Crude Catholic Scene

Cradle Catholics. I was one of them, part of that scene - children of Catholics going to Catholic schools. As part of the believing faithful, we were making the Baltimore Catechism scene. We memorized. We grew up impressed with phrases such as "the Church teaches," and "it is so because it is our religion." No one would dare argue when confronted with "God said so." The God that "said so" spoke in the bible and only the pope, the bishop or the pastor could tell us what he meant. If our pastor "said so" we knew it was just as if God had said so. Authority played a major part.

Reasoning was not part of our tradition. It was not quite Catholic to question anything. If we did all the answer we got was, "Never mind, just learn your religion."

Even in high school we had a priest who told us it was not our job to ask why. Instead, we were to learn the Church's teaching (some of us dared to call it the "party line even back then") and learn how to reason to that truth in the future when we got into the senior seminary.

The only authorized thinking that was in the legal arena. We tried to see just how far we could go or what we could get away with without getting in trouble. A church law prohibited meat on Friday and we discussed how much meat we could eat without committing a mortal sin. The difference between a mortal and a venial sin was an ounce!

My seminary was just another authority scene. We were told that Rome encouraged thinking and was not afraid of the truth. We all knew of writers who were condemned by Rome for their writing; and so it was not only the Galileo story that showed us Rome's real presumption - no one may think without Rome first supplying the conclusion.

Then came a professor who challenged us to think. I felt my very identity had been affirmed. He seemed to be telling me that my intelligent mind should have some honesty and integrity instead of being just a copy of another mind or teaching. It was right to critically examine what I studied and not simply memorize and give back without any thought.
If people laughed or scoffed at some of the ideas that came out of my mouth, I was at least putting oil on gears too long rusting.

**The Missionary Scene**

Then I went to Africa. I was a missionary to people who were not cradle Catholics. They were not even Christians. They had never heard about Christ. I could not ignore the rational, reasoning humans they were and impose a foreign authority as the ultimate value. They did not recognize any foreign authority.

I had, in fact, to relate to them out of a deep respect for their integrity. I had to announce reasonably the good God so that they could accept him rationally and respond lovingly.

The missions had formed me. For better or worse I could not participate unthinkingly in the authority scene. I could not be a person who did not allow people to think. Unevangelized Africans are free to create and respond to Christ according to their culture, theology and philosophy. The same must be said about them even after baptism. Baptism is not an occasion to begin restricting individual or societal thinking. Our faith is closely linked with and mixed up with authority, the bible and history. But intelligence and heart must not be left out or there will be no integrity.

A missionary does not deny Church authority; he just may not use church authority as the criterion of truth for people who do not recognize it. It almost sounds heretical. But respect to pagans is essential.

I wanted to present a loving God that made sense so that people could join mind and heart with integrity and feel free to love in return. It is, therefore, not so much an authoritative statement that God loves us and that we should love in return. (No one commands love.) It is a pointing out and drawing attention to God’s love shown to us through Jesus in the very foundation of our lives. It is an attempt to notice the free God, in his integrity, loving us and allowing for a free response in love that allows us to keep our integrity.

Feeling this way I began to notice some of the useless baggage I brought with me to Africa.

**Excess baggage from the "First World"**

When I appeared on the scene I came with many of the problems that very many "First World" people have when they begin to work in the "Third World" situations. We come loaded down with our own cultural baggage and garbage. Without even noticing it we have been adversely affected by our own previous schooling. We often presume that methods, visual aids, contents and progressions of teaching among a different people should follow examples that were given in our own homeland. We might, for example, think we can lecture as a professor all the while employing visual aids which portray Christ as something foreign or too complicated. We might presume to teach amounts of matter in one session that would be a burden even in our own culture. We wrongly judge that people will do homework or that we can progress at a rate we were accustomed to when we left school. Many people entering the world of first evangelization, especially among people who are not literate, are often so
completely out of their own cultural reference that they have no idea where to begin. They often don’t even know they are ignorant.

**General Problems**

Yes, I did notice much that had to be done. There are problems and there are problems. Some are immediate and some basic and long range. Some struggle with theology and others with legalities. Some are big as that of a child dying of hunger and some are as small as a bruised little finger. There are problems of justice such as children being denied a place in school because of their tribe. There are problems of oppression such as the unilateral rule of local government officials. There are problems of cattle stealing and murder. It is the work of the Body of Christ on earth to confront the problems of the world, to work actively to solve them.

As each part of a body has its specific task so each individual in the Body of Christ has his specific task. A doctor knows his area of work and what problems he confronts. A lawyer, a teacher, a police officer – each one knows what kinds of problems he confronts. The same is true of the missionary.

**Missionary as a first-evangelizer**

For the sake of clarity and to avoid unending arguments of what a missionary is I will use the term in a restrictive way. Here the word "missionary" is one who is a first-evangelizer.
Maasai

All of my eighteen years in Africa have been spent with the Maasai people. They are a semi-nomadic, pastoral tribe situated in Kenya and Tanzania, East Africa. Their length of stay in any particular place is conditioned primarily by the amount of grass and water available for the cattle. In some areas the average time of stay in one homestead is one month while in others it may be a few years.

Their houses reflect the lack of permanency in life. They are small dwellings about five feet high, made of sticks covered with grass then plastered over with cow manure. Their staple diet is milk, meat and ground maize. The latter is a more recent addition.

They believe in one God who made everything. God, is sometimes said to be black, the color which expresses the goodness of God; at other times God is said to be white (actually white with a reddish tone), the color which expresses God’s mischievousness.

I felt them to be a very conservative people, and judged this to have been a necessity which insured continuity in the tribe.

Simply because the Maasai are a different tribe than the English or the Chagga, they have different life-styles, customs, beliefs and myths. They, therefore, demand a different approach. Though a school system is present it is very important to realize that they are still mostly pre-literate and therefore cannot be taught as literate people are taught, using books and giving reading assignments. That they are nomads puts another strain on the teaching, because they cannot afford to carry a lot of excess baggage with them when they travel. Unlike settled people they are not always around for regular sessions. That they are unevangelized under these conditions means that I as the missionary must "grab them where they live" before they move away. Since they will move away they must be taught in such a way that they can carry on without me, on their own. They must be taught to quickly take on the responsibility for the health and growth of their own church.
Foundation Problems

As a missionary to the Maasai, I had to learn what their foundation problems were. I wanted to know how they felt about important matters in life and what they did or did not do about them. It was important to become acquainted with my audience.

Death, the end

The Maasai do not believe in the afterlife. Somehow a man lives on in his children but his own death is seen as the end of everything for him personally. Death is the worst evil that can befall a person. I have had to hold men and women so that they would not hurt themselves when they received the news of the death of a loved one. He or she cries, raves about the injustice of the whole matter and about how terrible God is, throwing him/herself around with abandon. An old man might curse God and declare how much he hates God because his little granddaughter died. After a person carries on for a suitable time someone says, "That is enough now. You are grown up. Your tears will not bring the person back. It is finished. Forget it."

Forget it he must. The name of the dead person is never mentioned again, even if another has that same name. Any object which is called by a word similar in pronunciation to the deceased person’s name is given a new name, in an attempt to wipe out a memory that is only painful. For example, if a person called Bridget died, no member of the family would ever pronounce the word, "bridge" again. The words "crossover thing" might be used to replace it from then on. Friends and neighbors who know of the tragedy would also refer to a bridge as a crossover thing in the presence of the bereaved.

The Maasai see a dead body and have no hope. The very limits of their existence are defined by the fact of death. "We are not like grass," they say, "that dies in the dry season and comes afresh every rain, or the moon which dies and resurrects on the third day. We are like cows waiting to be slaughtered not by men but by God, for God’s pleasure. God gives life and God takes it away."

Bewitching

The Maasai think that if someone is sick it is either because he is in sin, another has bewitched him or that God himself has made the man sick. I know of men who have called persons to their death beds to ask for forgiveness and a blessing. They see they have sinned against the other and now the curse they deserve is catching up with them. Since they do not believe in an afterlife the reason they want the blessing is to prevent the curse from killing them or from continuing on in their children.

It amuses us Westerners and non-Maasai to witness the fear people have of the "evil eye" that will cause a baby to become sick and die. We tend to think it silly to hide an infant from the eyes of strangers. They believe that even a very good person can have an evil eye; for it is believed to be God who gives people the evil eye. It is as if God causes evil through the one possessing the evil eye. There is nothing a person can do about it but to continually bless people, homesteads and cows wherever he goes in order to nullify the effects of his evil eye.
We are taken aback when we hear a Maasai tell a mother how ugly her child is. Telling a mother her child is beautiful can be an occasion of sentiments of jealousy that might, through bewitching, cause the child to get sick and die. If a stranger sees a baby he blesses it by spitting on it to show that he has no evil intentions. Imagine the fear that rules these people’s lives.

**Is God far away?**
Problems in life lead us into asking fundamental questions about God. What is his relation to us? Is he near us or far away? The Maasai say he is near and far but I often wonder if they feel he is only far. Do they feel God is really father and mother? Does he look upon us as his children? In what way? It often seems he really doesn't love us as he should. What does he expect of us? Does God expect more from us Maasai than to receive the cows and children he gives us, to keep our tribe intact and untainted from foreign influences and to take what happiness we can so long as we do not get caught by people and do not anger God? Is that all we are as Maasai? As humankind? Is that our only vocation in this world, that everything non-Maasai is to be despised and everything "God gave us from Kerio" to be kept static and immutable? (The Maasai believe they have their origins in a place called Kerio. Could this be Cairo?)

**Prayer**
"We pray to God," the Maasai say, "for more cows and children and everything but our prayers are often in vain. Why?" These questions carry feelings, beliefs and attitudes that must be dealt with if the Maasai are to see the world as God sees it through Christ and if they are to be co-builders of a new creation in Christ.

**Maasai Looking for Answers**

**Apparitions**
Sensitive Maasai, I believe, are looking for the answers. These problems bother them. Because they are so bound by tradition they find it hard to escape and search. Because of a lack of input, little original thinking is possible. They end up just accepting and for them accepting is a value.

I have taken their almost universal reaction to "apparitions" as a sign of their desire to search. Often it is reported that God has spoken to a woman and told her to bring some message to the Maasai. A favorite is for the woman to say that God is displeased because the women are wearing cloth garments instead of the traditional skins. When the report is sent out almost all of the women in the region will be seen wearing skins - at least till the fervor dies down.

**One-shot blessings**
One-shot blessings are another favorite. One man will announce that God has appeared to him and told him to report to all the Maasai that if they do not bless their villages with an elaborate blessing a disaster will strike the land. Maybe the reason for the blessing is that some calamity, like measles, has already visited the land and the blessing will drive it away. A delegation is sent around to see that each village in the area goes through the ritual. The ritual
itself is important; the very act of going through the prescribed motions determines the effects, which are way out of proportion to the cause. Inward dispositions and outward respect are often not in evidence to the onlooking foreigner.

Discussing these matters with different groups of elders I came away with a collection of observations and comparisons. I put their reflections together in the following paragraphs.

We Maasai go from obeying one apparition to the next; but each proves false and is embarrassing. We do not know what God wants of us or for us. We see God as always ready to be angry. We know ourselves as a people walking in the dark as if there were no moon and we have no torch. We hear a voice cautioning us, "Don't go over there because God hates it," and we swerve. We hear another voice advising us where to turn to avoid the anger of God and we unthinkingly turn. We hear yet another voice counseling us to do something else and we, troubled yet hopeful, stumble in its direction. We hear another sound and we are upset because we do not know its meaning. It is something like the feeling you get when you wake up in the middle of the night in a strange place and you don't know where you are.

What we really need is someone with a torch to show us the way. We need someone who will not deceive us as so many self-styled prophets have done in the past, someone who will not burden us with ridiculous laws. Maybe then we Maasai will begin to find an inner peace.

After that session I began to think how they put my teaching into perspective for me. If someone who would not lie to us, like the Son of God, were to come and tell us about death, sickness, sin, life, God, then maybe he would be believed, maybe then some basic answers would be seen. Jesus could be presented as that person.

The idea has promise. One of the earliest ideas of Jesus was that he came as the light of truth.

Maasai Prayer

One more issue struck me as an expression and reinforcement of fundamental attitudes - the way people pray. The typical Maasai prayer is one of petition. In fact, seldom did I hear any other type of prayer from them. Even when I heard words of thanksgiving they are said to God in one quick short sentence and then three paragraphs follow asking for anything one can imagine. God is invoked by many names of praise, almost as if he were being "set up for the kill," to get him to listen favorably to the requests that are sure to follow.

The Maasai say they pray to God but usually it does no good. Sometimes it helps, they say, as when a man asks that his son come back safe from Arusha or when a man asks God that he not meet with elephants or lions on the way.

This whole area of prayer tells us a lot about their mentality and later on it will be treated at length.
In general

Knowing fundamental problems is not enough, there is still a lot more to consider. When I first started teaching religion to the Maasai, I went with another's notes. I started, through my translator, to teach them Genesis, then on to Abraham, Moses, and others. I talked about God at work among humankind. After a while I realized I was talking as if God were not equally present among the Maasai.

The next attempt was to look for similarities between Old Testament practices and Maasai customs. That was supposed to show them that since the Maasai and the Jews of old were so similar, they should be able to identify with the Jews and so be at ease. I was uneasy with that reasoning because it seemed to carry a hint of subversion. Though unsaid, it seemed the intention was to ease them into following Jewish tribal customs.

Another blow

After a while, I asked them what this all meant and a man and his wife answered in the name of the group. "You are giving us stories of strange people of long ago. We do enjoy hearing them. Really we do. We enjoy your visits to us once a week. We like becoming friends with you. This thing you call religion is a lot like us Maasai. We also like to sit around at night and make up entertaining stories of long ago. We call such stories iloongukuun. So please do not stop coming. You are great entertainment." They thought they were making me welcome by identifying me and what I was doing with themselves and their customs. In fact, I was the Saturday Night Movie! Saturday Night Live!

A crushing experience. I was dejected, to say the least. I was saddened because the Holy Spirit did not speak to them through the bible. I was confused. I had learned nothing in the seminary about this sort of situation. I was a brand new naïve missionary who expected people to rush into the Church because I read them stories from the bible. I expected the Holy Spirit to create another Pentecost on the occasion of my reading them iloongukuun.

That the Jews (Gentiles to the Maasai) of long ago had customs similar to the Maasai is a pleasing thought; but it was Jewish salvation history I was bringing to them, not Christ. That one wanted to name his child Abraham did
not signify a conversion to Christianity. They often name their children after people who have had a lot of children hoping that with the same name the blessing of many children will rub off and their own children will have many offspring also.

**A clear challenge and request.**

Even when I got to Jesus and his cures a Maasai man challenged, "So what?" I was taken aback. The teaching stopped and he repeated himself. He continued, "You have been telling us a lot of nice, entertaining stories. Right now give me one good reason for becoming a Christian." I saw the petition underlying his words. In effect he was saying, "You haven't touched me. I have received nothing of value from what you have been saying. It just doesn't grab me. Give me something." It was true. I finally admitted to myself that I also really didn't care whether Abraham lived or not. The same for Moses, David and the other Old Testament heroes. They had no meaning for me.

**Give me a good reason**

That man who demanded, "Give me a good reason to become a Christian," is, I believe, expressing the typical pagan attitude. The good reason he asks for must be good. It is a safe presumption that that man, and all who do not know Christ want to be given something good from Christ. Simplistically and maybe a bit crudely the question being asked is, "What's in it for me?"

**What's in it for me?**

This "What's in it for me?" attitude is not bad. God does act first and then we respond to his love. He loves us, he has given us so much. Only when we see it can we want it and feel impelled to respond. It is God, though, who acts first. The pagan is, though maybe he does not know it, asking to be shown and given a part in the bounty of God. The good news of Christ is good because we really do get something out of it.

There I was, a missionary, the first one to come to preach the gospel. I was bringing an historic first that would influence the future of the Church in that area. I decided that if I am to preach the Good News I would make it really good for those whom I teach. I believed it to be very good and something I could be proud of preaching.

**They see no reason to listen**

My experience with the Maasai is that they will not come to me begging for instructions. They see no reason to come for something they know nothing about. They see no good reason to listen, even if I go to them.

**You have your way, we have our way**

One day one elder said to me, "You have your way of praying and we have ours. God gave us our way and it is good enough for us. If it is bad that is all right too because it is God who gave it to us. God answers our prayers when we pray in our way and he answers your prayers when you pray in your way." To him and many others the Good News of Christ is just a foreign way of praying. "It is not that," I wanted to shout, it is very good news that hits people where they live."

"**Gut-value criterion**"

I learned I had to change, I had to construct lessons with great care. Each lesson must be so constructed that when it is finished the people want what it
has to offer. Each lesson must be a pearl of great price. Each lesson, to be effective, must draw a response similar to "Wow! Look what I am being offered that I didn't have before. Hey, I want that!" I called this criterion "gut-value criterion," and I tried to keep it in mind for everything I was teaching. If I failed I would just be making myself Saturday Night Live all over again.

**What is so good?**

With the ghost of Saturday Night Live hanging over me I asked myself some questions and reconstructed my lessons accordingly. What is the Good News of Christ? Why is it good? What drives me to become a missionary? What is so good about our faith that I am driven to come to Africa to share it with others?

**Other missionaries' answers**

When I asked these questions of other missionaries some answered by saying that Jesus is important to them because he brought them ten guides for life. Others replied that Christianity is good because it teaches us how to pray and it teaches us that God loves us. For some, the important aspect is that Jesus saved us from sin. A few were happy with Christ because they thought he established the "Holy Roman Catholic Church." When I pressed a little and asked, "So what?" confusion entered the conversation and a bit of irritation as well.

**I did notice the way others operated.**

I visited other missions and found different theories in action. What disturbed me most was the use of magic to manipulate God. This short story about Father Mike illustrates a mentality that was very upsetting to me.
Father Mike

Picture yourself, an armchair missionary, watching a TV program about a missionary in Africa. The movie introduces you to a young man on the day of his ordination to the priesthood. The camera zooms in on his ecstatic face as he tenderly and with reverence puts on the vestments. The light in his eyes is obvious during the whole ceremony. Afterward, at the reception, the new Father Mike mentions to his folks how much the ceremony affected him and when he partook of the sacrifice he felt a call to go to the missions in Africa. He wants other people to be able to partake of the sacrifice and have God in them.

Off Father Mike goes to Africa and for the next few scenes he is seen learning the language, getting accustomed to the people, bringing them clothes to wear - beautiful clothes that have been donated by friends in America. Then he receives an appointment to a distant mission out in the bush. When he arrives there he discovers an unknown side of Africa - drought.

The people are in dire straits. It has not rained. They tell Father Mike the reason for the drought is that God is mad at them. They must have done some terrible wrong for God to withhold the rain. And now they must get God to send rain. They begin by saying prayers and singing songs. They hold ceremonies in which they hold up grass so that God can see that it is dry. Then they send delegations of pregnant women to beg for rain. They point their swollen bellies to the sky, accusing God of forgetting the children he gave them. When none of this works they slaughter a goat. All the while, as they try each one in succession, they are heard saying with confidence, "This one will surely work." When it doesn't work they try something else and repeat the phrase.

Smirk set firmly on face, the armchair missionary is thinking, "One of these days "it" will work. Some day it is going to rain and the people will say that the last ritual they tried was the one that worked on God.

Young Father Mike becomes inspired. "I have the perfect sacrifice," he says. "I know the sacrifice God infallibly recognizes and accepts. It is the death of his only son. It worked on God long ago. And now I have the same thing for you but in the form of bread and wine. So now you must stop all other sacrifices."
The people listen to Father Mike. Hi watches the people accepting Christ, his face radiant as it was at his ordination.

The armchair missionary begins to cringe. The uncomfortable suspicion is growing that Father Mike believes that Christian liturgies are pagan liturgies that work. But then a more troubling suspicion takes over. O my God! Is it possible that Father Mike is representative of the belief in his own tribe? And if this be so, then do many people also think of God as someone who is angry and mean and needs a sacrifice and someone to suffer before he shows mercy?

The show gets worse. The rains have finally come and Father Mike has a small Christian community gathered around him. The people seem almost worshipful of him. His sacrifice worked. Now he is taking mass intentions. He has collected the money and announces, "The sacrifice of the mass today will be offered for Keriko that he regain his health." From the armchair there is wonderment. Are people giving money to the priest to get him to work his sacrifice on God again?

Keriko dies. The new Christian community offers masses for his soul. "We can't give up on Keriko now that we can't see him," says Father Mike. The look of fear on people's faces seems to say, "Yes, we know God is still mean and we need to force God to be good. It is a good thing we have the perfect sacrifice that works on God for our purposes."

The church grows and another treat is given to the viewer. Father Mike has added another custom from his country. "Saint So-and-So," goes the singing. "Pray for us," is the sung response. As they walk solemnly through the fields, one of the new Christians asks his friend, "If this doesn't work what will we try next?" "I don't know," the answer comes, "we tried the mass, the perfect sacrifice that is supposed to work on God but it didn't work. So now we are trying to get the saints, the friends of God, to do the trick for us. They have more effect than our pregnant women."

The movie comes to an end. It leaves the one in the armchair wondering, "What do I believe?" I did not want to be a witch doctor or medicine man. Father Mike had become a medicine man. I did not want anything I did to give even the slightest hint of witch doctors or medicine men.
Seeing that I had no alternative but to construct my own catechesis I decided to base it on two concerns. What is the Good News of Christ? Why is it good? I think the answers will be found for people like the Maasai in the presentation of the kerygma as represented in the Circle. The answers will be complete and will grow to form a whole catechetical system.

Abraham

Answering the questions concerning what is so good about the Good News led me to disregard much of what I had been using. The Abraham story might be meaningful to an educated Christian. He might find consolation in reading how God prepared his people, how God blessed Abraham. A Maasai might just as well find the Abraham story no more than one oloongukuuni among many iloongukuuni made up by an olmeeki who died a long time ago and didn’t leave us anything concrete. (An olmeeki is a non-Maasai and the word is often said with scorn.)

So far the connotation of that story is not bad, but there are some who teach that God told Abraham to leave his own country and blessed him for doing so. They hint to the Maasai that God might call them by way of this new thing called the Church to leave something dear to them, their customs, their Maasai world. To them the Abraham story is no longer good news. It is bad news. A Maasai would easily think, "So religion means to leave being a Maasai. God made us to be Maasai. Being a Maasai is good. Now this olmeeki teacher is hinting that we might be called upon to leave our people."

Still the question had to be asked - did I come here to teach the good news of Abraham? Is Abraham fundamental? Does the Abraham story have gut-value? Do the Maasai get anything out of the Abraham story? I no longer teach Abraham to them. Abraham and the Old Testament characters were the first to go in my teaching. At this point keeping them in the teaching would please only a misguided sense of order and not the pagan sense of "What’s in it for me?"

The same applies to teaching the Ten Commandments.

Ten Commandments

The value of the Ten Commandments is not in question here, only their place in the kerygma, the evangelization of a people who have not yet heard
about Christ. I do not see the Ten Commandments as the way to "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation." (Mk 16:16)

I have witnessed Maasai react very negatively to the idea of good news being ten more laws, "when we have enough laws as it is."

**The Maasai Covenant**

Reacting to the covenant idea some articulate Maasai argued very convincingly, "Don't you think we have a covenant with God? Does it have to be written down? Does it have to be given to Jews or white people to be the will of God? We have laws that we all know come from God. They are expressed, for example, in our age-group system. Members of the same age-group are like brothers. They help each other out in difficulty. They feed each other. Warriors are not allowed to eat alone. This ensures that none of them goes hungry. Even the poorest fills his stomach. We say a child belongs to no one. It belongs to all. This helps us to ensure that the children are taken care of. If a woman is barren, she is not left to wither away in loneliness. She is given a child. Other women can bear more; not she. Not only must one respect his father he must also treat all elders as fathers. When a Maasai kills another Maasai we don’t kill him in payment of an eye for an eye. His family gives a girl to the bereaved family to cement relations. Life and friendship are more important than revenge. We know that to steal another man's property is wrong, and we have laws to deal with each situation. We go away to live for a while in what we call the olpul to eat meat. This binds us together just as the Jews of old stayed in the desert and became bound into one people, what you call the people of God. (How arrogant of you non-Maasai to think others may not rightly call themselves the same!) Our covenant goes even further. We are told not to judge another till you speak to him first. Why keep a certain day for God when all days belong to God? So what are those ten laws of the ilmeek telling us - to reduce the standards that God gave us to a minimum and a foreign one at that?"

I was struck by this outburst. They didn’t want to be identified with a different tribe. They couldn’t see how God could love Jews more than the Maasai or that the Jewish expression of the will of God was any better than the Maasai expression. The Maasai grow up with the law to feed the hungry. They give a cow to one who has nothing so that he can begin to prosper. They do not need to have the law written on stone. It is being written in their hearts from the moment they are born into the chosen people of God - the Maasai. Do I dare replace it with ten negative norms and the endless theologizing these norms entail? I no longer teach the Ten Commandments. If I mention them at all it is just to say that they are of Jesus' tribe and are not Jesus' message to us.

They converted me. I agreed with them. And so I stopped dragging in so much that wasn't necessary and maybe even harmful. It was not to the point.

**Yet I wanted to be biblical**

The bible is important to Christians. I wanted to have my teaching be biblical but I did not want to start a fundamentalist book-religion, as if that book were dictated by God word for word. I wanted the people to see the bible as a testimony of people regarding how they experienced God in their lives.
Making shoes
Loaded down with aids

When I first went to teach the Maasai I wanted to have all the available equipment so that I could do a good job. I was loaded down with pictures, charts, notes, an educated person of their tribe who served as a helper and translator, a Land-Rover, a light connected to the Land-Rover for teaching at night and a very big bible. I carefully went through each lesson with the translator before we went out to make sure he could tell each story with no trouble and to make sure we would get through all that we had prepared. For example we would go out and tell five biblical stories at a time to show them how powerful God is or three other stories to show God's love. We thought we were really spreading the word of God around. Alas, that was all we were doing - spreading words.

Almost everything was wrong

Almost everything we did was wrong. There was no actual teaching, just spewing out words from the bible, no real lesson plan and no criterion to signify success or failure. One older priest told me that that was all right because I had to leave room for the Holy Spirit to do his job. I couldn't just step in and direct the workings of the Holy Spirit. Any teacher would laugh at such a statement and would be horrified at such incompetence. There I was, making the Holy Spirit an excuse for my professional incompetence. I couldn't even speak to the Maasai in their own language!

The message all this "stuff" conveyed to the people was that God loves the educated person better; and if one is to understand and tell another person the Good News he must have charts, pictures, an American education, a Land-Rover (with night light), and be knowledgeable about a great big book called the Bible - which "no one could read even if he lived to be a hundred unless he were a white man". Also conveyed was the necessity to teach before a crowd, to give off numerous bible stories and to knowing know Swahili (a foreign language to them) since the bible was written in that language. All of these thoughts were expressed to me at one time or another by Maasai. The Swahili bible even suggested to one person that we foreigners considered that language more proper to things of God and his church than the Maasai language.
These many "aids" were not rally aids in teaching and evangelization. They were, by the very fact of being so foreign, preventing evangelization's necessitation imperative. And all this in silent communication.

**The elder who couldn't bless**

An example of silent communication still remains embarrassingly with me. It happened after one teaching session. I asked one of the elders to bless us. It is not a hard thing for elders to bless people. They are quite accustomed to giving blessings. The man stands, looks over the gathering and prays, the people giving their "amen" after each sentence. A beautiful way to pray. That particular man became embarrassed. He said he was not able to pray over a group. When I asked for the reason he replied, "I don't know Swahili." I felt cheap. I felt I had somehow betrayed them and my vocation.

**Mumble, mumble, amen**

In another place I was a guest and witnessed women leading the prayers. Instead of praying in the normal Maasai fashion the woman leading the prayers knelt down, closed her eyes, folded her hands and mumbled a prayer. The priest-teacher said it was good because the group wanted it that way. The Maasai elders, however, scoffed to me privately saying, "Let the women do it. We know only our Maasai way of praying. We don't know the eye-closing, knee-bending, word-mumbling way of the foreign church." That priest shouldn't have allowed the matter to progress so far, teaching the elders to give up their role. The church was fast becoming a women's affair.

At that time in Maasailand we all had hopes of a "spontaneous expansion" of the Church, but we were all teaching the Maasai that they couldn't possibly know or be carriers of the Gospel. They had neither the necessities nor the worth. As one elder remarked, "Since it is impossible to learn there is no reason to try." Right from the beginning they were being made dependent on the constant presence of the missionary. Maybe they were learning after a fashion but I doubted it.

"I don't know how to talk about it."

One day sitting in on a teaching session of another man I overheard one Maasai visitor ask his Maasai host, "What is going on here?" The host answered, "I don't know." When I interrupted and asked why he didn't know, the answer I received was, "I know but I don't know how to talk about it." No wonder. All the teacher expected of the people was for them to answer, "Yes, we understand," or to answer certain questions as to the identity of characters in pictures which were wrapped up and taken to the mission after each session. They were still dependent on the teacher even after being "taught."

**Spontaneous expansion has prerequisites.**

It quickly became apparent that if anything approaching spontaneous expansion of the Church were to occur, then I must strive not only to impart knowledge but also to try to make each person "able to talk about it" and to teach it as well. I would fall short, of course, but surely there would be some who would come forth with this gift of teaching. I wanted to give the community the ability to vocalize the teachings. It could no longer be sufficient that each one just "know" the matter. Each one would be expected to talk about his or her faith according to each individual's ability.
**Different is distracting**
During one teaching session I witnessed a teacher using very large drawings of biblical characters dressed as people probably dressed in the time of Jesus. While the teaching was going on people kept asking each other questions about or commenting on the funny headdresses, the ugly beards and the heritage of the people in the drawings. The distractions were more important to the Maasai than the teaching itself.

**Many aids have been used.**
Many different kinds of pictures and visual aids have been used in Maasailand. Some teachers use the old drawings like those mentioned above. Some have used actual photographs of Maasai, a few have used abstracts full of nice colors. Many have used drawings intended to imitate Maasai dress. Some of these visual aids are probably good, pleasing to the eye, beautifully colored, maybe even fit for decorating an African church or teaching art or photography. I was disturbed by them all because I could not see how these could help evangelize the people. I didn't see them as aids in making people teachers and independent of me.

Big pictures couldn't be carried around to other villages. Pictures considered of some value often were hidden away lest they be ruined. If a copy was left to a kraal it usually stayed in one household; the others in the village did not get to use it. Photographs and drawings with many lines proved to be more of a distraction than a help. Trying to identify people or their tribes drew people's attention away from the teaching. Some pictures were of black people in Western dress and I discounted them immediately. I didn't want to identify the church with Western customs. If a person who was in a photograph had died, the picture could no longer be shown to those who knew him or her. Human emotions and prejudices got in the way when photographs were used. I have heard comments such as these: Why is he/she in a picture of religion? Have you heard the "dirt" about him/her?

Many times I have given Maasai pictures of other Maasai to look at. They would sit there and take the picture apart and put them back together again. They would talk about every little part of the picture, what beads the person was wearing, their colors, who gave them to him, stories connected with different items in the picture. Noticing this I concluded I would try to use this tendency of theirs by cutting distractions out of what I used and making every little line in a visual aid have some meaning.

A very big objection to what I had seen in many drawings is an overabundance of lines. Even in a relatively simple drawing the average person will not be able to visualize the picture when he closes his eyes. I wanted each picture to be very easy to remember, so simple it could be copied by almost anyone in case of emergency. I found I had an answer in the stick figures of the Circle. I asked a group of people what they would do if they did not have copies of the Circle with them and they wanted to teach other Maasai. Some answered they no longer needed the Circle to teach others, they could just close their eyes and remember what they had to teach. Others said they would draw it on the ground and began to do so, to prove their point.
Possibly the biggest objection to the aids I had seen and used was their failure to answer the "so what?" question. They did not clearly confront the fundamental problems. Their use was confined to drawing parallels between Maasai culture and the bible, giving bible history or preaching sermons. The answer to the "What's in it for me?" question was not put into the picture and I wanted it somehow visually presented as an essential part of the teaching.

**Some conclusions**

Reviewing these examples and thoughts I came to some conclusions about criteria for judging visual aids. They should be small, for each individual, not involved, free, durable, with the meaning pictured in, having the possibility of people copying them themselves. I quickly reduced all my paraphernalia to one little circle of stick figures. I found the people were not insulted by simple figures. They actually learned easier with them. There was no distraction. The very simplicity helped their minds to remember longer and with greater clarity.

After working with stick figures for years I recognized within myself that they have become a part of my life. They are definitely not part of my art appreciation life. If my stick figures had the ability to call forth something in people then I would dare to call them art. I think they are a sort of symbolic, almost abstract art form which talks more directly to the soul being evangelized than do other art forms.

**Lone Ranger**

I concluded that the use of stick figures was an aid that allowed them to grow into their own art form instead of imposing an art form upon them. There was something in those stick figures that begged for creativity if only in the future.

**My imagination was a good cinema.**

I reminisced back to my childhood and the Lone Ranger. I recall listening to the Lone Ranger three times a week on the radio. We had no television then. My mind was continually projecting images that were meaningful to me at that time. There was activity. I had formed pictures in my own mind about everything in the story. My imagination was a productively good cinema.

Then came television. When I saw the Lone Ranger for the first time I was disenchanted, crushed. My whole world seemed to collapse. I didn't like another person's "television" invading my mind. I never watched the Lone Ranger again.

With that in mind I resolved to do my best to give the Maasai the respect of not placing them into my tribal view of situations and characters.

"It is written in our language."

As I was teaching one day a young lady who was studying her little copy of the Circle suddenly stood up clutching the little piece of cardboard to herself and gushed out, "Hey, everybody, I can understand this, it is written in our language!"

Maybe I erred in discarding certain visual aids. Possibly I did not understand their potentiality. I can only relate my historical reaction to them, what I did about it and the results.
Who can refuse?

Many people are impressed with the Maasai because they respond to requests to teach them religion with words such as, "Of course we want you to come and teach us about God. Who can refuse to talk about and learn about God! Why didn't you come to us a long time ago?"

This typical Maasai response is tribally colored. To have manners for a Maasai means to verbally agree with your guest even to the point of showing enthusiasm for what the guest is saying. They readily agree with gusto, getting involved in plans and gigantic promises and schemes. Many fresh young missionaries are impressed by the way people respond to them. These new missionaries come to meetings with other missionaries and entreat the bishop to send them more men because, "the people are begging for religious instruction." The missionary's failure is in interpreting other peoples by the missionary's own standards.

"Just like one of us"

The Maasai know how to flatter a person. They tell a man struggling with their language how well he can speak, "Just like one of us." They tell him how smart he is and ask how it is that people of the visitor's culture are so smart. There are missionaries who actually respond by telling the people just why they are so smart, relating all their years of study.
"Come, but I don't have time."

When asked if they think what the missionary is about is good they say it is excellent and that the visitor should come and "teach us what we should know." When pressed, "What about you personally?" answers are often hedging. "Well, I don't know if I personally will have time. I have a lot of work to do getting food for my family. If you could help me get food I would be able to attend." Another suggested that I teach the children because he is often not at home. Some young elders said they would like to come but they are too old to learn so I should stick to the younger people. Thirty years is old if one is not interested.

To invite is only manners.

Their answers betray a lot of attitudes and fears. First among the fears is that of being deprived of freedom. Fear of being held to a commitment when they are not even sure if they want to begin. Fear of failure. Fear of ridicule in front of their children for not knowing. Many are being polite, all the while hoping the missionary will not come around again.

Placing the blame on the other

Some will even interpret events to help them with their excuses for not being present at any teaching session. "You refused to go to Arusha (over 200 miles away) and buy what I wanted so I will not be able to come to teachings. It is your fault, Padri. You refused to help us in the way we want so you are not serious about teaching us. Maybe you are not a good man of God. Men of God are supposed to help people. So it is not we who do not want teaching, it is you who refuse to take us into consideration." No one is really fooled by these excuses. Even when I make detailed explanations it does no good.

It did not do any good to show them that the difference in price between where they were living and in Arusha town was only a matter of shillings. Whenever I offered to take a couple into town to do the buying for the whole village they grumble, "Do you think we are crazy? We are not slaves that we should do the shopping for other people."

Promises are courtesy not promises

I have learned never to take such promises and invitations at face value. I soon learned to make certain demands, such as the time when two men came to ask for teaching at their kraal, a walk of less than ten minutes from where I was already teaching. They said they really wanted to hear the word of God. All I said was that the next time I come to teach they should be there to lead me to their kraal to show me they were telling the truth. Six months came and went. They were home all the time. No one came.

The Christian elders told me I should not follow them because my following them would lower me in their eyes, making me look like a beggar about whom they could brag to others, "We really don't care about being taught but the white man begged us to listen."

And then they wouldn't come anyway.

So who can refuse? Those whose actions speak louder than their words.
Myths

Recently Initiated Boys

Known to Unknown

They have "the known"

After having dealt somewhat with the fears and misconceptions of the people I found I could get them to relax more if I showed them I was interested in and accepting of their customs and myths. The more I became open to them, the more I felt they became open to me. I saw their myths, stories and sayings as expressions of "the known" in which they were living. As a teacher I felt it was important for me to know all these because they were the known from which I would be taking them into the unknown.

The whole area of myth is very important to a missionary. No myth is meant to be a purely historical rendering of something, as many of the people themselves realize. Myths are rather religious expressions of reality, a sort of symbolic theology that takes in the whole person, not just the intellect. Theology expressed in myth is a teacher and guide even though it is not expressed in the style of a Thomas Aquinas. The myth of why houses no longer migrate is a case in point.

Houses no longer migrate.

The Maasai story relates how houses used to migrate with the people in the "ideal" age of long ago. Before people left an old homestead each woman would sprinkle her house with milk and then the house would follow her. One day a woman refused to sprinkle her house with milk and so the house refused to follow. From then on, because of that woman, houses no longer move. People have to work loading donkeys and carrying their possessions often for long migrations. Moving a homestead is now a chore.

To center in on the idea of houses actually walking is to lose the significance of this story. The tale is a praise of God's goodness in giving
humankind an Eden. It is a meditation on selfishness and its consequences. It is also a people expressing a desire to return to an ideal. I have heard reactions to the story such as, "Oh, how selfish that woman was! Look what her selfishness brought upon us. God was good to us long ago. I wish things could only be the way they were then."" Yes, but we would probably make a mess out of it ourselves."

This small parable given to him who has ears to hear should not be disregarded or scoffed at because it doesn't conform to history or scientific explanations or even foreign forms of theology. Nor is form criticism restricted to the bible of the Jews. I have witnessed this very story used in religious discussions among the Maasai. An elder, Rapoi, announced that he did not believe that long ago houses actually uprooted themselves. Other people stated they believed it because it is a story handed down through the ages and "nothing is impossible for God." When Rapoi, though, discussed religious matters, he used this story as a reference, citing parts of it as examples. He did not see a contradiction. He was, I thought, talking like the author of Genesis must have talked long ago. He was aiming at something deeper than simple historical and scientific enlightenment.

**The Maasai Genesis**

The same holds true in the very moving story about how death came into the world. It is to be told as the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve. It is a story experienced by the Maasai more than Adam and Eve because it has centuries of feelings piled up around it. This story impressed me so much that I now use it as "the known" from which I proceed to the unknown. It has become a reference point, though not an absolutely necessary one, helping to put all the lessons in order. It is the Old Testament of the Maasai expressed in one story, the incomplete testament that will be completed in Christ. I call it the "Moon Story." I happened upon it during an intense dialogue with the people one night around a fire.

That night a group of us were talking softly about things that mattered. Our eyes were on the fire. I asked them to tell me the worst thing they can imagine. A young man thought there was nothing worse than being a cripple. A young girl felt sickness headed the list. A woman said, "Barrenness must be the answer." Others offered such examples as lack of rain, cattle disease, children forced to attend school. Then Leng'unya, shoulders sagging as he sat there with a far-off look in his eyes and looking all of his seventy-plus years, sadly stated, "The worst thing that can happen to a man is death. His own death. There is nothing worse than that. But that is the way God wants it."

We all agreed with Leng'unya. Talk followed about God being both father and mother. We agreed that no father or mother wants death for his or her child. So what about God and death? I asked the old man, "Father, why did death come into the world?" And his thoughts reached back to the Maasai Genesis as he captured us all with the "Moon Story."

**The Moon Story**

In the beginning God created people; and God, who is father and mother, did not want people to die. God gave his people a formula with which they could ward off death. In case of sickness or any other life-threatening problem
God told them to go out at night, face the moon and say, "Moon, die and go away. Human, die and return to life."

It came to pass that the child of one of the first two women God created got sick. The younger woman, who's child was sick, said to her co-wife, "Please go out and say the required formula God gave us." The elder wife went out, but instead of saying what God had ordered she deliberately changed the words, "Moon, die and return. Human, die and go away." The child died.

After a time the child of the elder woman also became sick. She rushed out to say the required formula God had given them, but when she said it God replied, "It is no longer possible. You have chosen death."

In this way death came into the world to stay. Now we see that the moon dies and rises again, but for people there is only death. There is no hope.

Use of the Moon Story

This story is an Old Testament crying out to be fulfilled in Christ. In order to understand just how Christ will complete it we need to understand feelings that have been formed from centuries of retellings among the Maasai. I respond to this story by commenting I don't know if that is exactly the way things happened because I wasn't there. I can, though see that it is an ancient story, an excellent educational tool and full of meaningful truths.

A long discussion usually follows about what the story is telling us, what it suggests to the thinking person and where it is leading us. We see that in the beginning God made people to live forever. Through their hatred they chose death. Death did not first enter the land simply because of the words of that woman. Words themselves do not rule. A person can toss off a curse to another in fun and nothing will happen. The heart, the intention, rules. It is the hatred behind the curse that brings death. God did not want this hatred and the death that followed. God's law and purpose in the beginning was love and life. Man chose for himself death by breaking that one law of love.

God is still our father and mother. We still pray to him. We still believe he loves us and gives us what we have. We ourselves don't beget children to kill them. We love them, even when they do wrong. When God made us he knew we would sin. He put this weakness in us. He did not make us perfect as he himself is perfect. So right from the beginning, being father and mother, wanting eternal life for us, yet putting weakness in us, God must have had something better in mind for us than just death. If he didn't he doesn't love us.

It wasn't only that first woman who sinned. We all sin. We all know God's law of love yet we all have a bit of hatred in us. Now we know our problem. It is not that woman of long ago. We all choose death. If God is going to help us, he must forgive us as we forgive our children who are still learning and weak and are not as able as we are. God must do something about our sins and our hearts that choose death through hatred, and he must do something about the body that dies. He must help us, that is, if he truly is father and mother.

This story has told us much about God and suggests more. In talking with the Maasai I get to those suggestions by following their form of discussion - questions. Can we get the best of God? If God wants to give a person life, can I prevent it? If that woman has prevented us all from getting life then has she gotten the best of God?
So now what is it all about? What does God want for us now? Where is all this leading us? Again we see ourselves in doubt. We don't know. Is there the slightest possibility that God still wants life for us? Is it possible that God is still our father and mother who loves us? Yes, it is possible but we don't know.

What wouldn't we do to know for sure? Isn't the search worth it? Aren't our regular meetings together worth the little inconvenience if God has something great in store for us that we don't know about yet? How else can we get to know? Can we say it is not possible just because we don't know?

**Jesus completes the Moon Story**

The Good News of Jesus is the light we have been waiting for. It brings us out of the darkness in which the Maasai Old Testament has left us. It completes the "Moon Story." The New Testament shows Jesus explaining, saving us from despair, giving us hope. He showed us a God, who loved us right from the beginning and has never rejected us.

Like the Maasai Genesis, the story of Jesus is not to be considered a cold intellectual study. It is a human experience and must be taught that way. The teacher must be humanly involved when he teaches. He can't be uninvolved as the man who told me that the Circle doesn't work. Of course it doesn't work. It is only an aid to a teacher who is teaching and interacting with live, laughing, crying, suffering, hoping, thinking human beings.

**Looking to the Future**

From Rapoi and others I had seen the function of picture theology. They, the Maasai, like the writers of the bible, expressed truth in human terms and in all its local historical color. Myth played a part in the theological formation of both. Yet I wondered if they were on the verge of entering a desert—no—myth land. Rapoi did not believe that houses really walked. Would such a perspective of the bible stories cause him and others to abandon not only the literal interpretation of the stories but also the theology they present? Someday they or their children will see that the bible stories are not exact history but a theological work. They will have to distinguish vehicles from the truth they carry. Maybe they will have to go through a kind of desert before they see the value of myth again and either return to what once was theirs or create their own anew. That is up to them.

At least in the Circle pictures I tried to prepare them for the possible desert-crossing modern scholarship might force them into. I tried to teach not so much the literal interpretation of the stories but what they reveal about God. If in the future the history of the bible stories are placed into doubt their Christian faith need not be destroyed. The bottom half, expressing the love of God, will still be an expression of their faith in God. I hoped they would be ready for the crossing.

**Engoipapaai**

One of their stories is about an orphan named Engoipapaai. They tell the story as part of an evening entertainment but I have found no one who looks for the meaning. They might refer to the story if it compares to circumstances but that it teaches something is a new idea. I tell them I think the elders who wrote the story were very intelligent. They were teaching something and I point out what I thought the meaning was - to the amusement of the people and, I
think, their appreciation also. So too with the bible elders who wrote for us. We have to listen to their wisdom. Maybe the stories are not exact but they teach from antiquity and antiquity is important to the Maasai.
Introduction to the Circle

The Circle began taking shape about two years before it was born. The beginning spark was the result of a crisis. I had been teaching kraals in an area and the people were coming joyfully to the entertaining teachings but I knew deep down that I had not touched them more than momentarily. It seemed I was wasting both their time and my own. I knew I had been teaching as one a bit removed, reluctant to say openly what Christ was all about.

I had been warned by others with more experience to refrain from being too explicit in teaching. Once the Maasai heard, I was told, that the Good News was about never-ending life they would laugh and ridicule us and just walk away. They were not ready for such a revelation, the argument ran. As a result the teaching of religion was a collection of stories and sermons. There was no substance in the sessions and no perceivable movement into faith.

There was only one thing left to do - toss all caution to the wind and just tell them clearly and concretely what my faith meant to me and why I thought it important not only to me but also to them. If they laughed and went away at least they would know what they were rejecting. It was to be my last try.

When the next week came around I started out full of misgivings. My translator was coming along, he told me, because it was his job; but he wanted me and the people to understand clearly that he was only present as a translator for the foreigner. He feared to be laughed at if he identified too closely with such madness. He even sat opposite me and apart from the group when we began.

The people felt something different right from the beginning. When they were all seated I started, "I don't want to teach you tonight. I just want to talk. We talked. I told them directly, candidly what I had been leading up to for months. I half expected them to sneak away one by one to bed. Instead we all
sat for over three hours just talking about human problems, God, Christ and our reactions to all of them.

The translator even moved his stool to a more involved position and stopped being just a translator. As we were winding up this "last chance" session one old lady commented on the whole thing by saying, "Mamus!" (I never would have dreamed such a good thing was possible!) Then they laughed; but not in scorn. The Resurrection became good news. They laughed because they didn't know what else to do about such good news.

That happening showed me many things, one being that I could never be happy with just presenting a cold message however cleverly put together. This "last chance" experience helped me to see that if I continued to bring the Good News to people as I did that night I would be on the right path. It would be very hard till I learned their language and their ways of expressing that deep-down something we humans all share.

I also learned that night that I must change the meaning of the word, "teacher." If I taught in any way to change them I would be wrong. I learned then and subsequently became convinced even more that the Maasai put a high value on freedom. They are reluctant to change if there is any pressure felt. I think many are willing to listen to the Gospel but only in an atmosphere of complete freedom from any pressure at all.

They agree to anything said to change them, agreeing profusely with every visitor no matter what that visitor tells them. To agree to everything a visitor says, they assert, is good manners.

In one place they were forbidden to drink certain water. The government official said it would make them sick. They all said they would stop; but they continued to drink the water in rebellion against the pressure. "Who does that olmeeki think he is," they mumbled as they filled their water containers, "trying to tell us Maasai what water to drink? We don't need foreigners to tell us what to do."

**The sword and the pen**

They have witnessed many of their own who have left the sword for the pen. Those are the ones who often turn out to be drunks, lacking in respect for elders and customs. They tell government officials that they will do their best to learn to use the pen to become mighty again. But as soon as the official takes his leave of them there can be heard considerable ridicule at the official's expense.

The value or necessity of pressure to get the Maasai to change are not in question here. To assume that the Maasai should or could remain unchanged is unrealistic. The point here is the Maasai reaction to pressure. This reaction is just as strong in matters of religion.

**Attempts to change them fail.**

Teachers of religion complain that upon teaching the Good Samaritan the Maasai do not immediately get up and help a sick lady in their midst. It is unrealistic to expect them to react to this perceived attempt to change them and their ways however lofty the motive. They will readily agree that they must do something immediately but this agreement is only their good manners operating as usual. They need time to work over the Good Samaritan story in their own way. They need to be left free to consider, judge and act on their own
and in their own way. I saw that sermons, exhortations, or anything that could be perceived by them as attempts to change them would only make them entrench more. I personally found it easy to identify with this attitude and kept it in mind when preparing my approach and drawing up my lessons.

**Biblical lesson plans with meaning**

The general plan of approach of the Circle is biblical. Each lesson has something God said or did and the meaning it has for us. Each picture, except the last, is divided into top and bottom. The top is what Jesus did or said, making the bottom half possible, understandable, reasonable. The bottom half spells out the profit (benefit) one gets. It answers the question, "What's in it for me?" It is a sort of built-in application.

**The circle form is easiest.**

The actual circle form of the Circle is the result of trial and error. I didn't know that years of school had made me blind to the idiosyncrasies of people who never had a classroom experience. When I first arranged the pictures on paper I started from left to right and worked down in the usual way. I tested the plan and found people who didn't know how to read often started on the right or on the bottom and worked "backwards." They jumped all around.

There was an even more fundamental problem with the straight line approach. It was not a good memory aid. People could not close their eyes and visualize the pictures.

The circle form solved these two problems. Once I put a person on the road, so to speak, all I had to do was let the wheel roll. There was no other way to go. The circle form also lent itself to being remembered as two pictures, front and back, instead of ten individual pictures. I tried it on school children also and they said they like the left-right straight line approach, but the groups tested on the circle form had almost total recall and could copy it quicker on their own than the others who preferred the straight line form.

**Simplicity**

When I first taught the Circle I taught each picture as I present it here, as simply as possible, just trying to get across the one main point of each picture. The reason for this was that I was still stumbling with the language and did not have a good cultural reference for anything more impressive. Even so, the people responded positively. As I grew in language proficiency I added examples from my own culture and asked for examples from them. For example, I told them how many children of my tribe are afraid of the dark and why. With more understanding of their culture and language came an abundance of examples and sayings that allowed me to put a depth of meaning into the lessons that I originally did not think possible. One man even commented that God must have written the bible for the Maasai.

What follows is the simple original form of each picture followed immediately by some examples taken from Maasai life that I used in reaching a greater depth and richness of meaning. I arranged it this way in the hope that it would be possible for others to do the same wherever they were. It is possible to be effective with the simple form.
Questions and answers

The question and answer part is reminiscent of the old catechisms, but it is not so much the old catechetical approach as it was one of the first steps an illiterate person takes in organized learning. This form I found necessary because with it an individual could see that he was able to comprehend the material to his and the teacher’s satisfaction. It is like a much needed pat on the back. The beginner should not get discouraged with his first attempts at learning something in an organized progressing way. In later lessons the style changed and the people who had gone through this first experience easily adapted.

Resist the temptation for more.

The temptation to say, "They should know more at this time," had to be fought. There was a lot they should know and more would come after the first learning experiences were successful and satisfying. The Circle was only the beginning of a catechetical system.

For example, the aim in telling the birth story in the Circle was to show, as simply as possible, that Jesus was the son of God and that this meant something. Expansion on this came in the big Bible Chart later on.

My temptation to hurry

I found that the more I became familiar with any particular lesson the more I was tempted to hurry. The more proficient I became, the more obvious the teaching was to me, the more I had to keep reminding myself that all was not so obvious to the people. They needed time to digest. I learned I should not add more just because they understood what I was saying at the time. There is a big difference between simple comprehending and actually learning. People always wanted to hear more because they were having fun and because they didn’t appreciate what learning was. It would have been easy to go through the whole Circle quickly and have the people applaud. But this would not be teaching, just Saturday Night Live again in a different form.
1. Light of Truth

**Top:** Mary carrying Jesus on her back.

**Bottom:** Darkness of worrying doubt.
An eye seeing in the light of truth.

**Presentation**

**Top**

A long time ago God descended and approached a girl named Mary. God said to Mary, "I want to give you my child and you are to name him Jesus. When my son grows up he will become my special messenger of light to all people." Mary agreed because that was what God wanted.

When Joseph, the man Mary was betrothed to, saw that she was with child he was very upset. God said to him, "Joseph, don't be angry with Mary. It is my child she is carrying. When my son grows up he will become my special messenger of light to all people." So Joseph accepted Mary into his house and Mary gave birth to a boy and they named him Jesus.

Here we see Mary carrying Jesus on her back. She is carrying the special messenger of God.

**Bottom**

That black line represents darkness of worrying doubt. That is where we are without Jesus. People can lie to us about what God has for us and what he is about. We don't know where the road to God is, left on our own. We are like a man walking in the dark. He does not know where the path is or where it goes.

Jesus is God's messenger come to take us out of the darkness of worrying doubt.

Below that black line we see an eye seeing because it is in the light - the light of truth. Jesus came as God's messenger to save us from darkness of doubt and to put us in the light of truth. Some people believe only Jesus can
do this because he is the son of God and the son of God will not lie to us. We will consider him only as a messenger and see if we want to accept his message.

**Profit**

This picture shows us something God is giving us through Jesus. Jesus came and showed us something about God. If this be true then Jesus would be someone to listen to. This is a profit because we would no longer need to be in worrying doubt. No one wants to follow the path of falsehood or doubt. Do you want darkness of doubt or do you want the light of truth?

I am not asking you to accept Jesus right now. I am just saying that it would do no harm to know more about him.

**Test**

By experience I discovered the people wanted me to ask questions such as these. So I would ask the same questions in as many different ways as I could. After each lesson I give samples. Just don’t confuse these question periods with the old Baltimore Catechism.

1. **Give the entire simple lesson in your own words.**
   (Expressing it makes you learn and proves to yourself you know.)

2. **Who is Jesus?**
   Jesus is God's special messenger.

3. **Why was Jesus born?**
   Jesus was born to be God's messenger, to give us the light of truth about things of God.

4. **Why is it said that one who does not know Jesus is in darkness?**
   He is in the darkness of doubt because he does not know where the truth is. He does not know the path to God. Therefore he is worrying, looking for salvation but he does not know if he gets it.

5. **Why do we want the light?**
   We want the light that Jesus gives us because we want to know in truth what God wants for us and what he wants us to do.

6. **Who gives us the light of truth about things of God?**
   Maybe Jesus, if he is really the messenger of God; because God's messenger will not lie to us.

7. **What profit does this picture show us we get from God?**
   The light of truth.

8. **Do you want the light of truth?**
Explanation

This type of simple lesson was the way I began. I had found that if I gave lessons more complicated than this one the people would not remember them the next time I came around. In fact, I constantly had to check myself so that I did not add too many ideas and examples to a lesson. One man kept me in check by reminding me not to give too much, "How do you expect us to remember so much if you yourself can't remember five new Maasai words unless you write them down?"
**Need to learn their way**

These simple lessons appealed to something in the people but I felt that a lot was missing. I wanted to speak more intimately with them, to get everyone involved in the teaching. Talking about my own tribal expressions and asking for theirs, I felt was only a half-way station. I had a lot to learn if I wanted to be an effective teacher. I had to learn what words and symbols meant to them not only literally but also emotionally.

**Maasai version of Christ's birth**

In the birth story, for example, they were told that Mary was a girl when she became pregnant. Immediately in the Maasai mind there would be only two possible explanations unless I taught correctly. 1) Mary got caught pregnant while still an uncircumcised girl. This would be a great shame and something to be remembered and whispered about even when she became an old lady. In some places in Maasailand the girl would be cast away from her family to wander in the wilds till someone agreed to take her in or till she died. 2) Mary was already circumcised and it was all right to become pregnant by anybody before she went to her husband's home. If the father of the first child is not the husband of the woman, it is not a fault on her part because she hasn't been led to her husband's kraal yet.

**Maasai interpretation**

An even more interesting part of this somewhat unenlightened version of Christ's birth is the teaching it contains. This child who was born in a really poor social condition was chosen by God, to be God's special messenger. It shows that God does not hate anyone because of birth conditions.

**Need for correction**

I felt I had to go over the story again with them very clearly to make sure their possible version did not become the tradition. There were points, though, that I tried to keep, especially the Maasai moral of the story.

**Maasai and virginity**

The Maasai have no word for virgin and if they did it would probably only apply to very young girls; such is their society. The category of virgin is not socially significant. Of more social significance is fertility.

It is also very hard to talk about such things in front of a mixed group and often I have had to settle for a simple illusion such as "she was like a young girl but older" to convey the idea of virginity in the young Mary.

**Day-night theme**

Trying to get on a more fully human level was easy with the night-day theme. The night is a time for lions to roam. It is a time of uneasiness for those who have to leave the kraal. People don't go out alone at night. Maasai kraals are surrounded by ten feet high thorn bushes piled up to keep lions and leopards out. In some areas they always try to have warriors around at night for protection. There are places where hyenas so abound that they can be seen surrounding the kraals during the evening just waiting to get in at the young cattle when it is dark enough to pass undetected. Doors in these areas can't be locked with strips of cow hide because the hyenas will chew through them and come in for the young animals.
People do not like to sleep alone in the dark. They frankly express their fear. It is normal for one woman to "borrow" one of her neighbor's little children so she will not have to sleep alone in her house at night.

The woman of the house gets up many times during the night to keep the fire going, not only for warmth but also because of the darkness.

The idea of enaimin e enking'ashing'ash (darkness of worrying doubt) is not lost on a young man who returns to his area after a long safari only to find that his kraal has moved. He can't look for it in the dark. Even if he has a torch he is not at peace following directions. He might try to find the way with a companion but definitely not alone. The night is not a time of peace outside the kraal.

**Night and the path to God**

Many people looking for the path to God have similar problems. They are not sure where it is. Their own prophets have not satisfied them. Often they have lied to them. They are searching though and for this they are to be respected.

**The Sun**

Universal reactions to the sun can also help the light theme. Everyone knows the special feeling of relaxing in the warmth of the morning sun. The sun also helps to locate lions in the grass and the paths lead to wherever one wishes to go.

Talking about these feelings is a great help to putting us all on the same wave-length. When they say that Christ brings us out of the darkness of doubt and places us into the light of truth they can feel what it means.

**An overload of examples**

I had to learn the hard way the difference between examples that helped and examples that distracted. With too many or long examples, people tend to forget the point. Often it is better to bring in the examples after the simple teaching proper is finished, always being very certain they are told exactly what they are expected to remember before they are left on their own.

Neither could I distract nor overload them by giving other comparisons for Christ. I put aside ideas that would suggest Christ came to set up a Church, to forgive sins, to bring us the law of love, to die for us, to offer his life as a ransom, to open the gates of heaven and whatever other picture people might paint to represent their theology.

**Evangelists compared**

Matthew, Mark and Luke can compare Jesus to a rabbi, a teacher, a presenter of good news, a prophet. It is only to be expected that they would draw from their own experiences in presenting Christ. It is like they were saying, for example, "I know what a rabbi is. I would fit Jesus in that category more than any other." In effect these men were doing the natural thing. They were presenting their own tribal, individual, time-conditioned outlook in their presentation of Christ.

John's theme of light seemed more universal and better as a foundation than more specific definitions of Christ. I felt justified in taking Jesus at his word as John presented it.
I, the light, have come into the world so that whoever believes in me need not stay in the dark any more.  Jn 13:46

**Light as foundation**

The theme of light seemed the best as a foundation that would give the Good News time to sink in without defining it in one of the many historically conditioned comparisons. I wanted to leave them open to their own experiences, comparisons and creativity.

And Jesus did reveal God. He did not come to change God. A priest could easily be seen by anyone accustomed to manipulating God as one who sacrifices in order to change God and make him as good as humans. This is not what I came to teach. I did not want them some day to paint a picture of God the father saying to Jesus, "A little more blood and suffering, Son, before I get around to forgiving them. Only your perfect sacrifice will cause me to relent and open the gates of heaven I closed with a huff when Adam and Eve sinned."

In all this presentation I wanted to leave them open to future scholarship. If they came to realize more fully that the birth story was more a theological than an historical presentation they would not lose their faith. The bottom part of the picture would still hold true. They could still consider Jesus as a light revealing something about God.

It is obviously not possible to expect any faith at this point. All I can expect is some interest.
2. Truthful Messenger
Hope of Bodily Life

Top: Jesus raising Lazarus

Bottom: Jesus holding out his hands to us who have no arms or legs.

Presentation

*Top*

That child called Jesus grew up. One day he heard that his good friend, Lazarus, was sick; so Jesus went to visit him. When Jesus reached the home of his friend Lazarus he saw that the people were all very sad. He asked them, "Where is my sick friend, Lazarus?" Jesus was told that Lazarus was already dead and that the day Jesus arrived was the fourth day since he died.

Jesus asked the people where they put the body of Lazarus. They told him they put it in a tomb and that he shouldn't go around there because there was nothing Jesus could do. But Jesus went anyway and the crowd followed, wondering just what he was going to do.

The tomb was a cave with a stone laid across it. "Take away the stone," Jesus directed. The dead man's sister said to him, "It has been four days now, surely there will be a stench!" The people took the stone away and Jesus looked upward and said to his father (God), "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I know that you always hear me but I have said this for the sake of the crowd, that they may believe that you sent me." Having said this Jesus called out loudly, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out. Lazarus came back to life!

See the picture of Jesus reaching down holding the hand of his friend, Lazarus, who had died. This reminds us that Jesus raised him from the dead. The people were astonished and not a little afraid. They said, "God has surely come upon us. Who can raise a dead body back to life except God?"
Jesus said to the people gathered around, "You have seen that I can raise a dead person back to life. Do you agree now that I am God's messenger?" We would say that there is no one who would not agree because Jesus gave proof that he is God's messenger when he brought back to life a person who had died. Only God can raise a dead person back to life - especially if that person had been dead four days.

**Bottom**

Jesus is stretching out his arms to us, who have no arms and legs. He is saying, "I can raise to life someone who has died. I want to do this for a friend. I want to become the friend of all people. And I want to become your friend. Do you want to be my friend? Come." We say, as those people at the time of Jesus said, that we want to become Jesus' friends because without him each of us is like that person who has no arms or legs, who, if he falls to the ground cannot pick himself up. If we fall to the ground in death we cannot pick ourselves up. We want to become the friends of Jesus like Lazarus so that he will raise us from the dead. Friends of Jesus have a hope of bodily life.

Have you seen what Jesus wants from us? He wants us to place ourselves in his hands. He wants faith. Is there any person who does not want to place himself in Jesus' hands like a friend? Why?

**Profit**

The profit of this lesson is the hope of bodily life which Jesus gives his friends. There is another profit here. It is the witness Jesus gave us to show he is the messenger of God so that we have faith in him and have peace in that faith.

**Test**

1. **Tell the story of Jesus and Lazarus in your own words.**
2. **Why did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead?**

   Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead to show us he is in truth a messenger of God and that he show us he wants to raise his friends from the dead.
3. **Where have we seen that Jesus can raise someone from the dead?**

   We saw that Jesus can raise someone from the dead in the picture of Jesus and Lazarus, because Jesus raised his friend, Lazarus, from the dead and on the fourth day at that.

4. **What witness did Jesus give of himself to get us to agree that he is a messenger of God?**

   He raised a dead person back to life.
5. **Why is it said that you are that person who has no arms and legs?**

   I am that person because if I fall to the earth in death I can't pick myself up, just like a person who has no arms and legs.

6. **What is Jesus saying to us when he stretches out his hands to us?**
He is saying, "I want to become the friend of all people. I want to be your friend. Come, put yourself in my hands. Have faith in me. Be my friend. Believe in me."

7. **What does Jesus want from us?**

He wants us to put ourselves in his hands. He wants faith.

8. **What is the profit of this lesson?**

The profit is hope for life of the body which Jesus gives his friends. There is another profit, the witness (proof) Jesus gives us so that we can have faith in him and have peace in that faith.

9. **Do you want to be Jesus' friend? Why?**

*(Notice the call here.)*
**Explanation**

![Maasai Mother with Child](image)

**Three women and a dying child**

Two old women were staying at the mission with a young mother whose child was dying. When the young mother thought the child had died, I had to hold onto her while she wailed lest she hurt herself. The child rallied and then for four days we all had to sit and watch it die. There was nothing we or the local doctor could do. When the child finally died, the old women said to the young one, "Don't cry again. You did your crying already. Now is the time to go back to your living children and in the future you will bear more. You are still young. This thing is finished. Forget it. God has decided to take it away and there is nothing your tears can do now."

I offered to take them home. On the way, the two old ladies and I got out of the car, took the body into the bush, laid it on its right side facing East and left it. No prayers were said. No further ceremony was enacted. The burial was completed later that night by the hyenas.

The car couldn't make it to their kraal because of the thorn trees so I let them out a short distance away. I knew they had reached their home when I heard dozens of voices filling the air with anguish.

Teaching or prayers I felt would do no good to those who do not believe. I had done my part by being around when needed. For a week after that people came to thank me for sitting with the dying child and its family. I had done something great in their eyes, something they themselves are seldom capable of; I sat with people in their most distressing time and shared it with them. Other Maasai just couldn't do it.
Living through an experience such as this gives appreciation to the Jesus-Lazarus story. All Maasai live with death, lack of medicine and sanitation. Just living in that rough environment makes death an almost constant companion. Though I don’t overload the story with the section on Mary and Martha I noticed that the "Moon Story" leads to Jesus and suggests that "Lord, had you been here...." In this story Jesus is called upon and the good news is that he answers, "I am here. Put yourselves in my hands."

What is faith?
A short discussion on the meaning of faith is sometimes necessary and usually helpful.

The call in the picture
After the talk and the test I always make each picture into a call. I call them to say if they want what is being offered and, if they do, to express in their own words why they want it. I try to get them to commit themselves at each little step along the way. I am after a rational human commitment.

Does the God presented to you in this lesson sound good? Is it worthy of God? Can anyone else give such a promise as God has? What do we have to lose if we continue?

Physical Death
This lesson obviously deals with the problem of the death of the body. We hold on as long as we can but we can't win over the inevitable. In order to conquer we need help.

The story as an expression of God
The story of Jesus and Lazarus is not what is being taught in this lesson. As in the previous lesson, the story is, for my missionary purpose, the vehicle for the truth pictured on the bottom. I do not necessarily demand they see Jesus as a friend; but to see God as revealed through Jesus. The truth is about how God always was and is. It says that God does not change to become better. It says God is on the side of life.

I felt I had to be very sensitive to them and not enforce a "pagan" theology by suggesting that an unloving God doesn't want to heal but his loving son does.

God wants a relationship.
To keep to the point, I as the teacher must remember that sickness and everlasting life are not to the point. All that is being said is that God is able and wants to exercise his power over death for the sake of his friends.

Neither is this picture saying what a friend has to do in response to such a loving God. It seems to follow, though, that God wants us in some sort of relationship with him, a relationship that can best be described in human terms as friendship. This is a time for showing people how much God loves them. Only when they have seen that will the area of response be considered.

Is it good?
If this were true wouldn't you want to be in a relationship of friendship with God? No one is being asked for a commitment yet. Does the God presented to you in this lesson sound good? Is this worthy of God? Can anything else give such a promise as God has? What do we have to lose if we continue?
3. Forgiveness of Sins

Top: Father and son
Bottom: Three people of the Church

Presentation

Top

Jesus as God’s messenger has a lot to tell us. In this picture we see Jesus putting his message in the form of a parable. Learn from this story what God is like.

This is a picture of a father embracing his son. Jesus said that God is like that father whose son said to him, "Father, give me my share of the property now." So the man gave him his share of the inheritance. After a few days the son sold his part of the property and left home with the money. He went to a country far away, where he wasted his money in reckless living. He spent everything he had. Then a severe famine spread over that country, and he was left without a thing. So he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat. At last he came to his senses and said, "All of my father’s hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am about to starve! I will get up and go to my father and say, Father, I have sinned against God and against you. "I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers." So he got up and started back to his father.

He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him. "Father," the son said, "I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son." But the father called to his servants, "Hurry," he said, "Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate
with a feast! For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found." And so the feasting began.

We must remember that this is a story that Jesus told to teach people. Jesus, as God's messenger, wanted to teach us that God is good like that father in the story. God's forgiveness is great and free. It is prodigal. He does not want to remember our sins.

The son is an example of all people. When we decide to do something wrong that God doesn't want us to do we are, in effect, saying to God, "I do not want to stay in your house. I do not want you to rule me. I want to go it alone without you." God wants us to return to him like the son returned to his father. He will always come to meet us and receive us like the father received his son.

**Bottom**

Here we see three people of the Church. The one who has sinned is holding a tuft of green grass to show he is offering his sorrow to the other two and is asking their forgiveness. The other two are holding their arms out to the man accepting and forgiving him just as the father had accepted and forgiven his son in the top picture.

What the people are doing is celebrating the fact of the top picture, that God has forgiven them and is still forgiving them. They are doing a sacrament, a very human ceremony of celebrating the fact of forgiveness by going through the ceremonial motions of asking and forgiving. In doing this they make the forgiveness present here and now. They, the community, want to celebrate in community their freedom. This message Jesus gave from the Father is good news.

**Profit**

The profit here is obvious - forgiveness of sins. Is there anyone who does not have a sin, something that is not right between himself and God? Is there anyone who does not want his sins taken away or to get things straightened out between himself and God?

**Test**

1. **Tell the story of this lesson in your own words.**

2. **Why did Jesus tell us the story in this lesson?**

   He told us the story to teach us that God is good, like the father in the story. God's forgiveness is free and covers everything.

   He doesn't want to remember our sins.

3. **Why are we like the son in the story?**

   We are like him because when we decide to do something wrong we are, in effect, saying to God, "I do not want to stay in your house. I do not want you to rule me. I want to go it alone
without you." But when we try to live without God our life can no longer be called good.

4. **What does God want from a person who has sinned?**

   He wants him to be sorry and to return like the son returned to his father in the story.

5. **What power did God give his Church?**

   He gave it the power to forgive sins (sacramentally).

6. **Tell what the three people in the bottom half are about.**

7. **Where do we get (sacramental) forgiveness of our sins?**

   Through people; in the Church.

8. **Why can it be said that if there were no forgiveness of sins we would be without hope?**

   We would be without hope because by sin we have chosen death. But if God takes away our sins then we have the hope of life that is given at least to his friends.

9. **Do you want to be forgiven your sins?**
Explanation

Maasai woman building her house.

No definition of sin

At this point in the teaching I am not interested in a definition of sin. The purpose of this lesson is to bring the good news that God forgives sinners.

Sin is universal and all Maasai agree that it is so. Somehow the word carries an idea of being not quite right with God, with a human person or situation. Even a person seriously trying for a good relationship with God often experiences some sort of alienation. I knew I couldn't talk more about sin till I understood what word the Maasai use and the meaning of that word. The
usual word for sin is eng'oki. I found it referred essentially to an act one does on purpose with malice.

The meaning of the word is wider than just that. Sin can refer to a subject, in the sense of something one has. "He has a sin because he has done evil." It can refer to an object. For example, an innocent person "has a sin" in the sense that if you harm that person you have the sin. The word can also refer to a curse, such as "He has inherited the sin of his father." The word eng'oki can also refer to something very ugly.

Sin is distinguished from entorroni (badness) and from sesekua, which designates a bad act not done on purpose, such as accidentally stepping on a bird’s eggs. To do so on purpose would be an eng'oki.

To teach what the bible means by sin I have added lessons on the meaning of sin later in the teachings. It is sufficient for now not to define sin but to declare the forgiveness of sins.

Revealing the Good God

This a continuation of the idea that Jesus is the light showing us God. It is especially important that they not see Jesus as coming to change God, to make God better. A God that can change to become more perfect is not perfect. Jesus is not apologizing for us. He is not trying to get God to change toward us; rather the opposite. He wants us to change toward God. He is saying God is a God who forgives without needing Jesus' apology or intercession. We need to know that forgiveness is always there.

A call again

Do we want the forgiveness that is always there?

Green grass

Asking for something while holding a tuft of green grass is a sign of earnest entreaty and it should not be refused. It would be some sort of sin to refuse an entreaty made while holding the green grass.

Working for an olmeeki

That a Maasai should work for another person not of his tribe is bad enough; but to work for an olmeeki and to be herding pigs for him is really a degradation.

Looking to a future of celebration

Someday in the future the Maasai will sacramentally celebrate this good news of a loving God who has forgiven and forgives all the time. But for now I have only taken the first tentative step.

Notice the word, "sacramental," in the Test section. This is not a time to discuss sacraments. I just put it in there as a reminder that sacramental forgiveness will be discussed some time in the future and that the idea (without mentioning sacrament) is touched on in this lesson.

They themselves had ceremonies that had to be done correctly in order to guarantee the desired effect. I was not comfortable with the idea that they might see a ceremony done correctly as the cause of God forgiving - as if the Christian liturgy "worked" on God better than their own. In this instance, as in many others, I was afraid I would be compared to a magic man.

Whatever rite we would use in the future would not be identified with a magic formula.
Out of the mouths of children

One day I was with some non-Christian Maasai children during a penance ceremony in a non-Maasai speaking church. They could understand the words but not what was going on. One of them asked me right after he saw the priest bless with the sign of the cross, "Does God forgive when he hears the word and the man makes the sign over the people?" His question meant to me that he was thinking the words and sign of the cross worked on God. I answered that God does not need the words, nor has God chosen this way to forgive us. We need to hear words because we are a word-hearing people.

I was not satisfied with my answer but I couldn't go into a long discourse there and then. I did want to go on that day to say that we have the sacrament of reconciliation not because it is the law, or because it is our Catholic ritual, but because people wanted to celebrate, in common, God's forgiving love. I probably would not have been understood if I had said that.
4. Now We Know What God Wants

Top: Good Samaritan bending over the Jew.

Priest and Levite.

Bottom: A person hitting another on the cheek.

Presentation

Top

Jesus told a story to teach us. He said, "There was a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho (Kijungu to Arusha) who fell prey to robbers. They stripped him, beat him, and then went off leaving him half-dead.

An olaiguenani, a leader of the Maasai people, happened to be going down the same road; he saw him but continued on.

Likewise there was an oloiboni, another influential person among the Maasai, who came the same way; he saw him and went on. But an olmeeki, a person whom the Maasai usually call an enemy, drew near to the Maasai laying on the side of the road and was moved to pity at the sight. He approached him and dressed his wounds, pouring in oil and wine. He then hoisted him on his own beast and brought him to a private hospital. The olmeeki said to the doctor, "Take care of that man. I will pay the expenses."

Then, when Jesus finished the story he asked the people, "Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the man who fell in with the robbers?" The answer came, "The one who treated him with compassion." Jesus said, "Then go and do the same."
Jesus let the people know that if they understood this story they understood what he wants them to do in order to become his friends like Lazarus. Jesus’ message is God gave us one "law" - to love all people, even your enemies. He said,

\[
\text{You shall love the Lord your God} \\
\text{with all your heart,} \\
\text{with all your soul,} \\
\text{with all your strength,} \\
\text{and with all your mind;} \\
\text{and your neighbor as yourself.}
\]

**Bottom**

Here we see a person hitting another. Jesus said even if one does you harm you must not let hatred enter your heart or you would be like him. You may have to defend yourself but do not do it in hatred. To turn the other cheek at least means being open for love even to those who hurt you.

Notice the top picture deals with love that is doing something. The bottom picture is dealing with a love that is something. Love is a combination of what you do and what is inside you.

**Profit**

We have a profit here because we didn't know what to do in order to become Jesus' friends. We didn't know what God wants us to do in order for him to give us life. We know now. Love is what God wants. Therefore, if anything is of hatred God does not want us to do it. If it is of love, God wants us to do it. Love is the measure of all our acts. Jesus has put his light on the path called love and has invited us to walk it with him.

**Test**

1. **Tell the story of this lesson in your own words.**
2. **Why did Jesus tell us the story in this lesson?**
   
   He told us this story to show us what we have to do to become his friends.
3. **What do we have to do to become Jesus' friends?**
   
   Jesus said to love all people even your enemies.
4. **What is the one "law" God has given us?**
   
   Jesus said to love God with your whole heart and mind and your whole body and love all people as you love yourself, even your enemies.
5. **What is the profit of this picture?**
   
   Now we know what we are to do in order to become friends of Jesus like Lazarus.
Referring to the "Moon Story" we saw that God did not want hatred. He wanted love. It is as if God said, "Love and I will give you eternal life." The teaching of Jesus is not any different here. Jesus came to show that God has not changed. The measure of what is good and bad is not what false prophets have been saying - that you must stop wearing shiny earrings on your ears, red cloth on your bodies, twisted wire around your necks. It is love. Which makes more sense?

"I don't hate you. Have I ever hit you?"

There is the Maasai tendency to say that if I don't actively do anything against another it can't be said I hate him. They have been heard to say, "I don't hate you. Have I ever hit you? Have I ever denied you milk at my home?"

Possibly left unsaid, though, is "If I don't give you milk or if I hit you, you would curse me and I don't want to be cursed. Deep down in my heart of hearts I hate you and I wish you dead, but I will not actively do anything to bring about your death." And so the reason for both pictures is love in act and love inside a person.

The Maasai say to their children, "Tapala amu eiba EnkAi!" (Stop that because God hates it!) Jesus is adding to this. He is saying "Do that because God loves it."

Also, there is a saying among them, "Eilatia nainosaa imanyit." It is a saying that signifies that neighbors help each other out. I have found that it is a good introduction to the lesson. And who is my neighbor?

Other Laws

At this point people sometimes want to question rumors they have heard about church laws. I have already discussed this and often it is enough to do a
quick review. Sometimes they persist and want to ask questions about church laws that perhaps "you did not tell us about yet and will load on us if we become Christians."

When I found out that I was still a little suspect I became somewhat upset. They were thinking that so long as they were not Christians I was being respectful to them, then when they joined the Church I would stop being respectful. I knew I had to remain on the side of freedom and respect.

I responded that they should notice what Jesus himself told us about God and to compare it with what people (no matter who) say or legislate. This is not an insult to either Jesus or the other person. It is merely noticing who said what. I suggested that when they confront a law they should ask if it is what God has set down from all eternity as one of the conditions for being his friend (and so gaining what he offers a friend) or if it is something else. I will trust their intelligence and faith to make the right choice. After all, they are the Maasai, the people of God, and are slaves to no one.

What missionary does not question himself and ask just what identifies a Christian? Does "See how they love one another" identify Jesus' people or does something else?
5. God's Life in Us

Top: Dish and cup.

Bottom: People surrounding the round table with the dish and cup.

Presentation

Top

One day Jesus and his friends were celebrating a feast. Jesus changed the ritual of the feast. When his disciples noticed the change they became very quiet. Jesus took bread in his hands and looking up to heaven, to his almighty Father, he gave thanks and praise. He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take this, all of you, and eat it, this is my body which will be given up for you."

When we see this dish in the picture we are reminded of what Jesus said and did with the bread in the dish. We can picture the disciples, a bit perplexed, receiving the bread, eating it, sharing it but knowing Jesus was doing a holy thing.

When the supper was ended, he took the cup. Again he gave his father thanks and praise, gave the cup to his disciples, and said, "Take this, all of you, and drink from it; this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me."

When we see this part of the picture we are reminded of what Jesus said about the wine in the cup. Again, we can picture the disciples drinking the wine, the blood of Jesus, in a meaningful way. We can be sure they remembered what Jesus said at an earlier date, "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. Whoever eats me will draw life from me. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever."
When we see this dish and this cup we not only remember what Jesus said and did we also remember its meaning. Jesus lives in each of us. He is the son of God with God's life in him. God's life is also in us.

**Bottom**

The dots represent us, separate and individual people, doing what Christ said to do. That one solid circle reminds us when we eat and drink this food we are one like that circle, the table around which we sit, is one. We are one with God and one with each other, having the same life in us. Jesus' life is in all of us. We are not separate individuals.

**Profit**

The profit is the life of Jesus in all of us. It constitutes us all, one with each other and with Jesus; and it has no end.

**Test**

1. *Tell the story of this lesson in your own words.*
2. *What did Jesus do to show us that God wants life for us?*
   
   He gave us his life in the signs of bread and wine, a way that can be seen.
3. *Why do we say this food constitutes us one?*

   Jesus told us we all share this one life. When we consciously reach out accepting this revelation we are constituted as one.
4. *What is the profit of this picture?*

   The profit is the life of God in us that does not end. It constitutes us one in love.
5. *Do you want this profit? Why?*
**Explanation**

With Kamaika outside Church in Simanjiro.
Olpul

The word, "olpul" designates a place where Maasai go to eat meat. It is a place apart from the homestead, the responsibilities and the distractions of everyday living. The word designates much more than the usually stated purpose of going away to eat meat to get fat and healthy. Years after people have left an olpul it is not the meat they remember. The participants remember people, those with whom they have shared the time.

Sociologically, an olpul is more a retreat. It is a group of friends taking time out from daily living to live agape, to share an intimacy which profoundly changes their lives. This retreat of a month or longer is an intense exercise in community living that must be experienced to be understood and appreciated.

The olpul is not a time of plush living. It is plagued often by bugs during the day and night. It is living in make-shift dwellings almost completely open to the elements, possibly living on guard against leopards and other wild animals. An olpul means cold nights, cutting and carrying firewood, carrying water, slaughtering cows and cooking the meat, cleaning pots and whatever other tasks might be needed to make the olpul a success. Each member works to make it a success.

Everything is shared. If one refuses to do his share of the work, his cow is killed and left for him to skin and cook on his own. It is also interesting to note that those of the olpul send certain parts of the cows home to the elders and girls to eat. It is a sign of unity and peace.

The olpul is not only work. It is more. This "more" makes it worthwhile. The companionship, sharing in talk, song, prayer, dreams and aspirations are a strong force among people. With such intimacy comes a deeper knowledge of each other and following this knowledge a love, a love that is special to those of the olpul. Relationships are formed for life. Daughters are promised in marriage to cement and continue the bond. Cows are given which change even the name one calls another. "Our olpul" expresses identity and emotional attachments that are not immediately appreciated by a foreigner.

The members are loathe to break the olpul and go their way. Something central and basic has happened and with it the desire to prolong their stay together. Some even express a wish for all Maasai to become one as those of one olpul.

The cow of the olpul is a symbol of their unity, a unifying reason and force. It is as if they gather together to do something holy. (That they don't express it this way does not alter the reality.) The Maasai owe allegiance to their tribe. They are bound by many external forces to their age mates, but they feel more toward members of the same olpul. I think it is a very great binding force among them.

The "Moon Story" reminds us that God wants us to be one in love. The olpul is an expression of God's will and a working to make it actual. When I begin teaching the picture of the Eucharist, I start with a talk on the olpul. I have often called the Eucharist the Olpul lo Olporror le EnkAi. (The olpul of the Church.) This name makes for an immediate and human response and affirmation on the part of the people. In the beginning I didn't know about the olpul and did not use it in my teaching. I can't say if I just had a lucky break
among the Maasai or if all tribes have something of their own that has a similar "eucharistic" function.

**Especially in small “olpul” communities**

Communion among the Maasai became a most valuable time for all of us. During it we were “at home” with one another. Talk was subdued, personal and loving. There was an acceptance in the look and on the face of everyone present. We were together for a holy time. The Eucharist was the time to say in a glance, “I am for you. “You are OK in my book.” It became like a vow to people each time our eyes met over Communion. Affirming in a holy way overlooked disagreements to say, “I am for you.” So the Eucharist was not only what one gets but what one gives not only in a personal way but in a community way. It was not my food, my Jesus, my grace; it was our food, Jesus, grace.

“To be worthy” took on a special meaning. I am worthy if I see you and affirm you. I am worthy if I reach out to you in forgiveness and love. If I don’t - I am not worthy. We all should be thinking together, “I am for you, God is my witness, and so are the others here.” All this is more than just about a smile at Communion time. The Eucharist must have a human dimension. It is supposed to be a unity thing, unity with each other, not just God.

**Umbilical cord**

There are other Maasai customs I found to be helpful, some of them in only a playful way. for example, when a woman gives birth she passes a razor over the umbilical cord four times before cutting it, saying each time to the new child, "Imbung’a oltau lino, maibung’a olalai." (Take hold of your own life and let me take mine.” It is not said to show neglect but to declare that the child must now face the world. Then the cord is cut. I make a play of it by saying just the opposite, that Christ is connecting the umbilical cord again.

**Promise to a dying man**

Before a man dies, he divides his belongings among his children, leaving each one something of himself. The old man usually has one last command such as, "Keep the kraal together after I die; don't separate after my death." He still wants his kraal to continue to be one and still his even after he has gone.

**Animal sacrifice**

Though not discussed in this first teaching it will help to remember that the Maasai slaughter for God and only certain animals are acceptable for the sacrifice. Other animals do not work on God.

**Safety from bewitchment**

I often talk about their fear of spells at this time. I ask them if Christ can be bewitched. No, he is the son of God. Jesus says he lives in us. With his life in us do we need to fear people's eyes or other forms of bewitchment? They usually respond, "We no longer need be afraid." This is a big profit for the Maasai.

**Comments on Receiving Eucharist**

I am sure we all have our beliefs and personal histories about the Eucharist. When I was a child, I was brought up to receive, shut the world out,
consider Communion a personal visit from Jesus. There I was, in community, and then told to leave community and shut people out of my communion, keeping it a private thing between Jesus and me. Though I received the teaching, it was hard when I was little, to have some personal time with a piece of bread. If we even glanced around the nun would box our ears. I quickly learned to cover our eyes and act “holy.” We were told we get grace just by receiving - a very automatic grace – just by putting it in my mouth. I felt, then, that nothing more was asked of me. I subsequently learned that I was taught only part of it. I even felt almost betrayed. It was in the missions that I was confronted with what was, for me, a deeper appreciation of the Eucharist.

It was when I saw a mother giving the Eucharist to her infant. The mother looking into the eyes of her infant, broke off a piece, gave the Eucharist to her infant whispering Enkai kinyi, (Little god) It was a tender moment. It expressed a mother’s love and devotion. For me, it was a profound revelation. a real expression of the Eucharist.

I commented on this to one elder who replied, “Hey, we are not stupid. We understand Jesus. It is obvious that Jesus’ Eucharist is a community thing. It is like saying to each one here, EnkAi kinyi, little god.” He let me know that if he were God it would be important that people experience an act of bonding, unity in the Eucharist.

He was saying that the Eucharist is a sign that says I notice God in you and I will treat you accordingly. That sign spoke eloquently to him. And finally it did so for me also. I believe that was the way the Eucharist was instituted.

I remember sitting around the fire at night, a small child on each person’s lap being hugged and put to sleep. In those evening times I often would take out bread and wine and as we sat there we would have mass. It was very low key, but very personal Eucharist became for us a Holy Godly Human bonding. We knew Christ was present.

When the priest who followed me tried to forbid them, they told him not to return if he would refuse Jesus to babies. It even went as far as our bishop. He said that it fits so perfectly with their idea of community and culture that it would be wrong to refuse. His decision was to continue that practice.

Imagine my shock when I came back to the States and noticed that some people want communion to be utterly private. They would be happy if Mass were celebrated online or on TV and people would be allowed to take communion by placing unleavened bread in front of their computer monitors or TV screens and have the priest in some studio consecrate from there.

I remember being very sad because no one would look me in the eye or even look at the bread I was holding up. Only a few would give the answer – Amen. They just moved their lips. I felt the Eucharist expressed more of a distance than a closeness. And I wanted so much to return to Africa. I was not at home in the strange impersonal American tribe. I still wait for the person to say Amen. I still am a bit sad when I don’t hear it.

I remember Jesus’ prayer, “That they be one as we are one.” The Eucharist must bring us closer to God and closer to each other.
6. Opportunity to be God's “Favorite”

Top: A cross.

Bottom: A person carrying a cross.

Presentation

Top

This is a cross. It reminds us that some of the elders of Jesus' people were jealous of him because many of the people were following him and calling him the son of God. They got soldiers to take hold of Jesus, lay him on a wooden cross and nail his hands and feet to the cross. They stood the cross up and Jesus hung there. After three hours, he died. One of the soldiers came to make sure he died. He pierced Jesus' side with a spear and blood out flowed till it became water.

Though he had no sin, Jesus suffered till he died. He could have given up on God in despair but he did not. He could have run away from his enemies long before he was apprehended but he allowed himself to be tortured to death. Jesus really placed himself in the hands of his father. The love of Jesus for his father is very evident on the cross. He didn't even complain.

Bottom

Here we see a person carrying a cross. We say that individual is a "favorite" of God. The picture could represent each of us. Jesus said people will come possibly to torture us also, and to despise us, to laugh at us and do all sorts of evil against us because we are his people. We say when this happens that we are carrying a cross like the person in the picture. That person is a favorite of God because he still heeds God when the going gets tough, not just when it is easy.

Profit

This picture teaches us what to do in order to become favorites of God - to heed God in hard times as well as in easy times. God is not only asking us to
be friends like Lazarus, he is also asking us to make ourselves favorites. We have some control of the situation.

Test

1. Tell the lesson in your own words.

2. Does God hate someone who is suffering or having a hard time?

   God does not hate him. God did not hate his son, Jesus, and Jesus was tortured to death. We can say, though, that in hard times, we have the opportunity to make ourselves God's favorites.

3. What is the meaning of these words: there is no person who does not have a cross to carry?

   There is no one who doesn't have a hard time that can be used to become God's favorite.

4. What do we do to become God's favorites?

   We heed God when the going gets hard, not only when it is easy.

5. What is the profit of this picture?

   We have been invited to be God's favorites and we know what we have to do to become God's favorites.

6. Do you want to be a favorite of God? Why?
That Christ died can be a problem to a thinking Maasai. That he suffered and died in such a way could make the thinker wonder about God. It is a direct attack on the usual Maasai way of considering suffering and death. It will be confronted more in the teachings on the sacrament of the sick but for now I find this one little step to be enough of a jolt.

**Maasai crosses**

The Maasai coming to teachings often have their crosses to carry. One elder, the first in his area to follow instructions, was the object of the other elders' scorn. It took the form of dirty songs about the man who is turning away from his own to follow the foreign. That man had a cross to carry.

This suffering for Christ can have many meanings. In the future we will talk about it more. Putting up with hardships might also mean confronting evil head on and suffering the hardships this might entail.

**"Favorite"**

Favorite? Does God play favorites? No! The point here is that we ourselves determine the extent and meaning of the word.

A not uncommon scene to illustrate this is the one of the Maasai mother who buys candy for her children. When she returns home she will divide the candy equally among her children. If there is one piece left over she will slip it, unseen by the others, to a particular child, with the admonition not to let the others know. The child who gets the extra piece is often spoken of as, "you who live for me." That would be the one who helps around the house or helps the mother in extra ways.

No one considers her to have denied the other children their share. It is just that one more deserving has received the extra. In the future we will discuss more what that means – what and how of the more, what is expected of the one who has more?
Just Christians?
Are Christians the only ones who can become favorites? Of course not? God is the God of all people.

Why did Jesus die?
Jesus died on the cross. Some people have said that he died for our sins. What does this mean? An example of a little girl in religion class might show us the meaning. I visited a school in town one day and was invited by the teacher to observe the work of the children during religion class. One little girl drew a picture of Jesus on a cross and wrote a prayer to Jesus on the same paper. She wrote, "I love you, Jesus. I thank you for dying on the cross and saving me from that mean God." That little girl took the expression, "died for our sins," to its logical conclusion. In her mind God got mad at people and didn't want to let them in heaven. Then Jesus came and apologized for us. So God relented.

God is not evil.
That got me wondering if God were saying something like, "A little more suffering and blood, son, and then I will forgive people." God would be more of a devil if that were the case. Of course that would also mean that Jesus had manipulated God by his suffering and death. No one can manipulate God.

Jesus showed us...
Didn't Jesus show us that death is universal? It is not the result of sin. Could it be said that God made us perfectly material and material changes and breaks down? That is just what it is.
I resolved that whenever I teach about Jesus' death I would not present it the way that little girl understood it.

Connect to the following lesson
This lesson does not stand alone. It needs the following lesson to make sense.
7. Everlasting Life

**Presentation**

*Top*

This is Jesus. His hands are raised in exultation. He has overcome death. He rose from the dead on the third day after he died. Many people saw him and attested that he lives now. He will never die again. He hasn’t left us. He still has the power to raise his friends from the dead.

*Bottom*

Below we see a person who resembles the risen Jesus. Jesus said he would give any person of love life as he himself has life. That individual can be also you.

*Profit*

The profit this picture shows is the promise of life without end as Jesus has it.

**Test**

1. *Tell in your own words the simple story of the resurrection of Jesus.*
2. *What is the profit of this picture?*
   
   The hope of everlasting life as Jesus has it.
3. *Is there another person who has given us such a great hope?*
4. *Do you want the profit Jesus shows you?*

**Explanation**

63
Concluding the "Moon Story"

By this time people really listening will want what Christ has to offer. This picture is an essential part of the unfinished "Moon Story." God, knowing our weakness of body and soul, is still father and mother. The plan is still the same, God didn't change.

Now is a good time to retell the "Moon Story" and add the conclusion Jesus brought to it. It is a lot of fun making the transition from Old Testament to New Testament and it speaks deeply to people. From living in the darkness and fear of no hope, they are brought to a full revelation of hope, light and joy in Jesus.

Even those who died before Jesus

This is the picture everything has been leading up to. The original plan is still in force. As the Maasai say, "Metii enaimutie kiret," (There is nothing that is late if it helps you.) God doesn't hate them because they were not the first to
know about Jesus. Even those Maasai who have never known Christ are part of the plan Jesus has made known to us.

One young man was very sorrowful when he told the group he thought his parents were not fortunate to be Christians. One of the few who had some schooling, he said he heard that if one is not baptized with water he will go to hell. He said that he heard the Church teaches we were born in sin, "Original Sin."

I was present and affirming when the elders of the church solved the problem for him. They asked if his parents were good people, people of love. He answered in the affirmative. Then they asked him what Jesus had to say on the matter. The young man answered Jesus told us God has not changed and that people are not punished because they don't know Jesus. Jesus said he would give any person of love life as he himself has life. "Then what are you worried about?" the elders asked him.

**A Maasai summary of "Original Sin"**

After a lot of talk I got an affirmation when I summed up the Maasai outlook for the group. "No one is as perfect as God. That is our original condition from God. But remember our Maasai language. We say anything with a lack is a sin. We do not mean by the lack that there is something someone deliberately did which requires punishment. So "Original Sin" means originally imperfect. God loves us that way. Our original condition is to be able to sin and to die. Obviously we inherited our condition from our first parents."

I could add we all die because of Adam’s "sin," which means we were created with built-in obsolescence. I like the Maasai outlook. In the future we will apply this theology to baptism and see how we sacramentally celebrate God’s love all through our original condition.

Because of the respect I gave the Maasai they have influenced me fundamentally. Can I say they converted me? Yes, they became the instruments in a deepening of my faith. A God who loves us in our original condition is a loving God indeed.

**Not pie but foundation and for this life**

To anyone who has not been paying attention this might be seen as pie-in-the-sky theology. It is not that at all. Only this one picture has talked about it so far. Each of the pictures in the Circle hints at more than it says. There is concern for truth, life on earth, forgiveness of sins, peace, unity, freedom from being cursed. All these have ramifications in this life. I had to show very clearly what is in it for them before I could begin to develop the consequences.
8. Prayer

More on this in the prayer section after the lessons.
Presentation

**Top**

This is a picture of Jesus ascending to his father. After Jesus rose from the dead he stayed on earth forty days with his disciples, teaching them and finishing his work on earth. One day Jesus said to his disciples, "I am now returning to my father. I am going to prepare a place for you." That is why we see Jesus pointing up with his hand. With his other hand we see Jesus is pointing down. This reminds us that he said 'Though I am going I will not leave you orphans. I will send you the Holy Spirit in my stead. He will teach you and guide you and be with you till the end of time."

**Arrow**

When we see this arrow under Jesus we remember that Jesus has sent us. He said for us to go to the whole world teaching all peoples and making them his followers. He does not want us to stay worthless like arrows in a quiver.

**Hill**

After these events, Jesus rose from the hill under the arrow and went to where his father is.

**Arrows**

At the bottom there are three arrows going in all directions. They represent the church going to all peoples just as Jesus wanted. Is there any better news to a person who did not previously believe in life? Do you want your friends to learn about Jesus? Do you want to give your friends the best possible gift?
Profit

It is good to know that Jesus is preparing a place for us. His promise of life still stands, but there is another dimension here. Jesus is our friend and he needs our help. We have the opportunity of helping our friend, God, in his work. A person of good will wants to give his friends a valuable gift. Is there anything better you can give your friends than all the profits Jesus represents? Do you want to help your friend, Jesus, with his message and also help your other friends and neighbors who do not have the message? Bring them together.

Test

1. Tell in your own words the story of Jesus going to his father.
2. Where did Jesus go?
   He went to his father.
3. Why did Jesus go?
   He went to prepare a place for us.
4. Why do we say our friend, Jesus, needs help?
   He needs help to bring the Good News, the "profits," to all people. He needs help, our help, to become a known friend to all people.
5. What is the best thing you can do for another person?
   I can bring that person Jesus.
6. Do you want to help your friend, Jesus, and help your other friends?
**Explanation**

Maasai Catechist teaching boys.

**Vehicle**

We do not know if the story is exact. We do not know if Jesus spoke those exact words. We are interested in what the author wanted to tell us when he wrote the story. What is being revealed about God is our main interest. To do this we have to clarify the meaning of two words: "send" and "prepare."

"**Send**" the Spirit

Remembering that Jesus did not change God or cause a change in God, what does the word, "send," mean when Jesus says he will send the Holy Spirit? It cannot mean that Jesus will cause God to move in order for us to get the Spirit that wasn't around. That would be like portraying Jesus as going to heaven and saying, "Hey, Holy Spirit, before I went to earth you were present in the world. Now I am sending you to people." The Holy Spirit responds, "Well, if you send me I will have to go, otherwise I would have stayed here in heaven."

**Spirit is always present.**

If we did not know or believe that the Spirit is always with us it could be said we didn't have it at one time. Jesus is inform-sending us the Holy Spirit. It must mean God wants us to receive consciously and in faith the Spirit that was always there.

**Stronger in commitment**

At least this means being open to the Spirit of truth in ourselves that was always there from all eternity. That Spirit is now made strong in us by our knowledge, belief and commitment.
"Prepare" a place

What does "prepare" mean when it is said Jesus is going to "prepare" a place? It can't mean the "place" was not prepared from all eternity and Jesus had to set God's house in order. Jesus did not change God, he changed us.

Nor does it mean that he had to open the gates of heaven. They never were closed. God never closed them due to the fact that people were not perfect. He didn't fold his arms in a huff because of some ancient sin. God does not become good because Jesus came, oiled some rusty hinges and opened some gates.

He changes us.

We are the ones he changes. He changes us by preparing us for what was always there - by showing it to us, so to speak. What a preparation!

Love responds to love.

If you have understood and feel you have received something in these lessons, how can you keep quiet about it? How could you open doors for others to get the light? Can you teach them? Can you get others to listen to someone who will teach? How can this group get another group going? What would you say to get others interested?

Confusion about Lazarus

When I first started teaching, the people thought that if they died Jesus would immediately bring them back to life like he did Lazarus. When I explained the truth it was a bit disappointing at first. It is very understandable. Now I don't let things get that far out of hand.

A held arrow gets nothing.

An animal will not come to shoot itself on an arrow that is held in waiting. The animal sees both the person and the arrow as something bad. Much less will anyone ever get an animal if he doesn't even take an arrow out of the quiver. The Church will not get new members unless we get ourselves out of the quiver.

Refuse to Tell

The Maasai saying about, Tanya elimu o tanya ening' (Refuse-to-tell and Refuse-to-listen), the two people who have a sin, comes in handy here.

They can appreciate the meaning of the arrows. No one wants to be considered "Refuse-to-tell." It makes sense. It doesn't hurt to listen, either. You only benefit from listening. Only then can you make a mature judgment.
10. The Value of Individual Uniqueness

We, together, the body of Christ on earth.

Presentation

The picture

This is a picture of a body. It represents all of us together. We are the body of Christ on earth. One hand is at the mouth feeding itself, the other hand is outstretched, protecting itself, eyes looking forward outside itself.

Just as a human body, which is made up of many parts, is a single unit, so it is with Christ's body on earth. In the one Spirit we are one body. The body is not to be identified with any of its parts. If the foot were to say, "I am not a hand and so I do not belong to the body," would that mean that it stopped being part of the body? If your whole body were just one eye, how would you hear anything?

God put all the separate parts into the body on purpose. We are the body of Jesus on earth. We are like the body of a person. We have no useless parts. We can all belong, each one in an uniquely special way. There is no one who does not have a place in the body.

Welcome. Be at peace. You are valued.
By this time people are thinking that the works of the Church are only teaching, praying and singing. This is understandable because they have seen nothing else. It is not their fault if they do not consider other areas of activity nor could I see it as my fault because I have not taught everything by this time. Without minimizing what I have already done, I wanted a Church being formed as an active force in the world.

Each person should be free to witness in his own way as given him by the Spirit. I know that if I tried, even subtly, to force the Maasai they would passively rebel. The Mystical Body I saw as an answer to individual freedom and a call to involvement.

**Christ hinted.**

Christ taught and hinted at, by word and example, the work of his body on earth. Much is inferred in each picture of the Circle. There is the whole area of education into a life of light and truth, areas of concern for bodily well-being, despair, troubled minds looking for peace, peace on earth between people and nations, justice, retreats, suffering in the faith and fighting for the faith, just to name a few. When I want to talk about the works of the Church I find it helpful to begin by starting with the Mystical Body picture and have the rest of the pictures of the Circle follow it. But this is only hinting at a fullness that will come much later.

Jesus is asking us to be part of the plan, part of his olpul. He is not just asking us to eat meat out in the bush. He is asking us to join in working for and with him, to enlarge his olpul. In the image of this story, he is inviting us to make his body on earth grow.
The ending of the "Moon Story"

The "Moon Story" now has an ending. I usually feel that by this time I can ask for an indication of belief. "Jesus has shown us the ending God wants. How will your community write its ending and how will each individual write his or her ending to the story? In Jesus' way?"

Do you want to be a valued member of this Community called the Body of Christ on earth?
Prayer is fundamental

For perhaps many reasons prayer can be considered fundamental. It expresses a fundamental attitude toward God and also forms it. If God is perceived as something whose only function is answering our requests, then it is no wonder a prayer system of begging will predominate. If only words of begging are addressed to God they will form a person's orientation toward God. Through repetition that attitude is reinforced till it is recognized as good.

The challenge of working with prayer was a little frightening and very exciting for me. I realized that I was about to plant a seed of tremendous consequence.

Calling it prayer doesn't make it so.

Prayer is more than just adding "in Christ our Lord" to the end of any recital addressed to God. One missionary proudly proclaimed that since the Maasai know how to pray all he teaches them is that they should pray in the name of Christ. He was very dogmatic when he argued that at the end of any of their prayers he had only to instruct them to add "we pray through Christ our Lord," to make the prayer Christian.

Immediately I thought of one "prayer" I heard. "God, kill off the Mbulu tribe. Give their children whooping cough and let them die. May war devastate their lands." In my mind I added the words, "We ask this through Christ our Lord." Mmmmm, I couldn't have heard that man correctly. That simplistic answer was obviously wrong.

It is ours and therefore good.

A missionary can negate his teachings by blindly accepting prayers. I have observed translators whose job it was to help the missionary in this area of prayer. The translator was proud of his heritage and uncritically accepted it.
He accepted any prayer as an example of the greatness his people reached independent of Christianity. If a prayer was said by an elder in good rhythm and lengthy, it was considered irreproachable. Proudly, and at every opportunity, he would turn to the foreign missionary and say something like, "See, we know how to pray. We are pretty good."

Of course anything that is familiar is valued, preferred and considered correct. The particular challenge to me was to be accepted enough by the people so that I could draw them into an honest discussion.

I could not enter into an honest discussion unless I understood the language. I have heard a missionary comment on the beautiful prayer an elder gave at a meeting of his "Christian elders." He heard a few words such as "almighty, good, father," while he missed the other part of the prayer, the part where the man prayed that God drive away from the land and kill off the foreigners! His comment was, "Thank you, elder, for your beautiful prayer."

**A Fundamental Attitude in Pagan Prayers**

It would be a bit presumptuous to say people know Christian prayer if they only talk to God or invoke him, call God many flattering names, ask God for help, assent to God's immensity, ask for God's help for others, express how much they love God and people, or even tell God they want to be perfect. More was needed and Romans 1:21 influenced me on centering in on this more.

"... they know God and yet refuse to honor him as God or thank him."

**"Darkened" prayer**

This text also helped me to identify "darkened" prayer. I thought of a person in darkness praying not so much to honor or thank God as to change God. He tries, by flattering words or long recitals, to get God to conform to his wishes. He begs, usually without any thought of trying to be deserving. He does not try to change himself to please God and complains about God if he does not get what he wants. Often many and long prayers are used to please the one praying or the people listening.

**Prayer of the faithful or of the pagans?**

I wondered what people mean when they say, "God, help the needy of the world, those suffering from hunger." I wondered equally at the response, "Lord, hear our prayer." Does this request mean to suggest that God put himself out while the requesters busy themselves about other things? When one is praying for sick or starving people saying, "God, help the sick and starving" is the prayer completed with, "God, I will allow you to help them through me?" Is there a dedication added, "I will put myself on the line instead of just mouthing words"?

**Personal involvement in the divine will**

Prayer should be for God's sake, pleasing to God. It should be putting one's body where one's mouth is. This "gimme" for one's own sake is not so much prayer as it is a begging to sway God into doing what one wants God to do. Just as the curse is not a prayer even if we curse "through Christ our Lord" so selfish begging is not prayer because one cannot put pressure on God through Christ.
A child's psychology

The Maasai were not alone in that prayer style. I had memories of how children were taught in America. They were taught in accord with the psychological state of a children.

Children go through the "gimme" stage. Ask any American mother who takes her child to the store. She knows about the barrage of requests. Can I have that, mommy? Please buy me some candy. Mommy, get me that toy. The mother is familiar with the whining that goes along with the incessant begging. A child is not in control, has no power. A child's psychology is I want, I need, I ask, you give. Mothers realize the fact. But no mother would want her child to stay permanently in this stage. Would she want her child to remain into adulthood with a child's psychology in prayer? Some day she would have to tell her child to grow up.

John 17

Jesus is reported to have told us to ask and to have given us examples of asking. But Jesus did not pray to change or manipulate his father. His prayer was to change himself. To ask in order to change God is not prayer, it is an attempt at manipulating the divinity. It is "darkened." A selfish request, no matter how sweet the words, is not prayer. It is simply a selfish request.

In chapter 17 of John's Gospel I found that Jesus told God what he (Jesus) had already done for God. He also told his father what he would do. He explained why he would act. Jesus also expressed wishes. I could not say, after putting himself on the line so much, that he actually requested his father to come down and do something. Taken in context there were no requests that God change. Jesus was simply telling God what he wished, what he would do about it and why.
Most if not all of the Maasai prayers I have heard were, in my judgment, essentially words of begging. The flattering names they called God in prayer, it seemed, were just that - flattery, dedicated to the purpose of flattery.

"Buttering him up for the kill"

During one leave home one young American high school student commented to me that the flattering names we call God are our feeble attempts to "set God up for the kill." I thought of the Maasai and wondered if their words in prayer were "setting God up for the kill," "buttering him up," "laying it on a bit thick." (Slang can be very expressive.)

"May God grant you/us..." is often heard in Maasai prayers. This is an expression of good will and a declaration of innocence in case curses or bewitchments are suspected. The idea is that if one keeps saying good words then whatever bad might happen to another will not be attributed to the one giving the blessing.

Possibly. I hesitated to base a catechesis upon such interpretations but I could keep them in mind. I wasn’t sure exactly what frame of mind their words of prayer came from and what frame of mind they formed; but I was afraid I would negate the teaching if I blindly accepted everything the Maasai thought to be prayer. Here is a typical prayer.

**A typical Maasai prayer**

Let us pray to God who is our father and mother.
God, give us what we ask for.
Give us long lives.
Give us cows.
Give us wives who give birth to many children.
Give us water and grass.
Make your Maasai flourish.
Finish off the non-Maasai.
May God heal our children.
May you meet no enemy on the way.
May God keep you free from the evil eye."

**Manners demanded some praise**
When I first heard it I was put on the spot. The man prayed and then looked at me, a bit self-satisfied, waiting for my praise. I really did not want to laud that prayer. "I see by your prayer," I hedged, "that you know God exists. You appreciate God as being all-powerful and that it is God who gives you all you have, and so you present your petitions to him. He has given you cows as your livelihood and so you ask for what you need for your survival, such as cows, grass and water. It is good to see that you Maasai know that God is all powerful. I also noticed you call God father and mother. You must believe that because I don't think you would lie to God."

**A challenge to be thankful**
After those compliments I decided to awaken them. "If God is, as you say, your father and mother, do you ever show appreciation when you speak to God. Do you ever try to please your father and mother? Can you say a prayer of thanksgiving without asking for anything?"

Much talk followed, with attempts to speak to God without asking for anything. They couldn't do it! All they could say was, "God, thank you for everything. Give us cows." Each time the word, "give," was heard the whole group broke into embarrassed laughter.

**Olemakeku**
When I asked Olemakeku, a man of about sixty-five, to comment on what they had learned he nervously adjusted his blanket and said, "I never thought about it before but now I see our hearts are small. We are out to change God by our prayers but we don't try to please him. We are like drunken elders who go around bothering people for money to buy more drink. We, too, are only a bother. We are like a warrior who does not herd his father's cattle but keeps asking for cows to slaughter with his friends. We really don't deserve anything. We are children who are like bothersome mosquitoes with their incessant begging. It seems we know God but as a tribe we refuse to honor him."

We continued to take turns trying to say prayers of thanksgiving. Olemakeku kept quiet during it all, listening intently to the mistakes of the others. When all the other men had tried he said, "Let me try now, but don't you guys laugh." Then he said something like the following.

**Olemakeku's prayer**

God, we thank you for concerning yourself with us.  
We your children were in darkness and you saved us.  
Accept our thanks for your son Jesus.  
We Maasai accept him as the light.  
You sent him to guide us.  
As the sun guides us during the day and the moon at night so does Jesus guide us in life.  
Jesus is our light.
The sun reminds us of that light and your love. We see you care for us and for this we are thankful.

No one laughed.

I tested many Maasai by asking them to say a prayer of thanksgiving, or praise, that does not include asking for anything. I did not witness even one succeed, on the first try, in a prayer of thanksgiving that lasted for more than two or three thoughts. This taught me that there was a lot of work to be done in this area.

### 3 Prayer of a person who does not know Jesus

I introduced this following prayer while teaching and respectfully ask them to compare the it with their usual prayers. I called it the prayer of one who does not know Jesus.

**Naai**

Maasai public prayer is done in antiphonal mode. The "Naai" is the response made after each thought. Naai is the vocative case of the word for God, Enkai. It is something like an amen added on to a prayer. It is calling upon God to hear and at the same time declaring agreement with what the leader of the prayer is saying. To picture what happens just add Naai to the end of each line in the following example.

Father, we announce your goodness. (Naai.)
Because it is evident in the heavens.
Where there is the light of the sun.
And there is the heat of the sun.
There is the light of night.
There are rain clouds.
The land also makes evident your goodness.
Because it is evident in the trees and their shade.
It is evident in water and grass.
It is evident in milking cows.
It is evident in the cows that give us meat.
Your love is evident all the time.
Morning and daytime.
Evening and night.
Your love is great.
It has filled the land.
It has filled people.
We say thank you, our father.
Because you have given us everything we have.
You have given us our fathers and mothers.
You have given us our brothers and sisters.
You have given us our children and our friends.
You have given us cows, grass and water.
We have nothing but what you have given us.
You are our shield; you protect us.
You are our guard; you take care of us.
You are our salvation, all days.
You only stay with us.
Forever and ever.
You are our father and mother.
Therefore we say thank you, who are in heaven.
We worship you with our mouths.
We worship you with our bodies.
We worship you with everything we have.
Because you only have given us all.
We say thank you today.
And tomorrow.
And all days.
We do not tire in giving you thanks.

**Embarrassment**

When I gave them this prayer to compare with their own they became somewhat embarrassed with their own. Some came up with a defense of a sort. They said the Maasai way of praying was their way of praying and it was good because they get cows and children as much or more than non-Maasai people. "God gave us this way," they claimed, "and what God has given us since our beginnings in Kerio he wants us to keep. And besides, God doesn't tire of our
begging; that is what God is there for. We Maasai don't know any other way to pray, and it is not our custom to say thanks to anyone."

I was the foreigner and of course they had to protect their own in front of me. I realized people's prayer may be touched but only with the utmost tenderness and completely lacking any hint of threat. Touch it I felt I must.

**They pray respecting non-Christians**

After some time the Christian elders themselves came up with the solution. They had been looking for a prayer they could say at a general meeting with other Maasai elders. Their reason for wanting this type of prayer was simply a matter of respect. They knew it was not good to impose Jesus on anyone. Since most of the elders in the area were not Christian they had no right to force Jesus into their general meetings. It was acceptable to impress others with prayers that were no different from the traditional prayers except in that they gave God more respect. No one could be offended by another Maasai saying a non-Christian respectful prayer.

**The work of thanksgiving**

After an agreement has been reached that we should learn prayers of thanksgiving I tell them that the reason for saying thanks is at first just to get it on their lips. If they say it enough it might enter their heads and be seen as something worthwhile. Saying it and thinking about it will help the thanks enter the heart. Then they might get to mean it when they say thanks. If we mean it will come out our hands, visibly, in the form of works. The path is from the lips to head to heart out through the hands.

The reason for thanksgiving is also to take a relationship with God out of the baby stage to the adult stage. We are God’s body on earth. We are expected to grow and do God’s work.

Prayer changes us. It does not change God out there. With thanksgiving we hope we can stop trying to manipulate and begin to grow.

**The Challenge to Create**

As a literate person my first reaction to the pre-literate Maasai was to feel sad that they were at a disadvantage. Without books there were many new thoughts that were unavailable to them. Whatever they are worth the Psalms were not a study option.

My experiences in a literate culture were of people looking up and using another’s prayers. Ordinary people did not create their own public prayers. In fact, it seemed to me that literate people of my tribe were in a kind of bondage which restricted their creativity. It was much easier to copy than to create. The Maasai I was with were forced to be creative.

What did the first Christians do? What did people in the Bible do if not create their own prayers? Someone had to create the prayers. Someone had to be the first to pray them. Someone had to be the first to write them down. Those who wrote the Psalms were humans just as we are humans. The Holy Spirit was with them long ago, bringing forth a prayer life in tune with the people of that time.

I could not say that among the Maasai the Holy Spirit was not equally at work. I could not say that God wants the Maasai to copy everything of another
age, another culture, another language. I was convinced Christ must exist according to each and every cultural expression.

**Presumption can mean improper imposition**

I saw it as presumptuous to think that the Maasai must follow the Jewish tribal expression of anything. That something has "passed the test of Jewish time" was not for me an infallible criterion. Keeping it Jewish might just mean Christians should copy instead of being creative, that they forget something fundamental – to be creative according to their own culture. Christian heritage should not equated with being Jewish. It is more identified with creativity and enculturation. Time must continually test by calling for both creativity and enculturation. The Maasai must be allowed to use their own forms and customs, to create something distinctively Christian that speaks to their Maasai soul.

It finally became clear to me that being forced into creativity is something very positive. I hoped I would be able to be a help and not a hindrance. The first step in helping was to learn their prayer style.

**Their prayer style**

The more I stayed with the Maasai the more I was taught by them. As I let myself be taught how to pray as they prayed I grew in the realization that there was much more to prayer than just what I had been taught by my own tribe or by the ancient Hebrews. I found myself listening to what was happening in the present. A native genius was there that I must not hinder. Maasai prayers have a certain "feel." Phrases have a length proper to prayer and cadences and tones which are important in indicating proper responses.

The names they use in referring to God are indicative of their relationship with and theology about God. God is a feminine word in their language. God has given birth to us. Women give birth. The symbolism is evident and there is no need to draw it out. God is often called "my newly-given-birth-one" (Entomononi ai). God is compared to a new mother, how she acts with her child, the tender care she lavishes upon it, never leaving it, constantly nursing it, cleaning it, rocking it.

God is never "Our Father who art in heaven." God is "you who are our father and mother." Definitely a better concept than the impoverished image of a single sex deity.

God is also called, "Who is among the stars." "Black God" shows us what color is proper to God. This black God is asked to take us under her wings like a mother hen does when she protects her chicks.

It would surely be wrong to be instrumental in the Maasai loosing the richness God gave them. To use their point of view, since God gave them their prayer forms, God's son cannot destroy them. Christ might improve on what they do with their prayers but that improvement should still be with their native richness and genius.

To allow their own genius to operate in the creating process I had to refrain from giving a structure that would restrict them and thereby choke them of life. I chose to give only symbols in stick figure form so that the only structure the mind would hold on to would be the symbol. The verbal expression of the symbol would be left up to the person leading the prayer.
4 Arranging thoughts in prayer

The people already had an experience in thanksgiving based on the teachings of the Circle. I soon found out that the experience was not significant enough to enable them to apply it to other situations. I tested many people to see if they could thank God for other things that are obvious but not experienced in the Circle. They still couldn't do it. It seemed they couldn't order their thoughts to any plan.

For example, when asked to start from the sun and work down to everything they see, giving God thanks for it, they were actually blind to what was around them. It was as if they saw and accepted everything without thinking about anything. It was difficult to get them to list what was there and tell how it affected them. In an attempt not to betray them but to leave them free I drew the Prayer Card on the following page.

All this prayer card was first intended to do was to get people to notice in an ordered way what they always accepted in an unordered way. What it also and more importantly did was give them a crutch which enabled them to pray in public. The person "reading" the card felt he or she was reading words "written" by another. There was less embarrassment because it was not perceived as too personal.

In actuality it was a personal response.
Mechanics of the Prayer Card

On the left side I drew figures in red. To the right of these I placed other figures drawn in black. The red figures represent the objects we thank God for. They are written in capital letters. The black ones suggest reasons for the thanks, the good which the particular red object bestows on us. They are not written in capital letters. The empty spaces were purposely left blank to force people to make an effort at filling in the blanks with their own observations. Also, some were too abstract or involved for me to easily make pictures out of them. I wanted to keep it simple so that if people were to close their eyes they could visualize what was on the chart with no difficulty.

For example, the fifth picture in red is a tree. The black drawings next to it show us that it provides shade, fire, houses and sticks to drag thorn branches to make the fence around the homestead. A prayer based on this picture might go something like this:
God, we thank you for the trees you have given us.
    Naai.
They remind us of your loving concern.
    Naai.
Loving concern that provides shade when we desire it.
    Naai.
We remember you in thanksgiving when we collect firewood.
    Naai
When we warm ourselves by the fire.
    Naai.
When we cook our food.
    Naai.
It is with trees you provide us that we build our houses.
    Naai.
A constant reminder of your love.
    Naai.
Blessing us with a place of peace.
    Naai.
A place of shelter.
    Naai.
Because of the trees you have us given we can protect our homestead.
    Naai.
And we protect our children and the cows you have given us.
    Naai.
God, trees remind us you are always with us.
    Naai.
In love.
    Naai.
Thanks.
    Naai.

This simple prayer based on one section of the card was often too complicated for most people. A prayer expressed this way was often the end-product of many small learning steps. Many quickly learned how to say a very simple thanks for each of the figures, but only a very few got the poetry and feeling into the prayer that the community needed. I knew I had to work closer with the individual leaders.
By working with this card I could not only help individuals pray I could also help the community prayer leader emerge. That individual, given the opportunity to use his skill, was quickly noticed by all of us in the community as a useful member of the group.

Wanga, an old olaiguenani

In one place there was an old man who never missed a teaching session. He was almost blind and never said much. I didn't know if he was understanding anything of what was going on. His name was Wanga. I didn't know till later that in his youth he had been a very respected man and was considered very intelligent. He was an olaiguenani. Wanga had had many cows but they all died years ago during a famine. Now the old man had nothing. Even his eyesight had failed him and made him dependent on the eyes of other people. The younger men took over everything. They were quicker to absorb the teaching and quicker to be able to teach others. Wanga's life of being an olaiguenani was over. He depended on the generosity of others for everything. He was no longer a respected, valued member of the community, not even, I suspected, of the budding Christian community.

At this time all that the community understood about Christianity was the teaching dimension. They knew that prayer had something to do with being a Christian, but none of the young men was accustomed to standing up, blanket thrown over shoulder, staff in hand and blessing an assembly. It is not even a normal occurrence for junior elders to stand and bless groups of people. They just didn't have enough experience to put any life into their prayers. This particular community with Wanga in it had prayers but it lacked "soul." Till I called on Wanga.

The old man stood up uncertainly, adjusted his blanket and holding on to his staff with one hand and a large copy of the prayer card with the other he began to pray. And he prayed. Imagery, poetry were natural to him. People
were quietly, respectfully listening to him again. He was olaiguenani. He beamed. He was valued, and both he and the community recognized his place in the Christian assembly.

After a time I learned what practical steps to take and in what order to get more people than Wanga to pray in public with some proficiency. Trial and error are good teachers.

In steps

To get them involved in a non-threatening way I usually began by asking them to talk about their cows. It is a subject on the prayer card, quite important to them and easy to talk about. It is always easy to discuss what life would be like without cows. My idea was to get them to feel a "need for salvation" in this area, to appreciate the mess the Maasai would be in if they had no cows. It was easy to do this because they all knew of people who had lost their cows.

They usually began by naming the obvious: no milk to drink, no meat to eat. Often they could not name anything else. They were not accustomed to this kind of thought. It was up to me to keep the discussion going till they assimilate this new educational experience of making connections. "What about the beds in your houses? What would sleep be like if you had no cows?" "Terrible!" was the usual response, We would have nothing to lay down on."

When asked to describe their houses if they had no cows and were building during the dry season, they explained that since there would be no rain water they would use cow dung because it is moist. Without cows there would be no plastered house to provide shelter from the sun, the rain, the flies or the wild animals. Life would be very hard indeed without cows. We continued like this for a time till we got a good picture of life without cows.

Life with cows was described by all in glowing terms, for it provided the Maasai with food, medicine, beds, thread, brides, fat, houses, respect. The list went on and on.

When I asked who gave them all those things through their cows they were a bit stunned. One man answered my question, "I never realized God gave us so much through cows!" Then he set about looking for more. He was finding joy in letting his mind work in a new way and discovering things he could add to his quickly growing list. Each time he added another item he declared, "and God gave us that too.

With the growing list came a growing awareness that they were being called upon to give thanks. At the beginning the tries were very simple. First attempts said something like this: God, we say thanks for cows; God, we thank you for milk that the cows provide; God, we thank you for the meat that cows provide. People did not instantaneously recite beautiful prayers; but they had begun to integrate the new experience of listing with a thanksgiving form of prayer. The first simple attempts were good enough for a struggling individual, but something more pleasing was desired for public liturgy. After some work one elder attempted something like the following prayer.

**Thanksgiving - morning, day, evening and night**

God, in the morning we wake and thank you.
Seeing the cows you have given us we thank you.  
During the day we thank you.  
When the cows are grazing we remember your love.  
When we plaster our houses we remember you.  
Your goodness has provided the material for us.  
In the evening when our cows return safely we thank you.  
Cows loaded with milk remind us of you.  
We thank you for preparing our meal.  
During the night we think of you.  
Hearing the cow bells and the movements of our flock we know you are near.  
You are talking to us, moving around us and giving us peace.

Their prayer was maturing and they were becoming accustomed to how prayers might grow. A natural prayer leader began to emerge; and he taught prayer by his examples.

It was hard work, this prayer business, for me as well as for them. It was also fascinating and fulfilling to watch people overcoming their fear of praying in public and growing in their own prayer life, if only by imitating their own elders.

**Different occasions**

After a time it became easier to expand, to talk about different occasions when people, would pray. We began to practice beforehand appropriate prayers for different situations, such as a public meeting about water or a blessing over a son who is about to set out on a long safari. Because with the prayer card people had been taught to stick to a single topic, it became easier for them to stick to the point when they ventured into different areas. Slowly their different prayer times and occasions became more meaningful and creative.

**Women praying at milking time**

During milking time the women sprinkle a few drops of milk in the four directions of the compass and ask God for more cows, more children and whatever else is desired. After the prayer card experience it became easier for them to sprinkle milk of thanksgiving, showing gratitude to God for cows, children and in fact all they have. I often enforce the idea by periodically asking the women if they have come up with new ideas.

This way of teaching seems to be right because they learn from it and because no rupture of their own style takes place; their own unique life experience becomes the basis of their prayer life. Olaiguenani summed it up by saying, "I never knew our own Maasai prayer could have such a great meaning." All I could think of as a response was, "I knew you could do it."
6 - Prayer of Petition

After a time it became necessary to deal with prayer of petition. To do this I had to sensitize them even more than previously to the selfishness often found in requests.

Getting water from a dried river bed.
7 - Identification of the Characters

A cloud, a reminder of the Lord’s Prayer.

On the left side is the familiar picture of request one arm pointing to oneself and the other pointing up and away from self. This shows that the one making the request is concerned now only with himself but also and especially with God. Yes, he is asking but not in a selfish way. It was easy to get the group involved in judging requests to determine if they are selfish or unselfish.

On the top right side is a picture of a man with arms pointing down. He is pointing to all his surroundings, noticing that they come from God and giving thanks to God for them.

Finally there is the man holding a cross. It says that the man is praying to God in the way Jesus prayed. Chapter 17 @ in the gospel of John is the foundation of this picture.

Growing into maturity

There was a growth into Christian maturity going on. No longer could they accept prayers identified with a child’s psychology. No longer could they dump everything on God and walk away. No longer could they take the coward’s escape of “praying” and then hiding behind God’s olkila (skirt). They may express wishes in their prayer, but they were no longer present with simply telling God what to do.

Future steps

I was never happy with what I taught about prayers of request. I could accept what I did as small step into an adulthood mentality, but I had yet to dialogue with them about how people make God the extra-powerful man\woman in the sky, a person who can be changed, manipulated by words.

Not to change God

Prayer does not change God. Neither do prayers of request force or tempt God to come from out there somewhere to change something down here. Prayer, and also prayers of request, changes us. It changes us by calling up the God that is united in us, believing that it is there and then dedicating that God to respond.

This can be illustrated for the Maasai in the pictures they have learned from the Circle. The picture of the Eucharist calls people to notice and believe that they are one with God. The Mystical Body picture has them profess, that
they are God's body on earth. The picture of the arrow teaches people to proclaim, "God, we notice and believe that we are to act."

I hoped it would not be too long before an adult people could take upon themselves the responsibility of their own prayers.

7 - The Mass

Only their own tradition

There came a point when I was forced to do something about the liturgy of the mass. The people had never seen a mass. They did not have a tradition from which to draw other than their own plus what they had been taught by me.

I had no training in liturgy other than the little I received in the seminary. I was a bit apprehensive because I feared I might unknowingly lay my own ideas, feelings, defects and hopes on the people in a way that would be restrictive. I, the foreigner, would never know the liturgical soul of the Maasai as only a Maasai could know it. There I was, called upon to hold the fort till the native genius took over. I fervently hoped our Maasai seminarians were not being so formed in the tradition of the non-Maasai (ilmeek) that they lost their Maasai soul. In this interim I had to help the new Maasai community form a liturgy while still leaving them free to change and overthrow what I had done.

Two extremes were possible and neither was the answer. It was possible to give them a rigid church with foreign Roman liturgy and foreign Roman vestments. No doubt they could get to perform the Roman liturgy but that assumption didn't convince me to import every rubric of the Latin ritual as if it
were the only meaningful expression of Christian liturgy. I could have them become quiet while I recited a long prayer to which they would add an "Amen." That would contribute to the destruction of their own prayer style.

It was also possible to experiment recklessly. It would be easy to incorporate their customs into the liturgy without consulting them. I didn't want the New Christians to do whatever I told them to do, as if only I were the knowledgeable one and the law-giver. It would then no longer be their Church. Though I could see the Church in all the customs of a people I could not see every custom of a people in a church.

**An example in forcing**

In one place the missionary had the elder of the assembly sprinkle people with milk after each liturgy. The missionary had thought this was a good custom and the people agreed because the missionary was excited about it and they didn't want to hurt him. When I went there for a liturgy the people asked if they could stop doing that particular blessing because it was against their custom for pregnant women to be blessed with milk in that way.

**Protest**

These were the same people who, when the missionary prayed, chewed or snuffed tobacco, played with their children and picked lice out of their clothes. All they had to do in the liturgy was to wait for the missionary to finish his prayer so that they could add their "Amen" at the end. The people could not identify with this foreign way of praying or with the way the missionary murdered their language and so they protested in a very normal way.

Liturgy should be born of the soul of a people, expressed bodily and felt spiritually. The soul that would give birth to their Christian liturgy would be the Maasai Christian soul. Only then would that soul feel something authentically spiritual. The Circle was the Christian reference point. Facing the Circle from a Maasai perspective to form a liturgy seemed the way to go.

The beginning was simple. A step into a fully Maasai liturgy was not possible and also I was waiting for them to get interested and involved. When changes came they were always an integral part in making them.

With this freedom and with a minimum of framework they quickly became accustomed to the simple liturgy based on the Circle and began to suggest interesting changes. "The women should come in singing. It is only proper. And as they come in singing each should quickly take her place in the shade under the tree. They suggested that if we Maasai keep rising and sitting like the ilmek, then we will have only confusion in our assembly. We should get everybody seated and have them stay that way."

Later on more substantial ideas came in, such as the proper liturgical use of gourds that have the lip sewn to show the sacredness of the liturgy, or of passing a tuft of green grass around to each before laying it on the altar during the penance ceremony to show all are at peace in the community.

This simple mass based on the Circle was the first step toward a full liturgy. With this little ceremony as a basis the door was open for expansion.

**Lost**

Unfortunately I lost the mass prayers I wrote for the Maasai. They were prayers of thanksgiving following the pictures of the Circle.
8. The Bible Chart

**Something was missing**

Up to this point the Circle had been working well. The people knew the teaching. The community had teachers and prayer leaders. But there was a problem. I had been aiming the teachings at a "pagan mentality." I was continually showing them "what was in it for me." I had hoped the prayers would be more of an influence than they were, hoping that by saying prayers some ideas of action would enter their heads. It wasn't enough. Something was missing. I definitely did not want the Church to be confined to these few points and a "pagan mentality."

**The challenge of the second step**

The process of evangelization must continue. The unseen foundation had not yet been laid. Only a basement outline had been formed. Conversion had not taken place just because people wanted all that God can give them. The "What's in it for me?" attitude must be surpassed. The "I take" had to grow into the "Take me." The challenge of the second step had begun.

**A danger of overloading the Circle**

At first I thought of using the Circle for teaching the "Take me" step. I thought that I would start with the last picture (Mystical Body) making it the first then reading all the rest in relation to it. For example, we are the body of Christ. We have been born into the body of Christ. We have been born to be of help to those in darkness of doubt (any darkness or doubt). We have been called to be a light. What does this mean in any area we care to name? It can have meaning to those locked out of the modern world because they do not know how to read or write. It can mean being a light to those in darkness as to better farming methods. It can mean being a light on the road to peace in a land.

**Overloading means losing evangelization**

The Circle did not work well in transferring people to the "Take me" attitude. What happened was that the people unlearned the previous teaching about the profit and tried to turn each picture into a call for a Christian. This meant they lost the ability to speak to those pagans who were after something in the religion. The Circle became overloaded. I could not make it carry such a load. They were ready to grow beyond the Circle. But how? They didn't know what to do on their own with the little they had. I found I couldn't take it for granted that they would construct a vibrant Church with the little input I gave them.

**A lack of perception**

Not taking anything for granted began to have a special meaning for me when I observed one teacher, upon finishing his short course of teaching, saying to the people, through the translator, "Now that you believe in Jesus what does Christianity mean to you?" "It means a lot to us," they answered. "It is good. It means we should agree to what we were taught. We should not forget." That missionary presumed too much. He presumed the people had his European background from which to draw. He had been telling them they
should do something about their Christianity. He did not discuss what options were available and how they could go about making them actual. He told them they must work or be like the man who was given only one cow (talent). The people knew what they would do with one real cow but didn’t know the possibilities open to them in a new area. They were not familiar with this new line of thought.

The sad part of this story is that he left the people, calling them lazy and uninterested. He said that if the Church failed it would be their fault.

"We did not discuss that"

When I first started teaching on my own, I remember commenting that the people were talking during the lesson, politely greeting people who came late and passing around snuff. One young man responded to my comment with, "Well, we were only being polite and besides you didn't talk with us about the polite thing to do while being taught." He was right. I didn’t talk with them to get a community understanding. I mistakenly judged what was obvious to me to be obvious to them. The next time I taught I made sure I took time to dialogue with them on behavior and manners during a lesson. When they saw they were not being impolite to others who came late and that it helped to listen to whomever was talking future meetings continued smoothly.

Neither did they know that when I asked questions they were expected to answer. They just stayed quiet after each question I put to the group. I was annoyed at first, then I remembered I didn’t tell them when I asked the group a question, anyone who wished could answer. In their own culture they do not question or answer if another is standing and talking. Rhetorical questions are the common mode of speaking. They were just being polite. I very quickly changed my style of questions.

I soon learned I shouldn’t presume they could do more than they observed or more than they experienced themselves. Maybe they could do more but I was wary of presuming it.

New Venture, New Aid

My conclusion was that if I were to lead them outside themselves to the "Take me" stage I should not rely on the Circle. I needed a new visual aid. The Bible Chart seemed to be the solution.

They need the Bible

I myself had the Bible. I couldn’t refuse it to them. Also, those who were very proficient with the Circle began to get a little bored with it. It was clearly time to move on. The Bible Chart was my solution.

When the people wanted to know where Jesus came from I told them the birth narrative with a bit of exegesis. Other needs within the community were occasions for adding to the Bible Chart.

Kanisi’s outburst

Another episode vividly remembered happened when we were talking about going and making disciples of all nations. Kanisi blurted out, "I just can’t keep silent any longer! Just what can I, an uneducated young woman do? I can’t read or write. My husband doesn’t allow me to go even to the market. How can I, who am bound to home and children, be like an arrow?"
When everybody saw I appreciated Kanisi's outburst, there was no stopping them. Her husband added his voice. "Who will listen to us?" he protested. "Our own people, our equals, would laugh at us and tell us we are just trying to be show-off teachers or poor imitations of the Padri. They would tell us to stop being pretentious and remember that we are just ignorant nothings like they are."

Many voices were added to the din. 'I don't know how to teach. I am afraid. I don't know where to go. I am afraid of a group of people. I am afraid of being laughed at. Our people only want an argument, not the truth. They will only listen to you, Padri. They do not see that religion is important because even Christians get sick and die like everybody else.' This session lasted at least an hour. We finally ended it with a prayer.

**Four fishermen changed them**

Four fishermen changed the attitude of the community. St. Matthew tells about Jesus choosing his first disciples from fishermen, relatively ignorant people of that time who were definitely not leaders or teachers of their people. They were what the Maasai might call "ignorant nothings." I told the story and drew a circle with crisscrossing lines representing a fisherman's net. I looked around to see if the story from Matthew had any effect. At first most eyes were a little bewildered. Slowly a light began to shine in them. People started to blush. Much whispering. Finally, embarrassed laughter. I held my breath. Then Enkong'uai spoke, 'I'll talk. I am not afraid.' And talk she did.

**Enkong'uai lays it on the line**

"I am a bit ashamed of myself," she continued, "and so should all of you be ashamed of yourselves. We talk as if we really were ignorant nothings. No one in his own heart agrees that we are. We all know the way we put ourselves down is just our tribal way of saying we are lazy. People, it is just not acceptable."

"We don't have to be teachers like Padri Olkipirei. Sharing is our way of teaching and spreading news. Each one of us knows how to tell another the news of the day. No one here is in the dark about Jesus. We, not the Padri, have taught our own children. We may be like the fishermen whom Jesus chose but we are not ignorant nothings. We just can't sit around and prevent the Spirit from working through us. Those fishermen didn't sit in Jerusalem. They didn't wait till they were perfectly prepared. The Church would have stayed in Jerusalem if they had. Because they didn't "refuse to tell" the Church has reached our country. Are we going to let it die? Will our sin be "refuse to tell"?

Enkong'uai continued to tear into the people. She knocked down all their defenses. She worked on dispelling their fears. If she did not know the answer to something she said so but added that "We will not lack a way even though it be different from the white man's way."

The next week Enkong'uai brought her elder brothers and their kraals into instructions. (They subsequently became important leaders in the Church.) Two other elders were responsible for two other places. One of them persuaded the people of an area to clear a road so that I could drive my Landrover in. It
took one day for him to walk there on foot and another two days to cut the road.

**Accusations caught in a net**

When later I asked them why the sudden life in the community, one man answered, "We had a meeting after you left that day. We all kept thinking of the picture you drew of a net and what it meant. That net just stood out in our minds accusing us and reminding us that God wants our help however poor it is. I don't think our help is so poor after all."

Kanisi? Kanisi organized a group of children who go and teach other children of other kraals. She told me, "If I can't be an arrow, I can at least be a bow." I think she was both.

That wasn't the end of our problems but we did feel we were on the right path.
General Plan of the Chart

The general plan of the Chart has the ten pictures of the Circle on the top running horizontally. These are the main themes. Under each main theme, running vertically, are the expansions of the main themes.
**Column 1**

A Mary with Jesus on her back. Darkness. Light. (Main Theme from the Circle) Jn 12:46
B Mary, a bit shy, at the Annunciation. (Lk 1:26-38)
C Joseph is angry when he learns Mary is pregnant. (Mt 1:18-25)
D Birth of Jesus. Mary is inside an old house holding Jesus. (Lk 2:1-7)
E A shepherd standing on one leg holding a spear. (Lk 2:8-20)
F Joseph presents Jesus in the temple. (Lk 2:22-24)
G Simeon. (Lk 2:25-35)
H The Star, reminding us of the wise men. (Mt 2:1-12)
   The weapon below the star reminds us of the slaughter of the innocents. (Mt 2:16-18)
I Flight into Egypt. Joseph leading Mary with Jesus on her back. (Mt 2:13-15)
J The return to Nazareth. (Mt 2:19-23)
K Jesus in the temple with the elders. (Lk 2:41-52)
L A rock, the temple, a hill, representing the temptations of Jesus and of the Church. (Lk 4:1-13; Mt 4:1-11)
M A net. Jesus called uneducated fishermen, people like us. (Mt 4:18-22)
N The tax collector, Matthew, a traitor, is called by Jesus. No one is excluded because he is not a saint. (Mt 9:9)

**Column 2**

A Jesus and Lazarus. (Main theme from the Circle) Jn 11:1-45
B Jesus lifting Peter out of the water. (Mt 14:22-33) Mountain (Mt 17:20)
C Jesus heals two blind men. (Mt 9:27-30)
D Jesus healing a deaf and dumb man. (Mt 7:31-37)
E Jesus healing a man with leprosy. (Mk 1:40-42)
F Jesus healing a possessed girl on her mother’s request. (Mt 15:21-28)
G Jesus healing the servant of a soldier from afar. (Lk 7:1-10)
H Jesus raising a dead girl back to life. (Mt 9:18; 23-26)
I Jesus raising a young man from the dead. We see two men carrying the cot with the dead man on it. (Lk 7:11-17)
J Jesus feeding the multitude. (Mt 14:13-21; Mt 15:32-39; Mk 8:1-10; Mk 6:31-44; Lk 9:12-17)
K Jesus calming the storm. (Mt 8:23-27)
L Jesus curing a paralytic lowered through the roof and then forgives him his sins. (Lk 5:17-26)
Column 3
A  Prodigal son and forgiveness of sins. (Main theme from the Circle.) (Lk 15:11-32; Jn 20:22-23)
B  Woman caught in adultery kneeling behind Jesus who is holding up a stone to the elders saying, "He who is without sin...." (Jn 8:3-11)
C  Leaving the 99 and going after the lost one. (Lk 15:4-7)
D  A woman sweeping her house and finding her lost cent. (Lk 15:8-10)
E  The servant forgiven 1000 cows would not forgive a fellow servant five shillings. (Mt 18:21-35)
F  Why do you see the speck in your brother's eye? (Mt 7:1-5)
G  A woman washing Jesus' feet and anointing them with oil. (Lk 7:36-50)

Column 4
A  Good Samaritan and hitting on one cheek. (Main theme from the Circle.) (Lk 10:29-37; Mt:5:38-39)
B  Two men praying in the temple. (Lk 18:9-14)
C  Last Judgment "...for one of these the least...." Jesus is flanked by a man who has chosen life and another who has chosen death. (Mt 25:31-46)
D  Jesus with a whip driving people from the temple. (Jn 2:13-17)

Column 5
A  Eucharist. (Main theme from the Circle.) (Mt 26:26-28; Lk 22:19-20; Jn 6:53-58)
B  Jesus washing his disciples' feet. (Jn 13:1-16)
C  Institution of the Eucharist. (Mt 26:26-28)
D  Jesus handing Judas a piece of bread. (Jn 13:21-30)
E  Judas receiving thirty pieces of silver. (Lk 22:1-6; Mt 26:14-16)
F  At Gethsemane Jesus is praying; his disciples are sleeping. (Mt 26:36-46; Lk 22:41-46)
G  Peter declaring how faithful he will be. Jesus is telling him that this very night before the cock crows .... (Lk 22:33-34)
H  Judas kissing Jesus. Crowd in background. (Lk 22:47-48)
I  Peter with sword. (Jn 18:10-11; Lk 22:49-53)
Column 6
A  Cross and man carrying his cross. (Main theme from the Circle.) (Mk 8:34-38; Lk 9:23-26)
B  Jesus before Pilate. (Jn 18:28:38)
C  Whom should I release to you Jesus or Barabbas? (Jn 18:38-40)
D  Whip and crown of thorns. (Jn 19:1-16)
E  Peter warming himself by the fire. Three people asking him if he is a follower of Jesus. (Lk 22:54-62; Mt 26:69-75)
F  Judas hanging from a tree. (Mt 27:3-10)
G  Jesus stumbles carrying his cross.
H  Simon helping Jesus carry the cross. (Lk 23:26; Mt 27:32)
I  Women of Jerusalem crying. (Lk 23:27-28,31)
J  Jesus being nailed to the cross.
K  Jesus hanging between two criminals. (Lk 23:32-46; Mt 27:35-54; Mk 15:22-39; Jn 19:17-30)
L  Soldiers guarding the tomb. (Mt 27:57-66; Mk 15:42-47; Lk 23:50-56; Jn 19:31-42)

Column 7
A  Resurrection. (Main theme from the Circle.)
B  The stone rolled away. The soldiers are afraid. (Mt 28:2-4)
C  Jesus and Mary Magdalene. (Mk 16:9-11; Jn 20:11-18)
D  John and Peter at the empty tomb. (Jn 20:3-10)
E  Jesus appears to his followers. (Lk 24:36:43)
F  Jesus and Thomas. (Jn 20:24-29)
G  Jesus saying he will not leave us orphans. (Jn 14:18)
H  Jesus promising us a helper, the Spirit. (Jn 14:16-18, 26)
I  The Spirit will give us strength, represented by a warrior with a spear and a shield. (Acts 1:8a)
J  The Spirit-given strength represented by the arrows going out to all nations. (Acts 1:8b)

Column 8
A  Prayer. (Main theme from the Circle.)
B  Sacrament of Baptism.
C  Sacrament of Confirmation.
D  Sacrament of Eucharist.
E  Sacrament of Reconciliation.
F  Sacrament of the Sick.
G  Sacrament of Orders.
H  Sacrament of Marriage.
**Column 9**

A  Ascension. (Main theme from the Circle.) (Acts 1:6-11)
B  Apostles praying for the Spirit. (Acts 1:12-14)
C  Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-3)
D  First work upon receiving the Spirit at Pentecost. (Acts 2:4-12)
E  Cure of the lame man. (Acts 3:1-10)
F  Peter and John behind bars. (Acts 4:1-22)
G  Peter and apostles whipped for the faith. (Acts 5:17-42)
H  Peter raising Tabitha from the dead in the name of Jesus. (Acts 9:36-42)
I  Stephen the first martyr. Paul looking on. (Acts 6:8-8:3)
J  Paul struck down on the way to Damascus. (Acts 9:1-22)
K  Paul raising Euticus from the dead. (Acts 20:7-12)

**Column 10**

A  Body of Christ. (Main theme from the Circle.) (ICor 12, 13, 14)
B  Vine and its branches. (Jn 15:1-17)
C  The Good Shepherd. (Jn 10:1-18)
D  A can of salt and a little kerosene lamp. (Mt 5:13-16)
E  The story of a man receiving five cows, another two and another one cow. (Mt 25:14-30; Lk 19:12-27)
F  A field, a cow, a bride - excuses for not coming to the feast. (Lk 14:15-24)
G  Good growing up with the bad. (Mt 13:24-30, 36-43)
H  Parable of the mustard seed growing into a big tree. (Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:18-19)
I  Parable of a treasure under a rock in the field. (Mt 13:44-46)
J  Parable of the sower. (Mt 13:4-9, 18-23)
K  Picking grain on the Sabbath. (Mt 12:1-8; Mk 2:23-28)
Evangelization

In the beginning of this book I talked about a dream I had concerning how I would have wanted an older missionary to treat me as I was just starting my missionary life in another culture. I have been trying to fulfill my dream in these pages for the sake of others who experience the same need.

Now that I look back I can be more exact and picture my imagined mentor presuming I had read something about enculturation and adaptation and therefore had a some theoretical (possibly not much practical) knowledge of the terms. Lists of cold principles would not be his to enumerate but to enliven.

He would presume I had some appreciation of such concepts as religious imperialism, cultural imperialism, moral imperialism. He would wish I understood the meaning of biblical imperialism. He would sincerely wish I knew the meaning of the word, "freedom," and had a healthy respect for it. At least he would hope I was wary of what an imperialistic attitude in anything might do to people, and that I appreciated the fact that I cannot go to a person or a people as if only I had the proper expression of truth on everything.

I would forgive him if he gently warned me not to be like the minor government official of another tribe who, upon visiting a Maasai village for the first time, kept belittling the people in almost everything he saw, "That is bad. I will have to change that. How can these people be so primitive? They are like savages!"

Reflecting on that event later that same evening I remembered when I was in high school one boy could criticize his own school but a boy not from that school wouldn't dare. A member of the tribe can judge, criticize and even condemn his own; but not a foreigner. It also follows that the more one is identified with a people the more he can act like an insider.

Circumcision

Neither should I allow myself to be so imperialistic as the American lady who wanted the cessation of the practice of female circumcision to be a condition of baptism, telling me I was a bad missionary because I allowed it and calling me a male chauvinist pig because I smiled at her tirade.

A Maasai cannot become an adult without being circumcised. Reality is seen differently and I should not impose my interpretation of it on others. Even if I feel a practice is bad I cannot go in and impose my belief. This, of course, does not say I can’t dialogue with people. But if I confront anything I must do so in dialogue, as an equal, with respect and love, not as a law-giver.

The Maasai are intelligent

An intelligent Maasai might well say that the danger of imperialism also holds true where the Bible is concerned. It is obvious to a Maasai that the Bible is tribally colored.

It is understandable that the more we know of another person’s tribe the better we can understand that person. Since Jesus was a member of a Hebrew tribe it is a good idea to understand the Hebrew Scriptures. The Maasai should not be asked to leave their own tribe because of Jesus, but rather try to understand Jesus' tribe in order to better understand his message.
The Maasai man would readily agree that he shouldn't go to another tribe and force his religious practices on other people. God made the Maasai different from the ilmeek, he would stress. Then he would caution missionaries not to come to the Especially Chosen People of God (the Maasai, of course) and teach the Old Testament of the Jews as if it were invalidating the Old Testament of the Maasai, as if only the Old Testament of the Jews was inspired, as if it only is giving us prayers to rule our lives and to imitate. Who has said, he might continue, that only the Old Testament of the Jews is inspired and from God? The Hebrews slaughtered other people and had some questionable thoughts in their prayers. A quick reading of the Psalms will reveal this. So too with the Maasai. They are not perfect either. Revelation is not a synonym for Jewishness.

**Sin of capitulation**

By this time, the Maasai man might accuse the French, Germans and all European peoples of the sin of capitulation. They gave up their God-given heritage, he would say, to take on the heritage of the foreign Jews. He might simplistically conclude that such a sin is the reason so much is falling apart in the Church of the white people. The loss of tribal identity is a very serious matter among the Maasai.

He would end with an entreaty that Jesus be allowed to be born into the Maasai world with the revealed Maasai Old Testament as his heritage, heart, theology and prayer life.

So also in the New Testament. Jesus was born and raised a Jew. That is good. That is the tribe God had him born into. We don’t judge them. But, we must stress that that is not our tribe. God gave us ours and expects us to keep it. We do, though, accept the part of Jesus’ message that applies to all tribes. If he is God’s messenger we must distinguish between when he is speaking to his own tribe and when he is speaking to the whole world.

**Liturgical Imperialism**

Prayer forms also must be considered. Why should we be held to a foreign prayer form found in their mass? God would certainly want us to form our own eucharistic form in a way meaningful way to us. Your stiff way of mumbling and adding amen is not our way of praying. Those vestments, those rules of who can distribute communion, those and many other things belong to an age and tribe different from our own.

I tried to keep all that in mind when it came to the sacraments. Here are some thoughts on the meaning and liturgy of baptism.

**Sacrament of Baptism**

**Fire.**

When the Maasai move to a new kraal the woman of the house lights a new fire to signify that they have left the hardship of the old life behind and are starting a new life. The fire is a blessing and a sign of hope.
There is a special firewood that is used for blessings. It is said to give off smoke that is sweet-smelling and fitting for a religious ceremony. During the baptism ceremony, this fire is blessed and after the ceremony each woman is given the fire to take home and start a new fire in her house.

If a baby of a Christian household is to be baptized the child touches the twigs and the mother takes them home to add to the already existing fire in the house.

To use a candle has no meaning for them. Most of them have never seen a candle before.

**Water.**

The Maasai know the life-giving qualities of water. They all know the usual meaning of water when a person prepares to enter a new life. Boys and girls are washed of their sins with water just before the initiation ceremony. This ritual washing signifies the beginning of a journey in a new life, leaving the old behind.

The people decided that the only water to be used in baptism be water from a source that does not dry up. The women usually collect water but for religious ritual the community decided that two men should go to collect the water in special gourds. The gourds will have their rims sewn around with twine to give them strength. These men fill the gourds and add four stones taken from the water. Stones taken from water are said to be the hardest. Baptizing with that water is also a sign of strength for the one being baptized.

**Salt.**

Salt gives flavor to food. It preserves food. People and cows need it. I have seen Maasai use salt in a ceremony of reconciliation. It was supposed to be a blessing that put a proper "taste" in a relationship again.

Without Jesus we Christians find that life becomes tasteless and it decays. We need him. The giving of salt in baptism signifies that Christ is putting a special flavor in our lives. It is a sign promising preservation. There is a reconciliation with God. Jesus is bringing something very important under the sign of salt.

**Oil.**

Fat and butter are important medicines for the sick. They also give strength to the healthy. People spread oil over their bodies to make them look nice. Oil used ritually has these meanings. When God blesses with oil it means he is giving us health and strength.

The oil I generally use is the oil blessed by the bishop. I suggest this as a sign of our unity with the bishop and the universal church. I have found the Maasai like this connection with the wider Christian community.

**Sign of the Cross.**

An owner puts his brand on his possessions. In Maasai blessings people who have been part of the ceremonies are marked with a mixture of milk, water and lime. At times honey beer is added to the mixture. The forehead is usually smeared and it can be seen at a distance that the person has partaken of a special blessing.
With God’s sign of ownership and blessing on us we know that there is nothing which can steal us away from him. People may try but the Lord is our shepherd. No cursing or bewitching can touch us.

The Maasai also use the signs the Christians used almost two thousand years ago. It is the way the Maasai soul speaks and listens to God that is important, not in the slavish copying of another tribe and time.

**A blessing of the whole kraal.**

There is more to be added in this area of ritual. There is still the search to find out what the Maasai have over and above these five signs that fittingly could be added to the baptism ceremony. This is a difficult task and they are still too new to give really good suggestions. They usually add a special blessing for the whole kraal.

This special blessing is a dedication of all their possessions to God. The women stand in the center of the kraal along with the cows, sheep, goats and children. They are signing while four Christian elders bless all the possessions. The elders circle the kraal sprinkling milk mixed with water. There is green grass stuffed in the gourds used for this blessing.

Translations lose a lot in their trip to another language. The following prayer gives an idea of what the people are trying to say when they bless the fire.

**Prayer over the fire**

Thank you Father for your free gift of fire.  
Because it is through fire that you draw near to us every day.  
It is with fire that you constantly bless us.  
Our father, this fire today shows us your blessing.  
With your power you enter into it.  
You make this fire a worthy thing.  
A thing that carries your blessing.  
For us it becomes a reminder of your love.  
A reminder of life without end.  
This fire shines for the sake of people.  
Those who believe and those who don’t.  
A thing that shines for your sake.  
Father, you speak in this sweet-smelling smoke.  
It says with you life is sweet-smelling.  
A thing sweet-smelling that rises to God.  
A holy thing.  
A thing fitting for you.

**On receiving the fire.**

When the people are handed the fire at the end of the ceremony they are blessed with these words.

Receive this holy fire.
May each of your lives be like this fire.
A holy life that is seen.
A life of God that is seen
A life that has no end.
A life that darkness does not overcome
May this light of God in you grow.
Light a fire that is worthy of your heads.
Light a fire that is worthy of your children.
Light a fire that is worthy of your fathers.
Light a fire that is worthy of your mothers.
Light a fire that is worthy of God.

Go now in peace.
May the Almighty protect you.
Today and all days.

The entire ritual part of the ceremony is not included here because this is only supposed to be an explanation on the teaching, not the ceremony itself.

@Sacrament of the Sick

Three reasons for sickness

Long before the time came to teach the sacrament of the sick I had familiarized myself with the Maasai view of sickness. I discovered that the Maasai judge sickness to have one of three causes: 1) the sick person has done something wrong to deserve the sickness, 2) another person has caused it, as by bewitching, 3) God caused it. I noticed these interpretations were logical to a people who asked who was responsible instead of what was responsible.

Sympathy and empathy is easy for some personalizing

This personalizing a cause put them in a realm that I had once lived in. I do remember many times as a child hearing people talking about another's misfortune as a punishment from God. We were taught in school that if we laughed at someone God would punish us with the same illness or condition.
That another might have bewitched someone into getting malaria, though, was considerably out of my world.

Who caused this woman to be sick?

I have observed people gathered around a sick woman discussing just who might have bewitched her. They try to remember each person with whom she came into contact recently. Possibly an innocent person with an evil eye (inherited from God at birth) passed close by their kraal. Possibly the lady offended someone and now that other person is getting even. Maybe God made her sick because she removed the marriage ear chain all women wear out of respect for their husbands.
A curse caught up with the old man

Some men were visiting me one day and told me of the death of a very old man. I was sure the man died of old age but my visitors assured me that he was cursed by a lady because he had done something wrong to her and the curse finally caught up with him.

Health care means charms

It is hard to protect oneself against certain enemies. There are no steps one can take in the area of health care or preventative medicine except to wear charms; and if another's spells are greater than the charms there is no hope.

Maasai View of Sickness

The man who would curse his son

Much talk usually takes place about cursing and bewitching. I asked if cursing was a good thing. One old man said that it could be very good. If he had a son who disrupted the kraal and would not mend his ways after repeated warnings and beatings he would curse him. The man said it is better the son die than ruin everybody else's life.

The talk went something like this.
"You say you are right in cursing your son who is intractable."
"I am right."
"Who chooses the right punishment for your son?"
"I do, the father; the son would not want what I see to be a just punishment."
"Is God your father and mother?"
"Yes."
"Are you a saint or do you have lacks, sins?"
"I have lacks and sins; there isn't anyone who is without sin."
"Have you ever struck another in anger or talked bad about another or wished evil upon another?"
"Yes, there is no one who has not done something wrong."
"Then the conclusion, by your own reasoning, is that your father God has the right to punish you as he sees fit and he is not wrong in doing so. In fact he might be doing a good thing for the rest of us to punish you. His stick might be sickness. He might make you lame. He might curse you so you die. You, like your wayward son, cannot decide the punishment. You only deserve what your father gives you. In fact if God kills you tonight he might be doing a good thing. He might be doing it for the rest of us here. See how much he loves us!"

The elder did not like this way of thinking and said so. "No, that is not right. I do not want to die."
"And your son, does he want to die?" Gundayo, a usually silent man, joined the reasoning. "God knows everything," he continued, "He knows what you will do. He knows what you will do tomorrow. Suppose he knows you will kill Morondi tomorrow. He doesn't want Morondi to die. According to you God
would be right in killing you today to prevent that because he sees your heart is evil. The old man was flabbergasted. The group laughed.

**God does not kill people who sin.**

We know that God does not kill people who sin. Otherwise there would be no one living today. God does not make us sinners sick because if he did we would all be sick all the time. God is better than we are. He has sent Jesus to tell us he is unhappy about the way we think about him. It is important to God that we stop thinking that he sends illness. He sent his son, Jesus, to tell us he wants health not illness. He wants us to find another reason for illness. We know, through Jesus, that we cannot be cursed or bewitched. That explanation for illness is incorrect also.

Let us look at the matter from the Bible's point of view. Did Jesus come to teach us anything about sickness? I have drawn six pictures to show you what messages Jesus brings us from his father. These pictures have been taken from the Bible Chart.

1. Jesus heals two blind men by touching their eyes, (Mt 20:29-32) 2-C.
2. Jesus heals the deaf and dumb man by touching him, (Mt 7:31-37) 2-D.
3. Jesus heals the leper by touching him, (Mk 1:14) 2-E.
4. Jesus heals the possessed girl when her mother asks for help, (Mt 15:21-28) 2-F.
5. Jesus heals the servant of the soldier, (Mt 8:5-13) 2-G.
6. Jesus heals the sick man let down through the roof, (Mt 9:1-8) 2-L.

**IN THE FUTURE**

To anyone in ministry it is obvious that much more has to be done. In no way did I attempt to respond to all situations in a missionary's life. Other people will come to build on this Christian foundation. In the future there will come politicians, teachers, business people and many others who will share the same faith. They will influence lives. They will be a functioning part of Christ's body on earth. It will be their responsibility as part of the community to help build on this foundation.

One example I can add here is the way I introduced a lady who wanted to teach reading and writing to the new Christians.
Introducing Literacy

When I first came here you did not know the Good News of Jesus. Upon hearing it you changed. You are now a new community within the Maasai. You have a new life. Also, you have a new vision of the world and your place in it. Through Christ you have come to see yourselves in a new light. You are now Christ’s body on earth. You are sent out as other Christs, to create a new world; and you have a problem.

We have been talking about this problem for a long time. With this whole change in attitude many have been asking questions. How do we make this Body grow? How do we bring the Light? How do we create a new world?

You yourselves would like to cause a lot of changes in your area. I have seen that there are those who would like certain tools to be able to do more. The tools I have heard you talk about are reading and writing.

I have heard you relate stories to me about how people not of your area come in to rule you because they have the skills of reading and writing and you do not. Some of them take advantage of you by using their skills for themselves and not for the community. Yes, I have heard you grumble about the situation.

This lady you see before you today is someone who sees her part of the Body of Christ as that of a teacher of reading and writing. Her reasons for this are that people who can read and write have a great influence on the world. She believes that if Christians could rule in a Christian way things would be better. She feels you cannot fight the evils of an unjust rule and make peace and justice grow in your land if you do not have the tools you yourselves say are necessary.

Along with the proficiency in the use of these tools of reading and writing comes the confidence to do many other things which now seem frightening. These include such things as going into the bank, running your own business, taking people to a big hospital, seeing that your children get a good education, participating in government meetings and many other things I am sure you can name.

These two tools put you into a new world without taking you out of your Maasai world. They enable you to shape your world as Christ would want you to shape it - as Maasai Christians.

I came here to bring you the light of Christ. Do you see why it is important that I come here first? Yes, so that you have Christ’s light working in you when you decide to influence a greater community. Mine was only the first step in an ongoing relationship with God. It was a necessary first step. It gave you a Christian attitude.

Now this lady has come to give you an important tool so that God can act in you for the betterment of yourselves, of your tribe and of your whole nation - for more peace, love, justice among people. It is a great calling you have, to be Christians, and now we have another person who wants to help enable you to meet the challenge.

This lady would like her work to endure even after she is gone. She would not like to think that she has come only to have everything fall apart after she
has departed. Her skill in Christ’s body on earth is teaching reading and writing. She has taught many people. Now she would like to give you those tools.

Since she would like to know that her work will continue, she would like to make some of your teachers like herself. As we did in the Circle so she would like to do here - to teach so that your community has the ability to teach its own members after she leaves. She hopes that the individuals she teaches will be helpers of the community.

There is no reason to think you can’t do it. You have learned many symbols I have given you. You can just as easily learn the few symbols necessary in reading.

You know that Church means more than just Mass on Sunday. It is for every part of our lives. It is not enough to have a praying community which does nothing else. This community must be Christ in act, and she wants to help. I have asked her to help because she is skilled in something I am not skilled in and because some of you have expressed a desire to learn to read and write.

We know that not all are called to do every work of the Body of Christ on earth. Nor is she to stay here forever. You, the community, judge and tell me what you have to say about this.

Let us pray.

God, we thank you for being here.  
   Naai.
We see your presence in our members.  
   Naai.
Our community is eager to respond.  
   Naai
Our community is your body.  
   Naai
Watch us as we make our community grow.  
   Naai
For you have empowered us.  
   Naai.
To be as the Father to create a new world  
   Naai.
And as the Son to bring light to the world  
   Naai.
And as your Spirit, to bring love into the world.  
   Naai.
That it become evident that we are yours.  
   Naai.
Years later

What I have written is now years old. I would change some things and not others. But in sharing some of what I did I hope I have contributed in some small way to the growth of missiology.