

# A Synthesised Nandi Anglican Ng'anyet Ritual: A Paradigm Shift In A Multi Religious World

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*Abstract: The traditional Nandi believed in life after death and ng'anyet ritual was performed for deceased in order to enter the land of the living dead and new born children of the family be named after him or her. When the Anglican Church came to Nandi, it condemned and prohibited the ritual claiming that it contradicted the church's teachings on life after dead. The Church's demand was true because the traditional Nandi world view is cyclic whereas the Anglican Church's world view is linear. For this reason, the Nandi Anglican Church converts and potential converts who wished to retain ng'anyet ritual were left at the religious cross roads, torn between traditional Nandi religion religious word view on one hand and Anglican Church teachings on the other. The objectives of this study are: To show that there is conflict between traditional Nandi and Anglican Church beliefs and practices in relation to life after death; to show that the conflict originates in the two different religious world views; to demonstrate that the conflicting world views is the major cause for many Nandi people not joining Anglican Church in Nandi North sub county; to synthesise conflicting religious beliefs and rituals related to life after death. The study is qualitative and employed descriptive, historical analytical methods. Purposive sampling was used to identify informants. Research instruments were interviews, questionnaires and observations. Findings show that the converts are torn between these two world views, yet they want to be truly Nandi and truly Anglican. Therefore, conflicting beliefs and practices of the two religions were synthesized to create a harmonious model that is both cyclic and linear in understanding life after death. It is a new, inclusive alternative; away from the either/or exclusive and conflicting approach. The synthesized theological approach resulted in a forward looking belief and ritual culminating in future resurrection of deceased Nandi Anglican converts. In conclusion, the study recommends religious synthesis be applied where there are religious conflicts in Nandi and in the universal Church today.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Among the traditional Nandi, life was the centre of all religious beliefs and practices. Death did not destroy life but intensified it. Life was ritualized from birth and after death. This paper concentrates on *ng'anyet*, a traditional ritual performed after death. *Ng'anyet* ritual was performed for deceased in order to enter the land of the living dead as an ancestor and for new born children in the family to be named after him or her. On arrival in Nandi, the Anglican Church anathematized the traditional ritual claiming that it contradicted the Anglican Church beliefs and practices on the dead and life after death. In support of the Anglican Church religious position, Anglican Church clergy declare to the

dissatisfaction of the family members after burial of a deceased church member that no any other ritual or service will be held again for the deceased person. An Anglican priest would be heard saying, "we put this cross on one side of the grave to symbolize that the deceased was a devoted member of the Anglican Church and a faithful servant of God." The declaration was against the traditional Nandi who performed *ng'anyet* ritual after burial. Consequently, the family of the deceased would, after sometime, in violation of the word and deed of the priest at the grave site, request the parish priest to attend family prayers to clear the gravesite. Routinely, the gravesite was fenced off to protect it from domestic animals or other intruders. Family members invite the priest/church in the name of removing the edge around the grave but hidden

beneath it is the need to perform *ng'anyet* ritual. The reason for the concealment is that the Anglican Church has, since its arrival in the Nandi land condemned and disparaged *ng'anyet* ritual for the reason that it contradicted the Anglican Church teaching on the dead and life after death. Nonetheless, the Nandi Anglican converts are not religiously satisfied with the Anglican Church stance and consequently slip back to the traditional belief and practice. Subsequently, family members feel guilty, suspend coming to church until such a time that their 'sin of commission' is forgotten or decide to go to another denomination. Other Church members are left at the crossroad, torn between Anglican Church orthodoxy and ortho-praxis. This paper essentially presents a theological line of thought intended to close the existing knowledge gap between the conflicting traditional Nandi *ng'anyet* ritual Anglican Church beliefs and practices related to death and the living dead.

## II. CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

This section attempts to show a relationship between rituals and contexts. When a ritual is performed outside its context, it loses its meaning. To clarify this point, definition of a context is worth looking at. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines a context as a situation in which something happens and that helps one to understand it. The definition cites situation, something and understanding as important coordinates in contextualization. A situation could be a particular historical, geographical, socio-cultural and/or a religious context. Something in this case is a religious *ng'anyet* ritual which seeks to be understood in the present Nandi Anglican situation. Something is understood when one realizes what it is, how it happens and why it is important. According to Stephen B. Bevans, SVD, contextualization takes into consideration "the spirit and the message of the gospel; the tradition of the Christian people; the culture...social change in that culture...contextualization is a theological imperative" (Stephen B, Bevans, SVD 1992:3) Bevans and John W. de Gruchy agree that contextualization is a traditional practice as witnessed in the bible. The bible, they write, is a collection of books with several contextualized understandings of God such as the Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly, Deuteronomic and Wisdom theologies (Stephen B, Bevans, SVD 1992:3). Equally, the four gospels of the New Testament is a witness to emphasise on varied contextual understanding on the nature of Jesus Christ. In the book of Acts 15, the same concern on the contextualization of Christ is evident. As part of contextualization, the early Church Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon used the then current gentile contextual Greek philosophical terms like *homoousios* (consubstantiation) for better understanding of the nature of Christ.

Like in the past, today, contextualization is relevant in articulating Christian message in the world. Like in the above biblical and historical quest for better understanding of Christ, the present religious context especially in Nandi characterised by conflicting religious beliefs and practices from both the traditional Nandi on one hand and the Anglican converts on the other require a new contextual approach. This paper proposes a synthesised contextualization using both/and

method. The approach seeks to synthesis traditional Nandi *nga'nyet* ritual with the Anglican Church understanding on the dead.

Religious synthesis "holds that every culture or context has elements that are unique to it and elements that are held in common with other cultures or contexts...emphasize both uniqueness and complementarity, since one's identity emerges in a dialogue that includes both." (Stephen B, Bevans, SVD 1992:83). Aylward Shorter cautions that religious synthesis starts with the local traditional religious beliefs and practices and not with previous Christian inculturations. Besides, religious synthesis is a process and not a once-and-for-all project, Aylward adds. It is a creative, model for contextual theology. Among the proponents of this model are Aylward Shorter, Kosuke Koyama and Charles Nyamiti who have made Christian faith find new, vital and deeply rooted expression outside its original contexts.

In the next section, the paper synthesis the traditional Nandi *ng'anyet* ritual and the Anglican teachings on life after death. The synthesis is essential for the growth of Anglican Church in the context of the Nandi of Kenya because it harmonizes the long standing conflicting practice and teaching on life after death between the traditional Nandi and the Anglican Church. It is expected that the outcome would have both local and global, glocal, Nandi/Anglican *ng'anyet* ritual suitable for Nandi Anglican Church converts.

## III. A NANDI/ANGLICAN *NG'ANYET* LITURGY

The following is a synthesized Nandi/Anglican *Ng'anyet* ritual liturgy which is both Nandi and Anglican in belief and practice. It captures the traditional cyclic nature of life which spirals forward in a linear way into the distant future so that one is both a Nandi and an Anglican Christian convert. The liturgy expresses the prolongation and security of life in this world and after life. The communion of the living and the living dead is enhanced to demonstrate how the ritual is a meeting point of the past, the present and the future periods of time. The liturgy brings about stability, peace and satisfaction. The question of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation is addressed during the ritual and if there is any other hidden or unknown wrong is left for judgment at final resurrection.

The proposed Nandi/Anglican ritual liturgy is performed forty days after the death occurred. The days reflect the 40 days Jesus Christ suffered in the wilderness and finally emerged victorious as recorded in the gospels-Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13 and Mark 16. In the new liturgy, water is used for sprinkling around the gravesite instead of blood and beer in the traditional ritual. Water commonly symbolizes life among the Nandi and in the Anglican Church and is readily available. In the new liturgy, water is put in *sotet*, a bead decorated traditional guard. A whisk made of a cow's tail is used to sprinkle water around the grave site once. The leader of the ritual is the priest in charge of a parish or curate as suggested by Venerable canon Japhet Serem, the then Archdeacon of Kabiyet archdeaconry, a view shared by several other Anglican clergy in the sub county. The family of the deceased in consultation with the priest sets the day for

*ng'anyet* ritual. It is a family affair and only very close relatives are invited.

**PRELIMINARIES:** The Holy communion/Eucharistic *ng'anyet* ritual begins at about 10 am in the presence of all family members, relatives invited relatives, friends, neighbours, Lay-reader(s) and Christians of particular local church/parish. The leader begins by calling people present to worship as follows:

Minister: Put off mobile phones; remove your hats (if any) for it is a sacred place and hour.

All standing: Hymn- *Betutab Boiboyet* No. 11 in Kalenjin Hymn Book- A Day of Rest and Gladness. The hymn captures three pertinent spiritual aspects in this life and in the next life namely: The day of gladness, day of light and of fellowship.

Minister: Today, we converge in this home to perform *ng'anyet* ritual for (name) in the name of God, the Father and creator; the Son, Jesus Christ, our savior who rose from the dead and in the Holy Spirit, our sustainer.

Minister: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you

Minister: The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it

All: Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad

Minister: Praise the Lord

All: The name of the Lord be praised

Minister: God created us in his image and shines in our lives to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of death. For the faithful believers, the image of God transcends the power of death. *Ng'anyet* ritual is a prayer service to release the spirit of the deceased believer into the world of the living dead; where death has no more stings.

*Confession in silence.*

All: Almighty God, the absolute one, your greatness is beyond human comprehension. You are the source of human life, with its dynamism of birth, death and rebirth. The cosmic events like the rotation of the sun, the moon, days and nights and annual seasons are all cyclic with dynamic movement spiraling into the distant future. We gather here today, as men and women created in the image of God to rejuvenate and increase the dynamism of the life of (name) who is no longer in this physical life. In his/her life time, the deceased accessed spiritual world through the traditional rituals which revitalized his/her powers. He/she was able to put right any broken relationships and communed well with the created world, family, clan, spirits, the living dead and with God. Today, he/she is joining the living dead so that he/she may use his powers for the good of his family, the clan and human kind. Our ancestors we invoke you to participate in maintaining discipline and punishing the members whose misbehavior retrogresses the progress of the family/clan and community. Thank you our ancestors for you are the symbols of prosperity, peace and unity. Amen.

*Summary of the biblical and the traditional Nandi Ten Commandments*-The purpose of the commandments in this context serves to remind the participants of ontological responsibility to keep good relationship with God (vertical) and with each other and with environment (horizontal).

Minister: Hear O Children of God in the world, our God the creator of all human races loves all human kind equally and shows no partiality. Our African religions and rituals are avenues of communion with God. No one in the Nandi asks to

be taught about God for we all know God by the cloud of witnesses embedded in the rituals of pre-birth, birth, initiation, marriage and death. The environment, the created order witness to the presence of God everywhere at all times. We express our knowledge of God by our obedience to Him. Secondly, live in harmony with fellow human beings, both the living and the dead and with the created world. Hence, there are two cardinal rules: Know God by faithful service to humanity and environment.

All: Amen. Lord help us live by these cardinal rules of life.

#### MINISTRY OF THE WORD

The Old Testament Isaiah 35:1-10

The Old Testament reading is taken from....., chapter....., beginning to read at verse....

After the reading,

Reader: This is the word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

The Epistle:

1 Corinthians 15: 42-51

Reader: The Epistle is taken from....., chapter....beginning to read at verse....

After the reading,

Reader: This is the word of the Lord

All: Alleluia, Praise be to God.

Gospel: St. Luke 24:13-52

Minister: We stand to hear the good news of our salvation, as it is written in the Gospel according to Saint....., chapter..., beginning to read at verse.....

*After the gospel,*

Minister: This is the Gospel of Christ

All: Alleluia, Praise be to Christ our savior.

**HYMN:**

**SERMON**

*After the sermon the minister leads the congregation in the Nicene Creed*

Minister: We stand together with Christians throughout the centuries, and throughout the world today, to affirm our faith in the words of a synthesized Nicene Creed.

All: We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty creator of the visible and invisible worlds. We believe in Jesus Christ, our first born brother. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the proto type of our ancestors. We believe in the community Church, communion of the living and the living dead, abundance of life this world, and in the next world, a world without end. Amen.

Minister: The community of the living and the living dead converge here today to perform *ng'anyet* ritual for our church member (name) the family kinsman/woman/child, grandfather/grandmother who led an exemplary life while he/she was in this earthly life. Like us, he/she is created in the image of the living God and is an embodiment and rendezvous of the past, present and the future of this family, clan and community. In him/her, these three periods converge and diverge. Through death, he/she has graduated from the physical nature to the incorruptible spiritual nature and *ng'anyet* ritual facilitates his/her journey to the eternal land, the heavenly home of the living dead.

All: God, you are the designer, sustainer and perfecter of human life, receive our ancestor(s).

Minister: From the land of the living dead, the ancestors monitor the living family members in this world, protecting them, providing for their needs and punishing offenders, always watching over the moral behaviour of individuals and the families. Like all our ancestors, may this ancestor be our authority; maintaining peace and stability at all times. May the living family members value working hard, integrity, faithfulness, truthfulness and commitment of the ancestor to the family, the community, nation and the Church.

All: Protect us from any form of injustice and jealousy. May we preserve our cultural heritage, through which we draw our promises of commitment to God.

Minister: Protect the parentage of this family

All: For through them, life is passed on unselfishly from one generation to another

Minister: Bless their children

All: In them, the past is alive and the future is assured

Minister: Bless this land with milk and honey

All: It is the garden of life

Minister: Bless our ancestors

All: They are the custodians of the community

Minister: The great grandfather of this family

All: Present

Minister: The great grandmother of this family

All: Present

Minister: Today, we canonize the latest member of this family who is no longer in this human nature but has joined our spiritual family members in our resurrection.

All: We welcome you to join us in the family activities and in fellowship like other ancestors who went before you.

Minister: Together with you are other family, clan and community ancestors-Koitalel arap Samoei, Elijah Chepkwony, Agness Jebirir, Rt. Rev. Alexander Kipsang Muge

All: You are all our fathers and mothers who are in heaven.

Minister: From beyond the limits of death, you share in the life of the family, the nation and the church here on earth.

All: Through you our ancestor, life here on earth grows quantitatively and qualitatively.

Minister: Bless our grandparents, parents, children, grand children and great grand children so that life may be preserved and transmitted from one generation to another

All: O God bless them

Minister: Bless our lands, our farms, our flocks

All: That all may have where to live, eat, clothe and enjoy the image of God in them.

Minister: Bless our political, social and economic leaders and institutions that our nation may enjoy peace, prosperity and security.

All: May our leaders serve you faithfully that unity of all people may be guaranteed through the bond that unites the living and the living dead.

Minister: Bless the communion of the living and the living dead

All: For this is an eternal Communion

Minister: We cherish the living unity of the living and the living dead experienced and maintained through *ng'anyet* ritual

All: Where the living and the living dead believers converge together in eternal communion

Minister: May abundant life flow like a stream of cool waters in this family, clan, community, nation and the Church and in the world in the Name of God, the Father; God the Son and God the Holy Spirit

All: Amen.

Offertory Hymn: 161-Tienwogik chekilosune Jehovah

*Ministry of the sacrament/Holy Communion*

Minister: Today, we gather in the home of (Name) knowing that our Trinitarian God and all the ancestors who died believing in God are present with us. We lift up our hearts with thanksgiving to our Lord and God saying:

All: Holy, holy, holy God in heaven,

With our faithful ancestors in the land of the living dead,

Hear us as we celebrate the *ng'anyet* ritual of one of us who has come before us,

Minister: Receive him/her (name) as we commune together with our Lord Jesus Christ, through these gifts of your creation, who on the same night that he was betrayed, he took bread and gave you thanks; he broke it shared out to his disciples

All: Amen. Hear us as we celebrate victory over death

Minister: In the same way, he took the cup and gave you thanks and gave it to his disciples saying: Take this cup of eternal life, drink it and remain faithful to God always.

All: Christ died for our sins, Christ conquered death, Christ is alive, We are victorious because he is

Minister: As Jesus taught us, we are bold to pray:

All: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.

All: Amen.

*Communion and hymns*

*After the communion*

*All facing the Cross of Christ positioned in the western side say:*

Minister: All anti-life forces

All: We cast them to the cross of Christ

Minister: Any immoral and destructive behaviour and all life diminishing acts

All: We cast to the cross of Christ

Minister: Any evil thought and attitude among the family members, clan, in the neighbourhood and community

All: We cast to the cross of Christ

Minister: Any bad habits like evil eye, bad heart and all wrong-doing

All: We cast to the cross of Christ

Minister: All our rituals

All: Bless them Lord

Minister: Rituals of redress, of redress/initiation and liminality

All: Appeal to our spiritual community to influence abundance of life

Minister: God, the source of abundant life, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, our senior ancestor and elder, perfect you in every good work to do his will, and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

All: Amen.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The search for an authentic Nandi-Anglican Christianity calls for a reinvention of both rigid cultural traditionalism and dogmatism of missionary churches. Reinvention creates an alternative religious world of meaning and purpose as witnessed in the synthesis of the traditional Nandi and the Anglican Church beliefs and practices in relation to the living dead. In the end, both the traditional Nandi and the Anglican converts live as one religious unit confidently celebrating a common synthesized Nandi-Anglican religious context.

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