

Dissertation Abstract

A Study of the Pokot Cultural Worldview: Missiological Implications for Seventh-day Adventist Witness Among the Pastoral Nomads of Kenya

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Seventh-day Adventist witness among the nomadic peoples of the East Africa region is faced with a number of challenges. Although the Church enjoys relative success in reaching most communities, its growth and development appears restricted to locations occupied by the settled communities. Unfamiliarity with nomads' cultural structures and values is a partial explanation for why missionaries have failed to effectively connect with the nomads thereby hampering the establishment of a more vibrant mission work in pastoral nomadic regions.

This qualitative research sought to describe the Pokot cultural worldview as a step toward understanding their socio-cultural context and identify barriers to effective mission. This is fundamental in developing mission bridges that would potentially close the gap between the Church and the pastoralists. Using an ethnographic approach, data collected using focus-group interviews, participant observation, artifact examination, and casual dialogue enabled the description of the Pokot cultural worldview and exposed their cognitive, evaluative, and affective assumptions of their culture.

The study reveals that although they are closely associated culturally with other Nilotic groups in East Africa, the Pokot are a distinct community with an exciting historical heritage and shared value systems. A high regard for communal life and rigorous religious practices and customs are among values characteristic of the people.

In their communal living, group-thinking and decision-making above individual pursuits is fundamental. Rather than focusing on the individual, the Pokot emphasize the development and maintenance of relationships with others. Life and thought are centered on the group rather than on the individual or things. Every member of the community is expected to demonstrate loyalty and respect to their parents, older siblings, elders, age mates, and friends. Among the benefits of communal living is the sense of belonging, respect for relationships, and cooperation and strength of the whole society against the outside world.

On the other hand, religion plays a key role in life among the Pokot. Each step of life, from birth to death (or even after death), is marked with some form of religious practice or ritual involving sacrifice, prayers, song and dance, or bowing in holy places. Worship in caves, on mountains, at river-banks, under trees, and at other sacred places where divine beings are presumed to inhabit is common. Their religious ceremonies are characterized by charismatic singing, dancing, chanting, jumping, and other forms of expressive passion that appease the deity.

The pacification of the supreme being, *tororot*, and his assistants: *asis*, who witnesses human activities on earth, *ilat*, the messenger of the deities to humans, and the ancestral spirits is commonly practiced to alleviate calamity in the form of drought, disease, or death. Prayers in the form of songs are offered, entreating divine intervention for the protection of livestock and people, for more healthy calves to be born, and for enemies and wild animals to be kept away from the land.

Other valued customs include acts of heroism, generosity, respect, trust, bravery, wealth, versatility, and high moral standards. From early ages, younger people are groomed and expected to be loyal, patriotic, respectful, brave, and morally upright members of the community. The concept of *poghishyo* (peace and harmony) requires that people should aspire to live united if blessings in the form of rain, health, and enough food is to be expected from *tororot*. Initiation of young people into various stages of life helps to train, educate, and test their bravery and loyalty to authority, which is essential for unity and survival of the Pokot people in the midst of a region marked with scrambling of scarce natural resources.

In response to these findings, a comprehensive model for mission was developed. The model examined seven key strategies to guide mission initiatives that will result in the formation and development of mature Christians whose faith and practice is biblically based and spiritually guided.

First, worldview transformation is a topmost approach. Forming mature Christians from unbiblical backgrounds who will be able to witness to others require that a biblical worldview be developed from the initial stages of witnessing. This helps to alleviate unorthodox practices such as

superficial surface-level conversion, minimal behavior modification, syncretistic practices, and dual allegiance, which are often results of improper witness related to a lack of worldview change. Through the development of strong social relationships with converts, providing Bible studies, communicating in culturally appropriate methods, and overcoming negative attitudes toward the nomads, missionaries are likely to win nomads' trust, enabling the development of a Christian worldview.

Second, a contextualized ministry is vital. Contextualization requires that nomads should hear and respond to the Word of God in their cultural setting. This can only be possible if the communication of the gospel is done through the use of cultural methods such as stories, songs, proverbs, sayings, and riddles. A contextualized ministry should also involve the establishment of congregational structures that are compatible with a nomadic life. Since periodic migration is central to the pastoralists' life, creating nomadic churches and training of missionaries who can provide ministry in nomadic contexts is imperative.

The third strategy is appropriate communication. Sharing the gospel in culturally appropriate ways is imperative for quality and fruitful Christian mission and ministry. Since meaning is often formed and largely influenced by *how* and *what* people communicate, the use of familiar methods of transmitting the gospel is necessary. Oral methods such as proverbs, stories, and songs, with which the pastoralists are familiar are vital avenues that will enable nomads to hear and respond to the gospel in what is now termed "heart language." A specialized ministry that focuses on nomads is fourth. The study showed that nomadic contexts are unique in comparison to settled environments where Christianity is better established and from which most missionaries originate. Specialization will likely benefit ministry as it would enable the recruitment, training, and mobilization of a skilled workforce. It would also ensure that mission resources are better managed and channeled.

Fifth is the incarnational ministries. Response to felt needs among pastoralists is a significant approach that would help to create bridges for sharing the gospel. Since poverty, disease, and limited sources of water are among the many challenges nomads face, Christians can address these pressing needs through specific ministries such as initiating self-help projects, operating health centers, constructing wells, among other initiatives. These will provide needful solutions and empower the nomads in their daily lives.

Sixth, a prayer strategy is also of utmost importance. It is obvious that human efforts, without divine intervention, are insufficient when witnessing to people grounded in unbiblical worldviews. Mission workers will need to be guided and energized by divine power in order to know the

what, when, and how to share the gospel. The strategy also challenges those who are not directly involved to intercede for divine intervention on behalf of missionaries and their targets for success to be achieved.

Finally, there is need for a group-oriented approach to evangelism among nomads. Their communal thinking requires that missionaries must recognize nomads' social structures by approaching them as a group rather than as individuals. Since the community elders are the spokesmen of the community, those engaged in various mission initiatives should seek the elders' permission, or at least notify them of Christian projects in their community.



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