up to the divine, see themselves as 'receptors', passive entities *vis-à-vis* the divine, and seek, through collective effort, to induce divinities down from the transcendent plane to make contact with them and suffuse them with qualities of the divine. Orthodox Christianity taught a mode of access to divinity that relied on the mental and contemplative efforts of individuals, who should induce themselves to rise beyond their base human nature, through activities that arrested bodily appetites and functions (e.g. fasts and abstinence), to achieve contact with divinity on a higher plane of existence. The latter is most difficult for most people; whence the return to the former, represented by pentecostal, spiritualist and charismatic religious expressions.

Conclusion

By identifying the trance as a Christian mystical form, the southern Ghanaian has acquired a vehicle for impressing some of the modalities of traditional religion on Christianity:

1. 'Affective mysticism' has gained emphasis, restoring some balance with 'contemplative mysticism' in Christian religion.
2. Community worship as a vehicle of spiritual transport to the realms of the divine has assumed a new significance.
3. Different denominations are credited with special charisma, and one might seek spiritual relief in them according to need.
4. Life-long allegiance may be pledged to the religion of one's parents or infancy, but individual experience may indicate participation in other worshipful groups.

In consequence of all these, southern Ghanaian culture is giving a new mould to the Christian faith, as people experience divinity, as Godfrey Lienhardt described it, through natural experience and their own cultural lenses.

FRANCIS M. DENG

DINKA RESPONSE TO CHRISTIANITY: THE PURSUIT OF WELL-BEING IN A DEVELOPING SOCIETY

Introduction

AMONG the Dinka, as with many other African peoples, the reception of the Christian message of salvation has been ambivalent. As Godfrey Lienhardt has persuasively argued in his article 'The Dinka and Catholicism', Dinka reaction to the Christian mission was a complex process in which parallels, contrasts, acceptance and rejection were all intertwined. In this essay I will focus on Dinka ideas of well-being as they have operated in both traditional and Christian religious life. I will aim to demonstrate how Dinka values and cultural patterns interplayed with Christian principles in a process which, though frequently mutually supportive and reinforcing, was also fraught with cross-cultural misunderstandings, tensions and conflicts. Drawing mainly on songs, we will see how Christian education has positively transformed traditional notions and at the same time subtly undermined Dinka confidence in their ability to achieve the well-being they seek.

The Concept of Well-being in Dinka Religious Thought

Studies of Nilotic religions, among them the classic work of Godfrey Lienhardt on the Dinka, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka*, show that the religious beliefs and practices of the Nilotes reflect the social, cultural, economic and political realities of their world. The ultimate objective of their

religious devotion is not so much to ensure salvation in a life hereafter as it is the physical and spiritual well-being of life in this world.

Well-being among the Dinka is expressed in the word *wei*, which as a verb means 'to breathe' and as a noun means 'breath', but unlike the English equivalent, *wei* as a noun is conceived of as a plural. This is because by *wei*, the Dinka do not mean a single act of breathing, but the continuing chain that constitutes living. Nor is *wei* as an objective confined to the condition of breathing or being alive. As a goal, *wei* requires physical and moral well-being at its best. Dinka greeting nearly always involves the rhetorical question, *wei ka?*, 'Are those *wei*?', which is an acknowledgement of a satisfactory state of health or well-being. When one's appearance betrays poor health, whether as a result of a known illness or for some intangible reason, the interchange would then involve some acknowledgement of the weakening of *wei*, or general health. *Engo cin wei tok e ke*, 'Why do your *wei* look so pained?', is one popular response to seeming ill health. But as long as there are *wei*, however weakened, one is said to be 'alive', *apir*. Death is the absence of *wei* in the body. But in Dinka usage, such absence is expressed in terms of non-existence rather than of departure: *acen ic wei*, 'there is no *wei* in him' (or 'in it' if an animal). So, while 'the soul' or 'the spirit' in Christian usage is conceived of as a non-material reflection of the person it has left, to the Dinka, *wei* is intrinsic to the living being and merely ceases to exist when a person dies. Of course, the dead person in his or her full integrity, body and *wei* is believed to be then transformed into a different kind of existence in the world of the dead. That continued existence, especially whenever it comes back to the living in the form of dreams or afflictions, is expressed in the intangible term of *atiep*, literally 'the shadow' of the dead. The Dinka, of course, know that the body without *wei* lies decomposing in the grave, so that it is the memory of the dead person, conceptualized in the form of *atiep*, that reconstitutes the dead person as a whole being with body and *wei*.

The Dinka solve the paradox of their preoccupation with life as the objective of their religious practice and their recognition that death is inevitable by viewing the ultimate goal not as the preservation of life, but rather as the continuation of life through genetic and social reproduction by successive generations in the agnatic lineage or the clan. The overriding goal of every Dinka is to marry and have children, expecially sons, 'to stand the head upright', *koc nhom*, after death.[1] It is in this conceptual framework that the authority wielded by the various entities in the spiritual hierarchy of Dinka religion and their potential role in generating, weakening or eliminating *wei* should be understood.

The Dinka believe in a supreme being which they call Nhialic and whose attributes are similar, if not identical, to those of the Christian God, which is why the two words are used interchangeably in this essay. To the Dinka there is only one Nhialic, the creator of the human race and all things in this world.

1. Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1961, p. 26.

The Dinka usually assert positively, 'Nhialic *ato thin*', which implies that he is watching human behaviour and will sooner or later uphold and sanction the principles of the moral order of his authority. To say that 'Nhialic exists' is therefore a way of expressing confidence in God's ultimate justice in rewarding virtue and punishing evil. Occasionally, when disillusioned by God's seeming indifference, inaction, or what appears to be a whimsical infliction of harm on the innocent, the Dinka will wonder rhetorically, 'Where has the Creator [*aciek*] (or God) gone? Why have you abandoned us?' But the issue is never posed in a way that denies his presence 'somewhere'. In so far as his power is unlimited in time and space, Nhialic is everywhere, not in the sense of physical presence, but rather of effective control.

Apart from God and the ancestors, the Dinka believe in two sets of spirits. *Yieth* (sing. *yath*) are clan spirits, usually symbolized by totems of animate or inanimate existence and treated as relatives to whom cattle are dedicated and sometimes slaughtered in sacrifice. Like the ancestors, *yieth* are essentially virtuous and will harm a person only as a punishment for wrongdoing. *Jak* (sing. *jok*) are spirits which are essentially not related to specific clans but can be acquired from those possessing them or may fall on individuals of their own choice. Although they can be adopted, tamed and used for good, *jak* are essentially evil and destructive. They are generally the cause of illness, misfortune and death. The Dinka, indeed, generally refer to a serious illness or disease as *jok*. When God, the clan spirits or the ancestors are angered by wrongdoing, they will recruit *jak* to inflict harm, even death, as a punishment.

Because of the procreational foundations of Dinka religious thought, the ancestors and the clan spirits are generally referred to as 'grandfathers' or 'ancestors'. God may also be referred to as 'Ancestor', 'God of my father', or 'God of my forefathers'.

The hierarchy of spiritual authority in this world is headed by the father as the representative of God and the ancestors. The values of ancestral continuity give the father seniority over the mother. But dominant as men are in Dinka society, women occupy a paradoxically pivotal role not only because they are the main source of wealth through marriage, but especially because society depends on them to rear children and inculcate in them the values on which the lineage system is founded. Women have also been known to play a legendary part in the history or mythology of their people and have gone down as founders of lineages or ancestresses whose names have been added to the hierarchy of ancestral spirits. We will see how this pivotal role of women is demonstrated through Christian prayers to Mary.

The moral principles by which spirits and humans interrelate and mutually serve each other's interests are embodied in a complex concept known as *cieng*—'order, custom, behaviour'. At the core of *cieng* is living together in mutual understanding and co-operation. *Cieng* not only advocates unity and harmony through attuning individual interests to those of others; it requires positive assistance to one's fellow men. Consistent with the deferential ideals of human relationships, *cieng* favours persuasion against violence or other means of coercion. This is revealed particularly well in Dinka concepts of leadership

and education. The leader is seen, not so much as one with absolute control as one who makes adjustments to correct whatever might have gone wrong and then maintains the continuity and stability of the corrected situation. Similarly, knowledge is expressed not so much as an achieved state but as a process, *ngic* or 'knowing'. A person learns to know through counselling and advice, obtaining moral knowledge rather than just technical skills. Both leadership and education help to maintain *cieng*, and within this concept of moral order great emphasis is placed on the attributes of *dheng*—personal pride, honour, dignity.[2]

A remarkable feature of Dinka culture is that it gives virtually everybody some avenue to dignity, honour and pride. The degree varies, and the means are diverse: there are the sensuous means concerned mostly with appearance, bearing and sex appeal; there are the qualities of virtue in one's relations to others; and there are the ascribed or achieved values, material or spiritual, which help determine one's social standing. These ways are interrelated and cannot really be separated, but only by seeing them as alternatives and by realizing that all ways lead to the same ends can we fully understand why every Dinka has some share in the values of self-esteem, inner pride and human dignity.

To summarize, then, the Dinka believe that their value system is ordained and ultimately sanctioned by God and the ancestral spirits. Religion is not an affair of the 'soul' in a world yet to come; it is rooted in the quest for a secure life in this world and continued participation after death. Divine leadership and religious functionaries play a critical role in interpreting and applying the will of God and the ancestral and other spirits. The Chief is a spiritual leader whose words are believed to express divine enlightenment and wisdom and form the point of consensus and reconciliation. In order to reconcile people, the Chief himself must be a model of purity, righteousness and, in Dinka terms, 'a man with a cool heart', as opposed to a hot-tempered and impatient man. The notion of endeavouring to elevate society or individuals to an as yet unrealized higher and better level of existence through a process called 'development' was, I believe, foreign to the Dinka. The spiritual leader is expected, not to lead his community to a higher state, but to maintain unity, harmony and functional prosperity, or make adjustments to restore them when something goes wrong. But spiritual leaders are not solely responsible for the well-being of society. The individual member of the community, too, must endeavour to achieve it, and to this end education among the Dinka is both informative (in the transmission of facts) and morally prescriptive. Individual and societal goals, even to the optimum degree, were considered part of experience, achievable and, indeed, at one time or another, actually achieved.

2. F. M. Deng, *Tradition and Modernization*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1971, pp. 24–5, 209.

Christianity, Well-being and Development

The main objective of Christian missions among the Dinka was seen in traditional terms as the pursuit of *wei*. The premise was that prior to Catholic education, the Dinka were immersed in the abyss of intellectual, moral and spiritual darkness or emptiness that was dangerous to *wei*. Catholic teachings promised to provide the remedy and the path to salvation. Dinka notions of *wei* which focused more specifically on individual and collective well-being in this world were moulded to embody a new concept that welded the traditional Dinka view of health with the Christian doctrine of ultimate survival in a spiritual sense. As Godfrey Lienhardt explains:

> Missionaries, using *Wei*, breath and life, as the best approximation to translate 'soul', have presumably successfully reshaped the Dinka word for their converts into a unitary term for a moralized and spiritualized self-consciousness of each separate individual in relation to a personalized God.[3]

One of the most effective ways in which the Christian message was articulated and promoted among the Dinka was through the songs of schoolchildren, composed by older boys or Dinka teachers and sung by the pupils collectively with all the aesthetic values normally associated with singing and dancing as features of *dheng*. Schoolchildren viewed themselves in traditional terms as an age-set of warriors with a pen for the spear. Competing along tribal lines in much the same way their traditional counterparts did, they glorified themselves in singing displays in which they exalted their newly acquired wisdom and status with an exhibitionist self-esteem, alternately referring to themselves as 'I' or 'we', all characteristic of youth in traditional Dinka society.[4] It is through them that we see the expression of new Christian ideas through traditional language.

In keeping with the Dinka practice of asking ancestors and clan divinities to intercede on their behalf, 'Mother' Mary, described as extremely white because of her immaculate purity, is beseeched to intercede on behalf of mankind. The devotion of motherhood to the well-being and welfare of the child suited her to this role, but as this song clearly reveals, she was elevated to a level not previously accorded to ancestresses or female divinities. Since both her son, Jesus, and his heavenly father were God, Mary became the closest human approximation to the supreme being and, in Dinka religious thought and practice, the best intermediary between man and God in the pursuit of worldly well-being and the salvation of the soul after death. Thus the *wei* sought by the Christian converts was subtly different from the *wei* offered by the elders and the ancestors, who naturally became subordinated to Mary:

3. Godfrey Lienhardt, 'Self: Public, Private. Some African Representations', *JASO*, Vol. XI, no. 2 (1980), pp. 69–82, at p. 75.

4. In those songs cited here which also appear in F. M. Deng, *The Dinka and Their Songs*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1974, I have made minor revisions in translation, partly to elucidate the meaning in this context.

May the Earth make us meet
May we meet with our Mother;
I wish we could meet and see her,
Our mother whom we have forgotten.
We say, 'Greetings, greetings, our Lady Chief,
Creator, our Lady Chief,
Mary, our Lady Chief,
Our *wei* come from you.
No one has taught us well;
Help us, Mother
Help us, Creator Mother:
It is *wei* we seek, it is *wei*.
No one has shown us the way,
Our Creator Mother as white as the sun.'

Initially, the Dinka were reluctant to send their children to school not only through fear of cultural alienation, symbolized by the fact that schoolchildren became known as 'the children of the missionaries', *mith abun*, but also because of fear of moral corruption.[5] The so-called *mith abun* were looked down upon by their illiterate age-mates as having lost the dignity of tradition. There was an ambivalence about learning, which was often shared by the students themselves. At the root of this ambivalence lay not only a conflict between moral values, but scepticism about the skills the school taught. Slowly the significance of the school began to make itself felt. So miraculous was writing and reading in the eyes of the Dinka that children with this accomplishment had cause to brag. In our house, whenever we read letters coming to our father from other chiefs about inter-tribal cases, it was common for the bearers to listen with utmost interest, then remark, 'Exactly, that was what the Chief told his clerk to write', and an impressed audience would burst into admiring laughter. And with that discovery came the realization of the hidden powers of modern education.

The implication was a revolution in knowledge and the power accruing from it, even though the educated youth—unlike their traditional counterparts, who prided themselves on their physical courage and obstreperousness as warriors—saw their dignity in obedience and orderliness. This was indeed a reversal of roles; for in traditional society, knowledge was presumed to accumulate with age and proximity to the ancestors. Now, according to the new code of learning, the Dinka as a culture group not only had a lot to learn, but should indeed be ashamed of where they stood in the newly postulated scale of progress. This had direct implications on religious notions of well-being, as the song to Mary cited above demonstrates. A preponderance of the prayers in schoolchildren's songs are addressed to Mary. In fact, she seems to have replaced the Holy Ghost in the Trinity. The Dinka could accept the idea of God the Father and God the Son being two in one, but the term used

5. R. G. Lienhardt, 'The Dinka and Catholicism', in J. Davis (ed.), *Religious Organization and Religious Experience*, London and New York: Academic Press 1982 (ASA Monographs, no. 21), p. 87.

for the Holy Ghost, *Wei Santo*, said virtually nothing to them. Here, Mary not only replaces *Wei Santo* in importance but is presented as the source of *wei*, which, in one sense, was a somewhat surprising fact that the Dinka were ignorant of until now, but in another sense was intelligible to them, since the mother is a vital partner in the creation of life. Mary, now presented as the Mother of God, had to be even more pivotal as a source of *wei* to all humankind, a power superior to all the practitioners of traditional religion.

Dinka schoolchildren began to express in their own songs contempt for the illiterate 'pagan priests' of their own society.[6] Paradoxically, although Dinka traditional religion was condemned as a source of evil from which Christian education was the saving grace, missionaries recognized and made use of the sacred chiefs of the Dinka not only for the pragmatic purpose of reaching their people, but also because of the colonial policy of devolution. A number of prominent chiefs from Bahr el-Ghazal Province were flown to Rome to meet the Pope and, at least according to this song, seek his blessing for their people:

When they took Giir into the sky by a plane
Women all cried in dismay,
'O O ee ee
Our chief is taken away
What will return him to us?'
The chiefs were asked, 'What do you want?'
'Father, it is *wei*.'
'What do you have to say?'
'Father, it is *wei*.'
'What do you want?'
'Father, it is *wei*.'
It is *wei* that we, of Ajang, are seeking.[7]

The Dinka have a relative view of religion that recognizes the significance of race, ethnicity, culture, lineage or language in man's relationship to the divine order, but they also believe that mankind as a totality is subject to the One Supreme Power of God, for it is He who creates and destroys all human beings irrespective of race or religion. Because of the combination of their religious devotion with the universality of their conception of God's relationship to man, what matters most to the Dinka is not so much what religion one adheres to as how religious one is. A holy man—of whatever race, religion or language—who appears to reflect unusual spiritual powers and divine will is revered as a man of God capable of rewarding good and punishing evil. Christian missionaries among the Dinka had the distinct advantage of being seen as people who were there for the sole purpose of spreading the word of God to do good among men. Even the designation of the Catholic priests as Fathers was well suited to Dinka notions of spiritual leadership. Indeed, in the references to the Bishop or the Priest which have been translated as Lord or Master, the word used by the Dinka is the same one they apply to their divine

6. Deng, *Dinka Songs*, no. 133, pp. 251–2.

7. Ibid., no. 139, p. 258.

chiefs—*beny*. Their functions were viewed as comparable. Many of the schoolchildren's songs were indeed personal exaltations of the missionaries as benefactors in all the values associated with well-being and moral order. One song, composed in honour of Bishop Edward Mason of Bahr el-Ghazal, declared:

> We are honouring the *beny* of *wei*.
> We are honouring the Bishop
> We are honouring the *beny* of *wei*.
> We shall beseech the *beny* of *wei*.

But the inspiration behind the moral and religious exaltation of the missionaries was directed not so much toward a new spiritual order or the worship of God as towards the new notions of 'going ahead', or 'progress' associated with modern education. As Godfrey Lienhardt has pointed out, by the 1940s many Dinka had come to appreciate 'that lacking in education their people were lacking in some of the essential skills for political survival in the modern Sudan'. In so far as they were at a disadvantage in the modern world, they were also 'backward'. This idea was suggested to them by missionaries and administrators alike, and education began to be perceived as a way to protect Dinka autonomy through producing enough Dinka 'capable of thinking in foreign ways, of meeting foreigners on their own ground while remaining Dinka in their loyalties'.[8]

Dinka chiefs, most of whom were illiterate, continued to be honoured not only for their leadership, but also for their role in facilitating the progress of their people through the modern instruments of education and administration of law and order. Competition between the tribes as represented by their chiefs was the most striking driving force in the process of 'going ahead'. In this adventitious set of values, the literate chief was viewed as having more going for him and therefore more to offer his people than the illiterate chiefs. While the messages of literacy and scientific enlightenment, with their attendant value to well-being, were a major theme of schoolboys' songs, an equally preoccupying, even obsessive concern was with the supposedly inherent evils and dangers of non-Christian life and social conditions. The supposedly 'evil spirits' of traditional religion and even 'Mohammedism', which was morally equated with paganism, were seen as posing a serious threat to *wei*, and Christianity was extolled as the only tool of redemption. Again, it was to Mary that Dinka converts appealed:

> Maria, Mother, is feared by evil spirits [*jak*]
> Cries arose in the middle of the day.[9]
> Mother
> Help us
> The war of evil spirits,
> Our mother is feared by spirits.[10]

8. Lienhardt, 'The Dinka and Catholicism', pp. 83, 86.

9. Cries of war symbolizing fight with evil spirits.

10. Deng, *Dinka Songs*, no. 137, pp. 255–6.

Missionaries introduced a new concept of wrong which intensified Dinka moral indignation and apprehensions about wrongdoing as a provocation against God. Of course, the Dinka traditionally believe in the original wrong that offended God and made Him withdraw from man; they also recognize that many forms of wrongs are offensive to God and could result in spiritual contamination that might cause illness and maybe death; but they do not have a particular term comparable to the word 'sin' for those wrongs. The word *adumom*, which the Dinka converts now apply to sin, is a Christian invention which connotes 'darkness', a contrast to the 'whiteness' with which Mary's purity is conceived:

> We praise Santa Maria, our exceedingly White Lady,
> Maria, White Lady, redeem us from sin,
> The sins of our ancestors
> And the sins of our own,
> Redeem us from the war of evil spirits,
> Show us the *dheng* of the spirits above
> Show us the *dheng* of God in the sky.

Although the dangers of sin were seen in relation to *wei* in this life, the fear of the hell to follow death was also deeply ingrained in the young converts. Conversely, the dream of the heaven to come was also inculcated as a supreme compensation for the suffering in this world:

> Maria, Mother, White Lady,
> We are all your children,
> Help us to go to the home above.
> O O, the home of fire
> That is the place for suffering and misery!
> We are afraid; we are afraid.
> ...
> We shall meet in the home above
> Yes, Yes, we shall meet in the home above
> We shall meet with Jesus Christ, the eldest son of God
> The lamb who redeemed our *wei*.

As the fruits of education continued to materialize more visibly with increasing employment opportunities and participation in the power institutions of the modern state, the cultural traits of Christian missionary influence began to be gradually assimilated by the Dinka as part of the inevitable process of modernization. But modernization for the Dinka also involves social disintegration as a result of the adversities of north-south relations in the Sudan and the renewal of civil war. With independence, the Dinka experienced yet another stereotype of racial, religious and cultural development in which Arab-Muslim identity replaced the European-Christian mould as the official model for 'progress'. Since independence also, many Dinka have had direct experience of their own subordination to this stereotype as more and more of them were brought into the modern economy as migrant labourers in Sudanese cities such as Khartoum. These negative aspects of change are viewed as part of the moral degeneration Dinka society has undergone, in

sharp contrast to the religious ideals of their tradition represented by their sacred leaders believed to be now gone. As a result of the increasingly subordinate role to which they have been relegated in the pluralistic context of the nation-state, the Dinka have reluctantly come to accept that they occupy an inferior status than they had realized in the homogeneous context of traditional society.

The Dinka have a saying, 'Dignity, *dheng*, remain; indignity, *yuur*, let us go.' In the following verses from a recent song, the singer is painfully conscious of the indignities he has suffered, and attributes the hardships of urban labour to the inequitable distribution of resources among the races at the time of creation. He berates the ancestors who, according to myths now being told among the Dinka, chose the gift of cattle rather than knowledge.[11] Other myths referred to in the song are the ones that ascribe the suffering of man to wrongs allegedly committed by the woman who either threw a shard of broken pot into the river and cursed mankind to suffer and die, or hit the sky with a pestle while pounding grain and forced God to pull back into the sky:

The Arabs divided us for labour;
Some men carried buckets of water,
Others cultivated the fields;
And yet others worked for women at home
Those of us who worked for women at home,
No one is like me;
I severed my testicles,
And handed them to Arab women.
I took the broom,
And swept the floor until my neck hurt,
Like a man carrying a heavy load.
Why does each year come and appear the same as last year?
God hates us for the things of the past.
The ancient things he created with us in the Byre of Creation,
When he gave the black man the cow
To crawl out on to the shores of the river,
Leaving behind the Grain and the Book of his father,
To be kept in the cities.
A prosperity which denied water to the towns,
So that people remained drinking from wells.
We shall ask Bol Riang to extinguish the fire of the towns into which we flock.
Dinkas met with Arabs on the way
And filled the lorries going to Wau;
The Arab is going to distribute his sacks of grain to the South.
Our curse goes to the elders of the original land;
The man who threw the Book away,
It is he who has given us into slavery;
And the woman who threw the pot into the river.
My heart is as dark as the black berries in the forest.
The Arabs have bound us to a tight plan,

11. F. M. Deng, *Dinka Cosmology*, London: Ithaca Press 1980, pp. 269, 305–9, 312–3.

A plan as tight as a cow which has lost its calf,
Bowed to surrender milk.
In the evening, he shouts at us,
Like the thundering of a rain threatened by a dry spell.
Leaving only clouds in the sky,
To carry words between god and man;
He paces up and down with a face like a cloud.
The sun appeared.
Is it dawn?
Or is it dusk?
We gathered in large varieties
Like maize which mixes white and brown,
We were taken far away.
We found the place full,
We stood and searched our hearts like the Arab who abandoned his spear
And then cried, 'I wish I had a spear!'
We are pacing up and down.
There is no prosperity in what had been praised:
We found the land bare,
Like the drums of the fox and the ground hornbill,
The drums they followed to the sky to dance,
And found that their things hurt;
They were drums which afflicted men with pain.
An Arab woman shouted, 'Man who wants work, come and take *gurbal*.'[12]
I went and directed my ears,
I thought she was accusing me of *bal*.
It is the sifter which the Arabs call *gurbal*;
A wire screen with wood on the edges.
The language of the Arabs is confusing our heads,
Let us abandon it,
It is the language of uninitiated boys.

Conclusion

The picture that emerges from the foregoing analysis of Dinka responses to Christian education is a complex amalgamation of tradition and modernization in a process that was primarily geared toward 'development'. Mutual cross-cultural accommodation went side by side with contradictions and unwitting disregard, if not disrespect, of each other's values and institutions. The Christian missionaries took the inferiority of traditional religious beliefs and practices for granted, while the Dinka pragmatically and selectively benefited from Christian educational and medical services, which they at first resisted but eventually learned to appreciate. Although the converted youth

12. An instrument for sifting flour, here used as a pun in relation to the Dinka word *bal*, sexual promiscuity.

embraced Christianity with a religious fervour, their elders accepted the conversion of their children as a tolerable component of the more significant benefits that were accruing through missionary work in the area.

There were many mutual misconceptions. Sometimes they were most striking, even though no one seemed to be bothered, either because the language in which they were communicating was so alien to both sides that it provoked no discourse, or because they seemed to realize that in the world of cross-cultural communications, certain voids were inevitable and tolerable. One hymn for the souls of the dead, presumably a translation from the Latin or English version, included the words:

> Lord, let them rest in peace,
> Let them rest forever,
> Let them remain resting, O Lord.
> Save them from the home of fire
> Let them remain resting, O Lord.
> And let your sun shine upon them,
> Let it shine forever,
> Lord, let them rest in peace.

Although the prayer was accepted at face value, I doubt that the Dinka would have appreciated the words had they reflected on the meaning. In Dinka thought, the world of the dead is a mythical extension of the world they know. There is no particular quest for rest associated with death. As for praying for sunshine, although it might be argued that what is intended by the word *ruel* used in the Dinka text is 'light', that word is used only with reference to the sun, and no Dinka would pray for that except very occasionally to break a menacing downpour of rain. Quite the contrary, the heat of the sun which accompanies its light is associated with ill health. Indeed, the Dinka pray for rain and a cool breeze as sources of well-being or *wei*.

These subtleties in meaning and cultural orientation were not, however, significant for what was essentially a dynamic interaction and mutual influence in which the Dinka became gradually disposed towards the objective of self-enhancement through Christian education and Western scientific and technological development. From the viewpoint of traditional elders, what was threatening and became increasingly disturbing was the more blatant disregard for traditional knowledge and the superior wisdom of the elders. They now feel as if they are being pushed aside by the 'educated youth'.[13]

It would be wrong to conclude that the Christian missionaries were insensitive to the Dinka cultural context. Indeed, it could be argued that they used Dinka culture, perhaps even exploited it, quite effectively, especially in so far as they related the benefits of education and modern medicine to the enhancement of well-being in the physical, spiritual and moral sense of *wei*. The last sacrament was often administered by priests not so much to save the soul after death, but as a manifest effort to save the life of a supposedly dying man, and when occasionally that objective was achieved, the Catholic message

13. Deng, *Dinka Cosmology*, p. 286.

benefited from the miracle in a dramatic way. But it would also be too complacent to say that both sides understood one another in a profound way and sought to reinforce each other's values and institutions through a process of equitable cross-cultural fertilization. What seems to have occurred is that because of Dinka conservatism and pride in their race and culture, their values were so deeply rooted and resilient that they persisted against the onslaught of missionary intervention.

The irony is that the British colonial administration and Christian missionaries made a more effective use of this eclectic process through a conscious policy than the national governments have done since independence. The result has been that the Dinka sense of pride and independence—which still shines through in the songs composed by schoolboys—has been more infringed upon under post-colonial administrations than was the case under the British and missionary influence, as can also be seen in the last song I have quoted. Concomitantly, the resourcefulness of the Dinka for a self-sustaining process of development with a degree of coherence and cohesion was far greater under the colonial administration and their missionary partners than has been the case under national governments. The result has been a violent reaction to the racial, religious and cultural inequities of the modern Sudan, evidenced by two civil wars, with a devastating effect on the overriding objective of nation-building in a country of awesome diversity.

The tragic fact is that even as the Dinka reveal a determination to resist external domination, whether reflected in blatant political terms or disguised in cultural and religious forms, they are beginning to show signs of succumbing to the assumptions of racial and cultural stratification that underlie their relegation to an inferior status in the multi-racial and multi-cultural context of the modern Sudan. The lesson one is tempted to draw from this is that concepts of tradition or change which tend to be linear or one-sided are too simplistic to be representative portraits of the interacting realities. A degree of give and take seems indispensable, whether it is planned, recognized, or even ignored. The process would, however, be far more enriching if the postulate and the practical mechanisms of cross-cultural integration were better understood, clearly articulated and more deliberately and selectively aimed at enhancing the quality of life and the dignity of the human being on a racially, culturally and religiously equitable basis. The issue is even more pertinent and challenging to the independent Sudan than it was under the British and their religious partners, the Christian missionaries.