roman Catholic Church cannot ignore or simply dismiss.

4.1 Research Findings and Conclusions.

Firstly, there has been an observation that the Roman Catholic Church in Central Malawi erred in equating the *Nyau* secret society and the *Nyau* itself. It has been noted that there is a distinct difference in the two in terms based on their roles and significance to the Chewa society. Even though they are interrelated, such that one cannot not exist without the other, there is still an observation of this difference – and this paper submits this conclusion that *Nyau* is not a *Nyau* secret society. It is rather the outcome of the secret society. Hence this paper concludes that the *Nyau* secret society is not *Nyau* since any eligible person can become a member of the secret society but not all of the members of the secret society can become *Nyau* (de Kok 2005:24).

Secondly, it has been noted that the conflicts in the history between the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau* has actually been (for the most part of it) the conflicts between the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau* secret Society (Linden 1974:124). For this reason, it has appeared in this research that the condemnation of *Nyau* has been based on the behaviour of the members of the *Nyau* secret society (Linden 1974:124). This paper considers that such a condemnation needs a fair review. This paper submits therefore that there should be a separate treatment of what the nature of *Nyau* is, its role and its religious significance to the Chewa society.

Thirdly, it has been observed in the course of this research that the combined condemnation given to the *Nyau* and the *Nyau* secret society did not give enough room for the identification of the problem between the Roman Catholic Church and the traditional practice of *Nyau*. The problems between the *Nyau* secret society and the Roman Catholic Church have appeared to stem from a combination of factors such as jealousy, prejudice, fear, hunger for power and authority which are human and personal issues (Linden 1974:119). It appears in the course of this research that personal confrontations between the missionaries and the members of the *Nyau* secret society caused the distorted understanding of the original role of *Nyau* in the Chewa society. However, the practice of *Nyau* kept its original theological purpose for which this paper has used as the theological basis to correlate the theological articulations of the Roman Catholic Church as the Family of God.⁷⁵

Fourthly, it has been observed that there are challenges faced by members of the traditional Chewa family who are also converted to Catholicism (Linden 1974:125). The prohibition to participate in the traditional practices of *Nyau* (SSC 2006:57) has caused concerns over the unity of the family in times of crisis. The Roman Catholic Church may have the view of promoting the Christian faith over the African Traditional beliefs and practices. This paper inquired if the Traditional practices do not relate to the Christian faith at all. The observation of this research submits that God's revelation has not been limited only to the Roman Catholic Church's coming to Central Malawi. Rather the revelations and the salvific actions of God continue outside the Roman Catholic Church and of course in the traditional practices of *Nyau* (Chirwa 1994:57). The implementation of the image of the Roman Catholic Church as God's Family in Africa is an acknowledgement of this salvific value present in the African traditional practices and beliefs as in the traditional Chewa culture (EA 6; AM 7; Kalilombe 1999:106; Oborji 2005: 31).

The fifth observation concerns the influence of western civilization on the missionaries' perspective on *Nyau* (Mhango 2012:3). The western civilization with all its scientific advancement invalidated many of the traditional practices for lacking scientific proofs (Makumbi 1999:5859). Such invalidation has led to the traditional practice of *Nyau* been ignored and dismissed as a pagan worship, demonic, evil, superstitious, primitive and backward. This research has exposed that the negative perception on *Nyau* could have been different if western influence had not played its role hence this paper submits that the western influence continues in our contemporary time to influence the Roman Catholic Church's negative attitude towards *Nyau*. This paper proposes that the Roman Catholic Church become more cautious that it does not re-live the past.

⁷⁵ Here I think of the theological significance of the role of *Nyau* as placating the ancestors.

The sixth observation is on challenges to inculturation and yet with possibilities of overcoming them. This research submits that in implementing the understanding of the Roman Catholic Church as God's Family the African family structure itself should be applied in the Roman Catholic Church. A note on the African family as an all-inclusive entity where everyone at his/her level has a voice. Based on the understanding of the African family as including the unborn, the living including the extended family members, and the living dead. This is the understanding of the African family that challenges the male domination in both the Roman Catholic Church and in the traditional *Nyau* practices. The African family structure of the Roman Catholic Church should allow a change in the way in which the decisions are taken about crucial issues affecting the dioceses – that includes a thorough check on the pastoral structures that promote exclusivity in terms of decision making processes. There should be an opportunity of unconditional consultation given to the people whose culture is in question, men and women, young or old, those civilized in western form of education and those traditional, those already converted and those not yet converted.⁷⁶ In other words the Chewa people should be consulted unconditionally to freely and honestly engage on matters relating to Christian life and the traditional practice of *Nyau*. This paper therefore submits that following this route to inculturation there will be unbiased and holistic inculturation - the inculturation that is holistic and in depth. This approach will also be the inculturation that will possibly deal with the issue of identity crisis (Ilesanmi 1995:55-63; Grams 2007: 193-179).

The seventh observation notes of the Roman Catholic Church's insistence on the implementation of the ecclesiology of God's Family using the model of the Small Christian Communities (Healey 2012:16).⁷⁷ Although this paper agrees to the views of the Roman Catholic Church, however, it submit firstly, an observation that in the Small Christian Communities there are only those Roman Catholic Church families exclusive of the nature of the ordinary traditional African families. Secondly that the family of small Christian community speaks to the ordinary traditional family problems like in a context of multi-religious members. Thirdly that implementing the God's family image in the Small Christian Communities does not give the Roman Catholic Church enough challenge for inculturation of *Nyau*. Fourthly that the use of the Small Christian Communities intensifies the conflicts in pastoral situation at family level because Roman Catholic Church member in a family are supported in majority against the rest of the non-Roman Catholic Church family members. Fifthly, that the traditional aspect of family should be the priority to addressing holistically the problems that affect the whole Chewa family to which every member returns and lives after attending

⁷⁶ By saying anything negative, I mean inducing the local participants to be negative to their African own cultures under a promise of remuneration of whatever kind (financial, or status, or material support) as alleged by Patrick Kalilombe in (Kalilombe 1999:114).

⁷⁷ "The Church, as the Family of God, implies the creation of small communities at the human level, living or basic ecclesial communities" as in support of the 'Ecclesiology of the Church as Family' and on the section of 'The Church as Family and Small Christian communities" (Healey 2012:16).

Roman Catholic Church or even after attending the activities of the Small Christian Communities. Sixthly, that the small Christian communities do not offer a holistic solution to problem affecting the individual Christian families that are also traditional in nature. The Synod fathers recognised cultural crisis as the major root cause of the many problems in Africa and expressed a desire for a cultural identity for Africa (Oborji 2005:76).⁷⁸ An incorporation of a holistic Christian and local traditional worldview into the ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church as God's Family will certainly help alleviate some disharmony in the traditional African family, the Roman Catholic Church in African, and African continent.

4.2 Recommendations through the Five Pastoral Goals of the Church.

According to Marie-Joseph le Guillou (2010), the Roman Catholic Church is considered to be the Sacrament of salvation in pointing out to the fact that God's presence, identified with Jesus Christ, in the community of the believers spells God's act of saving humanity (2010:210). However, this Sacrament of salvation is effectuated in the visible human community gathered together as the People of God who are also identified as the body of Christ (2010:213). Le Guillou argues that, the Church as the people of God implies the mystery of God's unfolding plan for the salvation of humanity in the concrete human history (2010:214). Le Guillou argues further that the Church as the people of God takes is in continuity with the past (2010: 214) and that it takes seriously the problems humanity throughout history (2010:219). Stuart Bate (1998) points out that the Church as the People of God and the Sacrament of salvation, is concretized in the mission of the Church in fulfilling the five pastoral goals of: *Martyria Diakonia*, *Koinonia Leitourgia*, and *Kerygma* (Bate 1998: 176). This paper argues that God's plan of salvation for humanity is manifested and still continues to unfold itself in all cultures of the world. Using the Method in Contextual Missiology, this paper demonstrates how the aforesaid five pastoral goals indicate that God's plan of salvation also unfolds in the traditional practice of *Nyau* and how the Roman Catholic Church can eventually integrate the salvific values inherent in the traditional practice of *Nyau* as the Church's pastoral duty.

4.2.1 Nyau and the Pastoral Goal of *Leitourgia* (Worship).

According to Stuart Bate (1998), the pastoral goal of *leitourgia* is manifested in a community of believers using ways such as prayers, rituals practices, ceremonial events, spirituality and piety and it shows how people relate their existence to the presence of God (1998:180). Hence, at this point, we look at how the *Nyau* facilitates the liturgical celebrations where actually the Chewa people feel the real presence of God (Kasambala 2006: 48-49). Berinyuu asserts that "no single culture has a monopoly of God just as no single

⁷⁸ (Synod fathers noted in the footnote in Oborji 2005:76).

culture has a monopoly of human experience” (Berinyuu 1988: 96). This paper submits therefore that *Nyau* is also the way the Roman Catholic Church can articulate to the Chewa people about the God who has journeyed with them throughout their history (Chirwa 1994:57; Oborji 2005:17). *Nyau* manifests to the Chewa people the longing for God whom they find to be the same God in the Roman Catholic Church (Ott 2000:221, Kalilombe1999:110,114).

The *Nyau* Characters offer the Chewa family the experience of God. This paper considers that the common experience of God is the Roman Catholic Church’s primary point of dialogue with the traditional Chewa family. The traditional practice of *Nyau* speaks to the Chewa people in the language and symbolism they understand very well (Chirwa 1994:57; Nielsen 1994:7). The *Nyau* speaks to the Chewa people concretely of their day-to-day life experiences they consider to be a real worry and perhaps dismissed as superstition by the Roman Catholic Church. This is quite frankly, the way the Chewa people can talk of God’s divine revelations and intervention in their human history with the God of salvation.

Pastoral care situation provides an opportunity for people to tell their stories on how they understand and experience God’s involvement in their lives, more especially in moments of sickness, sorrow and suffering. This paper therefore proposes that the Roman Catholic Church working together with the traditional practice of *Nyau* can enhance the Chewa people’s experience of God, the real presence of God in their lives. This understanding therefore challenges the Roman Catholic Church that the denial of an Chewa person to participate in the rituals and customs that defined him/her as a Chewa person and bring him/her the experience of God is the denial of the realization of his/her existential meaning; it can also be considered as a denial of the entry point of the Roman Catholic Church’s missionary activity and evangelization (Uzukwu 1987: 61-65). The *Nyau* yields its message in its fullness only if one places them in the context of the entire Chewa culture: solemnizing the events of puberty and death which are the crucial transitions in human life (Schoffeleers 2000: 11). In dialogue with the *Nyau*, both the Christian and the ATR will be understood as sharing the common origin - from God where we all share in the commonality as human beings (Magesa 1987: 12).

4.2.2 *Nyau* and the Pastoral Goal of *Koinonia* (Fellowship).

In considering the pastoral goal of *Koinonia*, Stuart Bate (1998) suggests noting clearly of how the community of believers live a true community life as a manifestation of God’s kingdom, thus involving all the factors that contribute to its making: relationships, oneness, sharing of concerns and openness to one another (1998:178).

Therefore, the consideration at this point of pastoral goal, is on how the Roman Catholic Church looks at the nature of fellowship among the Chewa people – thus looking at how the *Nyau* facilitates fellowship among the Chewa people. The approach to culture that the Roman Catholic Church should adopt in dialogue with the African Traditional Religion is the one that takes into consideration the forces that shape the identity of the people in question and in that particular culture. In paying attention to this will the role of the *Nyau* becomes very clear and important in facilitating the dialogue between Christianity and the Chewa tradition, between Christian theology and ATR theology. In this way the role of both will enhance the development of the wellbeing of the Chewa person so that the Chewa person becomes an integrated whole (Schrieter 2011:27; Hintersteine 2011:85; Admirand 2011:102; Bansikiza 2012:28; Biziyaremye 2012:7).

This paper submits firstly that although the *Nyau* secret society is a closed society, it has the role of making the Chewa family an “open to society” (EA 85). The element of communal identity or tribal identity makes the Chewa people value *Nyau*'s role of the ancestor reincarnation more appealing to them than does western Christianity. The *Nyau* speaks to the Chewa people in the language the Chewa people understanding as meaning: hope, fear, reproach and encouraging. The Chewa people understand the *Nyau* as enabling them to commune with the ancestors they knew and consider to have a direct and visible impact in their lives. These are the same ancestors that unite the whole community, tribe and clan (Bujo 1996:140). The Chewa people therefore long for this ultimate unity that bring them a sense of genuine belonging and peace of mind. Besides, the *Nyau* offers those who are considered foreign to the particular Chewa clan or even tribe an opportunity to belong.

Secondly that the *Nyau* practice in this way removes the attitude of marginalization. It has also been called the “association of the marginal members of the *mbumba* lineage” (Kachapila 2006:328). The *Nyau* characters can also be considered to be a “voice of the voiceless” (EA 70). The *Nyau* can also be considered to be the agent of “dialogue, peace and reconciliation” (AM 12). Therefore the *Nyau* characters can be a Roman Catholic Church's ministry in opening the doors to the Chewa society as an open Family of God ready to accommodate anyone and bringing universal fellowship. The traditional practice of *Nyau* makes the Chewa people proud of who they are, not just the communal identity but also the tribal pride as their traditional religious and moral values have been recognized as the pillars for the building of the contemporary Roman Catholic Church society in Central Malawi (SSC 2006:48-49). This also comes in the time of challenges facing

the contemporary families (Waliggo 1996:208; Samuel 1993:5; Garret 1994:11; Onyango 2002:80; Kwashi 2002:19-23; Minto and Knottnerus 2008:183).⁷⁹

4.2.3 *Nyau* and the Pastoral Goal of *Martyria* (Witnessing).

The pastoral goal of *Martyria*, according to Stuart Bate (1998) should be noted clearly in the way the believing community lives its life as a result of its belief in the power of the Creator (1998:177) which becomes a living testimony of God's within that community. Hence the consideration here is on how the *Nyau* facilitates the witnessing of religious life and of the good news experiences. Witnessing to the gospel is not done in a vacuum. It is in an event in a context (Tienou 1991:9; Wendland 1991:13; Angrosino 1994:824, 830). Among the Chewa people we have those who are converted to Catholicism and do not find themselves isolated from the problems and concerns that inflict their non-Catholic biological brothers, sisters and extended family members. They are in solidarity with them seeking the solutions they all understand to speak concretely to them as a traditional African family. The concerns such as witchcraft, *ziwanda* (evil spirits), *kubwebweta mizimu* (spirit possession), *matsenga* (magical powers that are directed towards evil intention), and *mdulo* (taboo diseases). The *Nyau* society as storehouse of Chewa religious and traditional practices knows the origin of these afflictions and knows how to deal with them. This is what the western tradition will always dismiss as superstition and yet remains the basic fears and concerns of the Chewa people (AM 93).

In witnessing to religious life and of the good news in these kind experiences without the help of *Nyau* would be almost impossible. On this point, the question the Roman Catholic Church should ask in dealing with *Nyau*, is: do the *Nyau* facilitate the promotion of life or the destruction of life? For instance how do the *Nyau* characters promote Jesus' saying of giving life to the Chewa people, so that "they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). This paper proposes that the Roman Catholic Church has to recognise the gifts it does not have as an institution. The Roman Catholic Church should instead acknowledge such gifts in other traditions - those gifts that promote life. Based on this premise, this paper submits that the traditional practice of *Nyau* is "open to mission" (EA 128) and thus acknowledging God's call to play full part, "at the world level, in his plan for the salvation of human race" (EA 128).

⁷⁹ The political, economic, social and cultural difficulties (EA 80); the diminishing values of extended family (Onyango 2002:80); family was viewed wrongly as the institution of inequality and oppression between men and women and children (Samuel and Colleen 1993:5).

This paper views the gospel witness of the *Nyau* characters to the Chewa people as being actually the Roman Catholic Church's mission mandated by Jesus Christ (EG 19). However, the success of the Roman Catholic Church will be through its disciples, the members of the Roman Catholic Church who schooled in the Roman Catholic Church live out the faith in their tradition (AG 21). The disciple will express oneness and wholeness in their culture and in a Christ-like mentality in Christian practice. If Chewa people are allowed to be Christians in their own way of life, in their own context, in their own consciences and in their own traditions then they must be allowed to participate in the traditional rituals and practices that make them who they are as Chewa people. This experience will then make the Chewa converts to Christianity the conscious followers of Christ in their own tradition while they remain the disciples of the Christian Church, nourished, fostered and encouraged, modelled and inspired by Christ in the Roman Catholic Church. This brings the Challenge to the Roman Catholic Church that if the Roman Catholic Church excommunicate or stops her members from participating in the traditional activities, the Roman Catholic Church is in other words: failing to bring Christ into that culture, failing to evangelize that culture, failing to recognize the presence of Christ in that culture, failing to implement the incarnation of Christ in that culture, and failing to make Christianity African and making an African a Christian is in (CCL 1365, 1366).⁸⁰ In other words, the Roman Catholic Church is refusing to engage in dialogue and failing her duty to be the bridge bringing Christ into the world as the light of all nations, as the light of all cultures (LG 1, CF 1024).

Finally, on the same note this paper is of the view that each time the Roman Catholic Church stops the Christianized people into participating in the culture, the Roman Catholic Church is in other words denying the evangelized future of the culture in question. The generation that comes will most probably go on with the old, corrupt norms, rules, and practices, and abuses which are not relevant to our time, relevant to Christian message and relevant to the Christian practice in that particular culture. The Roman Catholic Church also denies the professional adaptation hence the danger is that, the message of Christ will be adapted into the culture by the people who are less informed, the people who do not fully understand Christ's message. In other words Christ message becomes a thing of mockery, yet it is the crucial message of salvation, liberation, and humanization, dignity of human life, protection, enhancement and nourishing of human life. The *Nyau* people will not get to do the Roman Catholic Church's teachings correct, bringing them into their own context with proper meaning if let alone (AG 11). Hence his paper proposes to the Roman Catholic Church to let the followers of Christ do their ministry. The Roman Catholic Church should consider letting the followers of Christ do it for themselves in the tradition in which they feel at home, at union with themselves, with God, with the environment, with the ancestors, with one another and with their understanding as being human with

⁸⁰ CCL Stand for The Code of Canon Law

their fears, hopes and religious experience. There will be a new and evangelized blood in the traditional practice of *Nyau* (AG 10).

The impact of such a move will also allow the fundamental transformation of the *Nyau* to be done with a deep understanding, dignified and proper inculturation rather than mocking, criticizing, condemning, and demonizing. The *Nyau* contribution will be taken seriously in the Roman Catholic Church, in the society at large and the dignity of a human person will be respected, fostered, nourished, and recognized by the religions, traditional, civil and in the Christian Church societies. This will also be the point of dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau* secret society, the perfect dialogue in which the dignity of both is respected, done in collaboration by the participants of both in both the *Nyau* and the Roman Catholic Church (LG 13). Such a kind of dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau* will only be possible if it will be borne in mind that the Roman Catholic Church is promoting life not only in the Roman Catholic Church but also in the African traditions; that the Roman Catholic Church is not promoting western life but the life of Christ which is present in all cultures (Dhavamony 1997:593; Davies 2001:129; Kiaziku 2009:129; Sanely 2007: 21-23; Gathogo 2008:40; Nyende 2008:47). This also means that the efforts of the African Traditional Religions will be recognized in preserving and passing on the life of Christ to the next generations and to the society at large. The perfection will be in a joint collaboration between the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau*, while both playing their part theologically, socially, psychologically and otherwise (AG 7). This should also be a way of preserving the tradition that keep the people's identity as the evangelized tradition of old; as the tradition that brings people into the unified past-present-future experience; as the tradition they identify with; and as the tradition that makes them have a sense of meaning, purpose, goal and destiny in life. Christianity will most certainly be at home and alive with, for and in traditional practice of *Nyau* (SACBC 12).

In *Lumen Gentium*, the Church is understood to be “like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument of both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG 1). However, the Church as a sacrament is effectuated in the visible human community gathered together as “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (LG 4) - in other words as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people...who in times past were not a people, but now the People of God” (LG 9). The Church as the people of God implies the mystery of God's unfolding plan for the salvation of humanity in the concrete human history thus taking continuity with the past as the Church “desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission” (LG 1).

In this process of continuity with the past the “Catholic Church” (LG 8) not only that “it cannot err in matters of belief” (LG 12) but also maintains its nature of being “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic” (CCC 811).

Furthermore, the Church does not live in isolation with human contexts. According to the document *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church takes seriously the problems humanity faces throughout the contexts. The Church is in solidarity “with the human race and its history” (GS 1). It is the Church that unites itself with its members in their human suffering since “the joys and the hopes, the grief and the anguish of men of our time . . . are the joys and the hope, the grief and the anguish of the followers of Christ as well” (GS 1). However, some of these problems come about because of human weaknesses of its members hence the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches of the Church being Holy and at the same time also in need of “purification and renewal” (CCC 825, 827). According to the *Lumen Gentium*, “the Church...in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain its full perfection only in glory of heaven, when there will come the time of the restoration of all things” (LG 48). This paper points out to the fact the Catholic Church as the People of God and the sacrament of Christ consists of members who also belong to different cultures of the world and the traditional practice of *Nyau* in this case. The paper highlights the facts that the participation of Chewa Christians in the life of the Church may bring into it assimilated *Nyau* values which in turn may be purified by the deposit of faith and gospel values present in the Church. In this way, the Church “fosters and takes, insofar as they are good, the ability, riches and customs in which the genius of each people express itself. Taking them to itself, it purifies, strengthens, elevates and ennobles them” (LG13). Therefore, the participation of Chewa Christians in the traditional practices of *Nyau* has its role in bringing new insights into the Catholic faith as well as in purifying the *Nyau* culture as “the Church or the people of God takes nothing away from the in establishing the that kingdom of God takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people” (LG 13).

4.2.4 *Nyau* and the Pastoral Goal of *Kerygma* (Preaching of the Good News).

According to Stuart Bate (1998), *Kerygma* should be noted as a community of believers proclaim, within the community itself and beyond its borders, of how God’s involvement in its life has brought salvation and how this salvation can also be shared with others outside the community itself (1998:180). The consideration here is on how the Roman Catholic Church preaches good news to the Chewa people, and what the good news is according to the Chewa people. Can the Roman Catholic Church and the *Nyau* work together? Can the good news be preached in the local language of *Nyau*? Is western standard the only way of preaching the gospel? In considering dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and *Nyau* the areas of dialogue could be considered as being the dances, symbols, verbalizations, poetry, songs, invocations, ritual formulas with which

the Africans express their religiosity and be at home with themselves (Chirwa 1994:57; Nielsen 1994:9). This paper submits that the Christian faith does not have to be taught as if it were only practiced best in the western form of life, the western conscience and the western norms; rather it is faith that can be lived out in a traditional way. In this case the evangelization of Christ's message will be invested in the tradition where it will be lived out and practiced. This means incarnating Christ in the culture and moreover it will be discovering Christ in that particular culture (Chidi 1998:40).

Furthermore, it will be able to help people make the best of what they have believed from of old, understanding it better, enriched, explained in modern terms and united with Christianity. the fruits of dialogue between the *Nyau* and the Roman Catholic Church (of what is expected) is letting Christianity be a way of following Christ in our own culture using the teaching of Christ, the critique of Christ's teachings in our culture: the challenged culture, the challenged values, the challenged consciences, the purified tradition, the purified values (AG 11, CF 1025). The Roman Catholic Church should become the model and the school of Christian faith, the point of reference and let the people practice that faith in their traditions, and cultures. This does not exclude embracing the explanations of science, the contribution of the modern world into the culture in question. Western life becomes not a, measure standard for being a human person, but a style of life that enriches the culture by bringing into it what it lacks, its shortages, imbalances; something acceptable freely and challengingly. Let it contribute to modern knowledge, literacy, be conversant with modern technological advancement and health facilities. We also know that the primal people were also literate, able to put their thoughts into symbols, arts and songs. However it was the form of education and literacy that does not, in our modern times, teach us how to handle a cell phone, computer, which require modern education of western origin. The faith promulgated by the Roman Catholic Church, the Christian faith, the Christian values. The teachings of Christ must be identified in the culture of the people. The Roman Catholic Church then becomes the school of the Christ thought, the thought that when passed on to the people of their culture, they will be able to identify them in their own culture, live them out to the best, purifying corrupt practices in their traditions and strengthening their values (AG 11; CF 1025).⁸¹

4.2.5 *Nyau* and the Pastoral Goal of *Diakonia* (Being of Service to the Community).

Diakonia, according to Stuart Bate (1998) should be seen as an attempt done by the believing community in manifesting God's service to humanity, thus involving actions such as care, concern and service (1998:179). Stuart Bate goes on to elaborate that these services should be considered as facilitating the community's social

⁸¹ CF (the Christian Faith)

reconstruction and rehumanisation in areas of the community where there has been loss of esteem, loss of hope, loss of dignity, loss of self-respect and also offering refuge for those in crisis (1998:179). At this point of pastoral goal a consideration, therefore, is on the concepts of illness and health for a particular people as being one of the important aspects of the context for pastoral care. They are the crisis points where the Roman Catholic Church exercises its service to humanity. In this respect, it is the traditional world-view that is an important foundation which must be considered seriously in developing a relevant contextual pastoral approach, as a large number of the African population, including Malawian Chewa people, “still adhere to those beliefs” (Msomi 2008: 98).⁸²

Furthermore, in the cross-exchange of the values and faith practices between the *Nyau* and the Roman Catholic Church means allowing Christ to work in both spheres of human wholeness, to bring humanity to unity, to bring purification of the weaknesses: demeanours, imbalances that affects the members of both out of negligence, ignorance, inclination to sin, taking things for granted and corrupt practices. This practice will allow Christ to challenge the systems and clear in them the path: of redemption, of salvation for the poor, of the oppressed, of the weak, of the widows, of the orphans, of the uneducated, of the crippled, of the deaf, of the dumb, of the blind and of the people who are sincere faith adherents and yet the victims of the corrupt practices within their belief systems. The corrupt practice that reduces the human person and brings about dehumanization will be avoided and instead authenticates the humanization process in a proper way (Ilesanmi 1995:49; Ezigbo 2008:55; NA 1, 2; CF 1019-1022). In subscribing to this idea and practicing it, we are not putting Christ into a box, thereby appearing as if we are evangelizing Christ rather sending out Christ in the disciples to evangelize their own traditions, their own values and thus done by allowing them to participate in the systems yet now as transformed people of God who are ready to witness Christ in their traditional practices, ready to see the depth of the mystery of Christ in their own culture and ready to contribute to the universal Church (AG 21).

And in addition, there is a creation of an opportunity of making inculturation a task not only of the theologians at a higher or scholarly level but at grassroots, letting the scholarly theology be informed by grassroot experience. Scholarly theology is good in its own way and it is not absolute, but as a starting point for grassroot theology, letting culture shape theology and letting the theology enlighten the culture. This will be the greatest opportunity for the renewal of theology of the Roman Catholic Church, theology at the service of a human person and not a human person at the service of theology. Theology is centred and focused on a human person.

⁸² The Traditional Chewa beliefs and practices.

We ascribe to the way in grassroots theology answers to the personal struggles in both tradition and Christianity. On the Roman Catholic Church's dialogue with the followers of African traditional Religion, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that "the adherents of the ATR should therefore be treated with great respect and esteem, and all inaccurate and disrespectful language should be avoided" (EA 65-67, Ross 1996: 119-124).

4.3 Proposed Areas of Future Research with regard to *Nyau* and the Roman Catholic Church in Central Malawi.

This dissertation based on literature review, no empirical studies were done. The future area of research will be to engage the empirical studies on how the traditional practice of *Nyau* can be integrated into the Roman Catholic Church. The study will propose the investigation on how the initiation of Chewa people can be done by the *Nyau* and still be accepted by the Roman Catholic Church. The study will propose how the *Nyau* dance can be accepted to be performed at a funeral of a Chewa Christian who wishes so. The study will propose how the spirit possession involved in the traditional practice of *Nyau* can be an acceptable reality for the Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore, this study might facilitate the one family concept among the Chewa people - the living and the living dead, strengthen the belonging to Chewa family and the recognition of the ancestral influence of the deceased Chewa Roman Catholic Christians. The Chewa Christians will not have to wait many years to be canonised in order to exercise moral and spiritual influence on the living as worthy ancestors – local saints.

As previously discussed in section 1.4.6 of this paper 'Nyau and Chewa Psychology' it appears essential to relate how the gender issues in the traditional practice of *Nyau* relate to the Roman Catholic Church leadership. It calls also for the need to explore the implications of such affects in the understanding of the Church in Africa as the Family of God and this will be done in three points:

First, in acknowledging that the traditional practice of *Nyau* is male dominated meant to address the problem of female dominance in the Chewa matrilineal society (Kachapila 2006:328; Paas 2010:675; Phiri 1983:258). Hence the traditional practice of *Nyau* has little participation of women. It has been argued therefore that the traditional practice of *Nyau* grants male dominance in ritual practices among the Chewa people (Kachapila 2006: 319). A similar observation of male dominance can be noted in the traditional Roman Catholic Church leadership which consequently extends to male dominance in Roman Catholic ritual practices (celebration of Sacraments) such as the celebration of the Eucharist (LG 18, 20, 28). It is understood that even though women share some pastoral duties, priesthood is reserved for men (EG 103-104).

Secondly, that the observation above can point easily to the fact that the traditional practice of *Nyau* grants the Roman Catholic Church a greenlight to male ritual domination and vice versa. If this fact is to be upheld, then the Church as the family of God where every person is equally capable of a life of holiness and capable of sacred duties is challenged as expressed by Pope Francis (EG 104).

Thirdly, the traditional practice of *Nyau* may give some insights to this challenge. In the traditional practice of *Nyau*, the ritual representation of female *Nyau* characters is done not only by men but also by women who are initiated into the *Nyau* secret society and with some exceptions where women have to use the female *Nyau* characters to instruct the female initiates on their roles into the society (van Breugel 2001:133). Even though Johan van Breugel points out the women's *Nyau* characters do not claim to reincarnate the ancestors (2001:133) the practice agrees with the understanding that the *Nyau* characters are the reincarnation of sacred powers beyond ordinary, for both male and female and whose ritual powers are recognised by the society. Perhaps the Roman Catholic Church would look into the practice of the Communion of Saints (Christian ancestors), men and women whose sacred powers are accepted by the Catholic society. Surely, not all people are gifted in practice of leadership and not all people have the vocation to the practice of the sacred orders. The question for further exploration would consider how could it be theologically argued in the traditional practice of *Nyau* and in the hierarchy in the Roman Catholic Church, that only those called to the practice of sacred duties may be recruited and further articulate how that theology can facilitate the understanding of the Roman Catholic Church as the Family of God in Africa. Hence a critical study will be proposed on how the male domination in both Roman Catholic Church and *Nyau* Society affect the understanding of the African Church as the Family of God.

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