African religious history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been dominated by the rapid growth of Islam and Christianity. This has been especially true of the Senegambia region of West Africa, which has witnessed the adoption of Islam by approximately 80 per cent of the region's populace and the development of a small, but influential Christian minority. Among the Diola of the Casamance region of Senegal, Islam and Christianity have both enjoyed rapid growth. The approximately half million Diola, however, include the largest number of adherents of their traditional religion within the Senegambian region. They are sedentary rice farmers and are usually described as acephalous peoples. While Muslims and Christians have been in contact with the Diola since the fifteenth century there were few conversions during the pre-colonial era (Baum, 1986). During the colonial era Islam became the dominant religion among the Diola on the north shore of the Casamance river, and Christianity also attracted a considerable following (Mark, 1985). Among the south shore communities neither Islam nor Christianity became important until after the Second World War. Seeing the increased momentum of recent years, many observers are confident that the south shore Diola will follow the northern example and convert to Islam or Christianity. Louis Vincent Thomas, the doyen of Diola ethnographers, described Diola traditional religion as 'a false remedy to a very real crisis; fetishism will become a temporary response that will be quickly swept away by another attempt, even larger and undoubtedly more profound: Islam and perhaps we could add, Christianity' (Thomas, 1967: 225; translations are my own, unless otherwise stated).

In this article I shall examine the growth of Christianity in a single south shore Diola group, the Esulalu, and its interaction with Diola awasena religion. I contend that the history of Diola Christianity has been dominated by conflict between a new religious practice and belief and the persistent claims of awasena religion. The study of religious change among the 12,000 Diola-Esulalu suggests that traditional religion will not be swept away. Despite prolonged contact with Muslim and Christian communities, there are few Muslims within Esulalu. Roman Catholic Christianity has attracted a substantial following in much of Esulalu since the Second World War, but it has not become the majority faith. While the region has produced seven priests and several nuns, substantial numbers of Esulalu young people, often well-educated, continue to practise or have returned to the practice of awasena religion. In Esulalu two vital religious traditions confront each other in sustained contact. Conversion is not the only direction of religious change. Reconversion to awasena religion remains a common occurrence. Diola religion has not withered away; it has remained an independent and dynamic faith. Furthermore, it has helped to shape the world view of an emerging Diola Christianity.

In discussing the growth of Christianity, I use the term 'conversion' to indicate an individual's decision to accept a new source of religious authority.
Conversion is seen as the beginning of a long process of integration into a new religious tradition rather than the sudden and dramatic change represented by the conversion of Paul in the Christian tradition. Moreover, this conversion process need not involve the renunciation of one's former religious system. It must be remembered that African traditional religions are not narrowly exclusive; various African religious systems have traditions of incorporating foreign ritual forms and ideas. Thus, A. D. Nock's classic definition of conversion as involving a 'consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right' may be of limited value in studying conversion in Africa. Even for the most fervent adherent there will remain areas in which pre-conversion ideas remain important. At that point the individual Christian attempts to come to terms with the conflicting demands of two systems of ideas. I shall describe the ways in which Diola Christians have made their new religion respond to this conflict and resolve the issues that led them to convert and turn to Christianity to meet spiritual needs that are deeply rooted in Diola culture.

My interpretation of the development of Christianity differs sharply with commentators who have treated the conversion of traditional societies to world religions as part of a universal historical progression. They have tended to consider the incoming religions in relatively pure forms, as moving in and replacing previous systems of belief. The convert's internal conflict between old and new ideas is seen as a temporary phenomenon, following which the old ideas ultimately give way. These commentators' belief in the decline of traditional religions has been reinforced by a tendency to study African religions in areas where massive conversion has already taken place and traditional religions have lost much of their vitality.

At the centre of the discussion of religious change in Africa is the 'intellectualist theory' of Robin Horton. Horton argues that the expansion of social boundaries brought on by economic and political changes produces a comparable change in the religious systems of African peoples. In what he calls a basic African cosmology, Horton assumes that the supreme being is primarily concerned with non-localised phenomena affecting large numbers of people, while lesser spirits dominate the spiritual affairs of the villages and are the primary supports of a local moral order. As people move into broader spheres of social interaction, their ritual and spiritual concerns move from a microcosmic focus on lesser spirits to a macrocosmic focus on a supreme being. A dramatic shift towards the macrocosm normally results in conversion to one of the world religions, Islam or Christianity, but it may provoke a shift in the traditional faith from a microcosmic to a macrocosmic focus and a greater emphasis on a supreme being. Thus, Horton ultimately returns to older theories of comparative religion which claim that monolatry is the most appropriate form of religious expression in a universalistic or modern society (Horton, 1971: 101–3 and 1975: 219–20).

Horton contends that the same forces of change that are pushing religion into monolatric forms of traditional, Christian or Muslim origin, are also transforming the entire relationship between people and religion. He argues that European Christianity has already moved away from a personal and instrumental view of religion:

Euro-American Protestant Christianity had dropped all pretence of providing a
theory of how the world really worked, or a recipe for controlling the course of its affairs; and theologians and pastors concentrated on the encounter with God as the supreme and archetypal relationship.

He claims that Africans will also abandon their view of religion as a means of controlling temporal events and see it as providing a way of universal communion. Horton views the Africanisation of Christianity as a temporary phenomenon. The emphasis on the Holy Family, the saints, faith-healing and other elements of early Christianity are only a way of cushioning the threat of alien belief systems.

At this point, I think the traditional cosmology reaches the limit of its potential for expansion and development. As I have argued in common with many other sociologists, the advent of modern industrial society must sooner or later make for the depersonalization of the idiom of all theory. In Africa, as in the West, it seems likely that religion, if it survives, will do so as a way of communion, but not as a system of explanation, prediction, and control. [Horton, 1971: 107]

In Horton’s theory one finds that converts are trying to restore a balance in their lives as the extreme localism of their world breaks down. They turn away from local deities and find themselves in need of a satisfactory way of approaching a supreme being. Ritualy the focus shifts from lesser spirits to a supreme being and from the attempt to influence the events of the converts’ world to the attempt to establish models for their own behaviour (Baum, 1976).

Commentators on Diola religion also have assumed that the growth of monolatric religions is associated with increasing integration into Senegambian society. Thomas describes Diola religion as under siege, ‘the last bastion of fetishism in Senegal’, with no deus ex machina to repulse the intruding new ways. He contends that: ‘the ancestral beliefs are in the process of disappearing’. Thomas cites contact with Islam and Christianity, the introduction of a cash economy, migrant labour and the influence of modern (unspecified) ideas as the forces undermining traditional religion (Thomas, 1959: 23, 327, 394, 773). He makes no mention of a changing view of the supreme being. Rather, he stresses, as causing a disaffection with the traditional faith, the creation of new situations, especially in the social and economic spheres, that could not be adequately addressed by the spirit shrines (ukine).

While questioning the contention that the erosion of the microcosm will cause a shift towards monolatry, I accept fully Horton’s and Thomas’s claim that the pressures of the colonial era seriously challenged traditional religions. The establishment of European domination challenged the efficacy of Diola institutions in all spheres of life. The imposition of colonial government, its policies of taxation, forced labour and military conscription all raised profound questions about the sources of power in the community. The origins of French power remained mysterious and were not readily understood through Diola historical experience. The weakening of the political and economic order and the people’s diminishing ability to explain new circumstances encouraged a sense that new ritual powers were needed. Some people sought out European religious practices as new forms of prediction and control and in order to understand the spiritual base of the dominant community. Others turned inward and re-examined their own religious
incidence

not only available of Christianity have been drawn from the environment, assimilated into it, and embraced as a protection against the colonial administration. The desire for literacy was also a major motivation for attending catechism schools, which were the only available schools in the region. In these cases adherence to Christianity might only represent a decision to ally with an alternative religious system. It need not indicate that the individual had rejected traditional beliefs.

In those cases where the convert appeared to be rejecting traditional religion, I detect two principal causes: a sense of powerlessness and a sense of existing in a morally fallen state requiring new means of establishing a spiritual balance. The colonial conquest and the profound changes instituted under European rule generated a sense of individual and community powerlessness. This sense of external forces dominating local people’s lives has continued in the independence era as national governmental institutions and a world economy have continued to erode local autonomy. This contrasts sharply with pre-colonial experience, at least of the Diola, where the forces for change had a long history within the community and were readily assimilated into Diola categories of experience. In a colonial or post-colonial environment, conversion may represent an attempt to restore the individual’s power to understand his or her world or a means to redeem one’s community from past wrongdoing. The belief that the community is in a morally fallen state may arise from the trauma of the colonial conquest, from an increasing incidence of witchcraft accusations accompanying the conquest, the rising incidence of diseases that are seen as having spiritual causes, or other
phomena undermining traditional religious practices. A leading Esulalu
Christian describes the inadequacy of his old religion and the superiority of
the new: "They seek heaven on earth . . . whatever they want, they will have.
But they have eaten their heaven here. The Christian heaven is for all
eternity. It never ends." Conversion may also stem from a sudden revelation
or an opening of one's mind to hear the new teachings. This often occurs
during a life crisis: a time of illness for oneself, a relative, or a friend, or a
period of emotional stress.

While the act of identifying oneself as a Christian marks a step away from
traditional religion, the wide range of motivations that lead to conversion
generate a comparable range of attitudes towards the former religion. Initially
many adherents see no major differences between Christian and awasena
teachings. Christian concepts of God and of the community of saints have
parallels in many African religions. Like Christianity, awasena religion has
sacraments of spiritual purification at birth and has rituals of confession and
of offering prayers with wine. In their concept of the oyi or priest-king, a
man who is both sacred and slave, all-powerful yet a prisoner of his power,
Diola converts could readily understand the sacrifice of Jesus as a way of
securing divine favour for his people. Thus, new adherents could see strong
similarities between their old and new faiths and, while accepting a new
religious authority, retain some sense of continuity with older views of their
world.

Despite an acceptance of Christian authority, many converts continued to
find awasena ideas to be effective in explaining their world. Longstanding
ways of perceiving the world do not disappear overnight. Nor can Christian-
ity be brought systematically against every facet of a community's world
view. The teachings of the new faith were partially assimilated according to
categories of Diola experience. Christian teachings also created new ways of
perceiving the world, which were only partially absorbed by the new
Christians. Thus the convert does not forget older explanatory ideas but
enters into an internal dialogue between two conceptual systems which
overlap in some ways, but diverge in many others. As Aylward Shorter
suggests, 'the heart of the dialogue between Christianity and African
Traditional Religion is located within the consciousness of the African
Christian himself' (Shorter, 1975: 10).

The new convert moves into a world where two conflicting modes of
explanation compete within his consciousness, a Christian mode and one
deriving from his traditional religion. The convert attempts to resolve these
conflicts in a permanent way. Five broad patterns of resolution can be
identified. First, there is the sudden and far-reaching conversion in which
one embraces a new faith fully. In this case old ways appear to have given way
in a radical shift of one's life orientation. This is exceedingly rare and is
difficult to analyse.

In the second pattern, there is a decisive shift of religious authority, but
one in which the paradigms of Christian thought are only partially incorpo-
rated. The continuing tension between old and new ideas is resolved by the
convert's acceptance of the authority of the missionaries to interpret religious
texts and doctrines for the newcomers to the faith. This pattern would be
particularly common in oral cultures where the skills of textual analysis
would be perceived of as external to the community and where missionaries would be slow to translate religious texts into African languages. In such cases, the convert embraces the new religion and its leadership all the more firmly, and critically rejects or emotionally negates the continuing claims of traditional ideas. This denial of persistent claims that one feels at some level to be true, by accepting an external authority to interpret the new system of thought, generates a sense of uncertainty and self-doubt in regard to one’s new religion. In such a mission Christian stance, the convert continues to rely heavily on external interpretations of proper conduct and doctrine rather than interpreting his new religion from his own knowledge and experience.

In the remaining modes, spiritual concerns of a traditional religion are acknowledged and addressed. In the third method, that of indigenisation, the convert attempts to resolve the tension between religious systems by bringing to his new religion the spiritual and moral questions of the old. This entails the development and application of Christian beliefs to traditional concerns. For Diola Christians this involves explaining Diola moral and spiritual concerns by drawing on Christian beliefs and practices. In the fourth pattern, a syncretic mode, the new Christian maintains a dual allegiance by recognising two sources of religious authority. He develops a sense of each faith having its own areas of knowledge and expertise as well as its own areas of ignorance or error. Finally, there is the alternative of reconversion, a return to the traditional faith and a rejection of Christianity. In this mode the tension between two systems of thought becomes too intense and the convert resolves the conflict by abandoning the newer tradition and embracing his former religion. This fifth mode has been the most frequently used and has been a means for the introduction of Christian ideas into Diola religion.

The last four alternatives are common responses to the internal conflict between two religious systems. The degree to which these responses can effectively resolve the spiritual dilemma of the convert is dependent on many factors. These include the particular beliefs and methods of the missionaries. The possibility of bringing traditional spiritual questions or practices into the convert’s new religion is enhanced when missionaries see the traditional religion as a suitable foundation for the growth of Christian belief structures. When the convert is expected to renounce his traditions as the creation of Satan, then the alternatives of either mission Christianity or reconversion tend to be more common. Another factor is the existence of alternative sources of Christian teaching. Are European missionaries the only source or is there an indigenous clergy available to provide alternative interpretations? Have the Scriptures been translated into the indigenous language, allowing people direct access to the sources of religious teaching? Alternatively, have sufficient numbers of Christians been educated in European languages to enable them to read the Scriptures and theological debates? Yet another factor concerns the vitality of the traditional religion. Does it continue to offer a comprehensive explanation of changing events in the world?

THE GROWTH OF A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Having described the various types of change associated with conversion, I shall look specifically at the growth of a Christian community in Esulalu. The
The five Diola village areas of Esulalu on the south bank of the Casamance River Delta, c. 1880. Settlements are built on areas a few metres above the paddy fields and tidal mangrove swamps.
Diola-Esulalu, numbering approximately 12,000 people, inhabit five townships on the south shore of the Casamance river. They are, from east to west: Kadjinol, Mlomp, Eloudia, Kagnout and Samatit. The Esulalu speak a common dialect of Diola and share many religious shrines. In times of war, they often used to combine against external attack. During the colonial period the French treated Esulalu as a separate administrative unit or canton, and in the establishment of the parish of Mlomp, Catholic missionaries also have recognised Esulalu as a distinct cultural area. Eight small ‘stranger’ villages have been established on lands belonging to Esulalu. Their Mandinka, Serer, Wolof and Mandjak settlers have been a source of Muslim and Christian influence in the region.

On the eve of mission evangelisation in Esulalu, the region was torn by warfare, political rivalries and religious ferment. Frequent warfare with neighbouring Diola groups made travel, trade and even the cultivation of rice paddies dangerous and uncertain enterprises. There were wars even within the townships, for example, between the quarter of Kafone and the quarter of Hassouka in Kadjinol. Efforts to achieve security through inter-township alliances were often cemented with ritual libations and with prayers to the supreme being, Emitai. A village that came to the aid of ritually powerful neighbours was often rewarded with initiations into some of the rites at their special spirit shrine (boekine). Attempts by the oeyi or priest-king to establish a sense of unity in the community and, to a lesser extent, the region as a whole provoked the opposition of certain lineages who controlled powerful ukine. Increasing opportunities for trade in slaves and rice created new social cleavages between rich and poor. The wealthy sought to consolidate their power by imposing at many of the principal shrines a series of new rules for acquiring ritual knowledge.

In the late nineteenth century, Diola religion confronted the perpetual problems of rain, fertility, and the securing of good fortune and good health for the believer, but it also faced other problems of more recent origin. Increased warfare and opportunities to gain wealth through trade had aggravated the problems of quarter, township and regional unity. The desire of the wealthy to control major religious shrines threatened the religious influence of the less privileged. A growing population of slaves and newcomers threatened the egalitarian ideology of a relatively homogenous society. The quest for spiritual unity had become a central problem of atwasena religion as missionaries prepared to bring a new religion to Esulalu.

One can divide the history of Christianity in Esulalu into three distinct periods. During the early colonial period, 1880–1918, Holy Ghost Fathers based at Carabane sought to acquaint the populace with their mission and build a firm foundation for the growth of Christianity. During 1918–45 missionaries established themselves at the governmental centre of Oussouye and intensified their work, aided by more effective French control of the region. In the period 1945–86, Catholics established a mission and mission schools in Esulalu itself. The most rapid growth of the Christian community occurred during this third phase.

The early colonial period, 1880–1918
When the Holy Ghost Fathers began work in the Casamance, they entered a
region where French control extended only to a few trading villages. The extreme localism of Diola political authority, the frequency of inter-village warfare and the Diola’s steadfast refusal to accept French claims of sovereignty all combined to make European entry into Diola communities extremely difficult. In 1880, the missionaries established their base at Carabane, a trading post located on an island that had belonged to the Esulalu township of Kagnout. Carabane had a small Christian population, consisting of a few French officials and traders and a larger number of Wolof and métis. At Pointe Saint-Georges, a stranger village built on land belonging to Mlomp, missionaries encountered another Christian community, consisting of people from Carabane and Portuguese grumetes. Father Kieffer, the founder of the Carabane Mission, described this community as woefully ignorant of their religion: ‘All the religion of these poor people consists of wearing a crucifix or a large Saint Anthony’s medal around the neck. This suffices for them, so they say, to be in the religion of the good Lord’ (Bulletin, 1883: 709–10). He also described the razza, the prayer for the dead, which was common to Afro-Portuguese Christianity and was performed each All Saints’ Day. Protection from witchcraft and misfortune were central features of this religious practice. The Holy Ghost Fathers regarded the Christians of the ‘Pointe’ and Carabane as extremely lax in their observance of the faith, an unsuitable model for the evangelisation of the region.

The lack of French control over the region and the colonial authority’s anti-clerical policies made it absolutely imperative that missionaries secure and maintain Diola acceptance of their presence. Both to win this acceptance and to gain a receptive audience for their teachings, missionaries offered their services in schooling, medical care and prayer for the Diola who lived in and around Carabane. Because the Holy Ghost Fathers had begun work in northern Senegal and learned Wolof, its lingua franca, they used Wolof as the initial language of evangelisation in the Casamance. The mission opened a school in which students were taught catechism in Wolof as well as the fundamentals of reading and writing. By 1893, there were approximately thirty-five students in regular attendance (Bulletin, 1893: 280).

A far greater number were attracted by the mission pharmacy, where medical treatments were administered with evangelical zeal.

Finally ... our infirmary allows us to attract a good number of Diolas, who, coming to find medicines for the body, always hear good teachings that, often, predispose them to leave their villages for a while and to establish themselves at Carabane in order to receive preparatory instruction for baptism. [Bulletin, 1893: 281]

Just as avasena leaders claimed a religious origin for their ability to cure certain types of disease, so did the missionary link his medical skill to his spiritual knowledge.

The medical mission provided a particularly effective means to establish contacts with Diola children. Frequently, when a cure ended, the priest would ask if he could become a guardian for the child during the dry season to teach him the rudiments of reading and of Christianity. After spending the labour-intensive planting season at home, children would return to the priests, where they would spend each dry season until they had reached a
level of competence sufficient to become village catechists. The first converts at Kadjinol, Thomas Kufongi Diatta and Thomas Sambou were raised by the Carabane priests. Similarly, the first catechist for Kadjinol and Kagnout, Pierre N’diaye, and the first schoolteacher at Oussouye, Ambroise Sambou, were raised by missionaries.  

The Holy Ghost Fathers involved themselves in another area of life that was central to the religion of the Diola: the fertility of the crops and the procurement of rain. Here also, the Diola response was enthusiastic.

Furthermore, our dear blacks very easily accept Christian customs. It is a rare person who has not brought his seeds to be blessed before being placed in the earth; worthy is this to serve as an example to many Christians who have believed more in the work of their arms than in Divine Providence. *Bulletin*, 1893: 317

These ideas were not new to the Diola, who used many *ukine* to secure God’s assistance for a bountiful harvest. They did not refuse the missionary offer of prayer for the same purpose.

During the first decade of evangelisation, the missionaries concentrated their efforts on those people who came to them: the permanent inhabitants of Carabane and the migrant workers from Esulalu and other neighbouring areas. In 1891, they established a mission at Elinkine on the mainland, situated on land belonging to Samatit. From there, Fathers Wintz, Pellégrin, and Cosson began to conduct tours of Esulalu villages, particularly Kagnout and Kadjinol. They reported an extremely warm welcome and a desire for the establishment of mission posts in the villages (*Bulletin*, 1893: 281). The priests continued the work of healing, blessing the seed, conducting prayers for rain, and holding mass.

At the mass the priests would give out gifts of shirts to the children and tobacco to the elders. Father Wintz, who figures prominently in most traditions concerning the beginnings of Christianity, actively sought out the elders of the *ukine* to gain an understanding of the community in which he worked and a tolerance of his presence. Over palm wine, he asked questions about the ritual procedures and beliefs of Diola religion. Pakum Bassin, whose father was baptised during this period, describes it as a time when the priests attended traditional rituals and there were no disputes between *awasena* and Christians.  

Baptisms were given after a fairly brief catechumenate and without rigorous examinations. Large numbers of people, especially at Kagnout and Kadjinol, were baptised even before the beginning of regular catechism classes there.

It was during this period that the missionaries made the transition from working primarily in Wolof to using Diola. In 1900, Father Wintz completed the first Diola catechism and began to preach in Diola. Preaching in Diola opened the missionaries’ way into the Diola community and attracted much attention:

*The European who speaks it [Diola] possesses an extraordinary prestige among them. Thus when, for the first time, we chanted hymns in Diola, one saw these brave people so surprised they would hit their mouths with their right hands; they would not recover from their surprise and admiration. *Bulletin*, 1901: 423*

These developments brought attention to the missionaries and also, for the Diola, offered the possibility of communicating with a European for the first
time in one's own language. The missionaries were more accessible than their administrative counterparts. They travelled without armed escorts and did not try to collect taxes. On occasion they could become intermediaries or intercessors for the Diola in disputes with other Europeans.21

While the missionaries agreed on the methods to be used in winning the attention and co-operation of the Diola, they differed on the issue of accepting new converts into the Christian community. Father Wintz believed in easily accessible baptisms, tolerance of traditional beliefs, and a gradualist approach to orthodox practice. One of Mlomp's first Christians describes Wintz's methods: 'If you could say the Hail Mary and the Lord's Prayer then he would baptise you because you were searching for the path of God.'22 But a majority of the priests believed that only the most fervent should be baptised. Father Cosson wrote the following description of their work in Kagnout:

Few baptisms have been done during the last two years because, in the great mass of the population that is still pagan, we want only an excellent leaven. Our first Christians must be this fermenter; their faith must be strong, and their conduct so exemplary, that they will be able to impose their influence rather than submit to that of others. [Bulletin, 1911: 720]

These priests recognised the continuing power of traditional religion and believed that only a well-versed and hardened Christian could withstand its pressure.

In the opening years of evangelisation, the touring phase of their work, missionaries were well received. Building on this base of good will, the mission sent catechists, generally young men raised at the mission, to begin the work of religious instruction in the villages. Pierre N'diaye, a Serer raised by the priests, was entrusted with work in Kagnout and Kadjinol. Pierre succeeded in attracting substantial followings among the young people in both townships. He also sought out the elders, including the oeyi of Kadjinol with whom he was on friendly terms. Within a year of the opening of catechism classes, the priests noted:

At Kadjinol and Kagnout, it is still the youth who are most accessible. There is a really zealous catechist, who divides his work between two villages. . . . The spirit there is excellent; the good will is perfect; they are starting to make fun of the fetishes. Those who are baptised like to receive the sacrament of penance; those who have taken first communion, take communion as often as they can. [Bulletin, 1911: 720]

The young people, many of whom had begun to leave Esulalu to seek dry-season employment in the towns, welcomed the opportunity provided by catechism classes to learn to read since reading gave them access to jobs with traders and administrators. Some of them welcomed the catechists' criticism of the elders' control over village affairs. But it was at this point that the Diola leaders withdrew their co-operation from mission programmes and began to resist the new teachings.

The reports that young people carried back to the elders and which the elders began to hear for themselves were quite disturbing. In catechism the youth were being taught that the ukine were satanic and that many of their customs were evil. In Mlomp, community leaders closed down a catechism school rather than permit such teachings to continue. Catechists and
missionaries were ‘poisoning their children’s ears’. One of the oldest Christians at Mlomp explained that the catechist was teaching uninitiated children things about women (probably as related to the birth of Jesus) and about the nature of death. Only men who had been initiated by the priest-king had a right to such knowledge. The closed-down house chapel that had been built for catechism classes was filled with rice and converted to a granary. In Mlomp, catechisms classes ceased. Kagnout also shut down its catechism school and expelled its catechist. 36

In Kadjinol, the elders took direct action against those who wished to continue catechism. In the Ebankine quarter, the elders came together and poured libations at the boekine called the Houle to prevent people from getting involved with Christianity or the ways of the European. In the Sergerh quarter those who persisted in going to catechism were attacked with clubs. Similar incidents occurred in most other quarters. At Kadjinol only the quarter of Kagnao remained enthusiastic about the catechism classes. The presence of several mission-raised Christians in Kagnao helped to sustain interest in the new religion. Kagnao had been plagued by disputes over rice paddies with the Muslim, talisman-protected people of Djeromait and they may have felt the need for a protective power as well. Finally, Kagnao possessed far fewer of the more powerful ukine then did their neighbouring quarters, and was at odds with the priest-king (oeyt) of Kadjinol. 37 The villages of Eloudia and Samatit were not actively evangelised during this period.

The Diola were ready to welcome the missionary as a provider of services in schooling and medicine and as a source of additional ritual expertise. When missionaries attempted to obstruct awasena religious practice, however, the majority abandoned the mission path and opposed missionary teachings. The enthusiasm with which people came to hear the mass or attend Christian festivities, combined with their polite and steady refusal to abandon customary practices, continually frustrated the missionaries.

Once they are baptised, the great work that we were burdened with was to train them in Christian practice. Very happy to assist at the mass, even the evening prayer every day of the week, they excuse themselves at the slightest pretext, the smallest desire of their parents, to absent themselves on Sunday and perform all sorts of work. . . . The fetish, without being all that respected at Carabane, is nevertheless well frequented because of its accompaniment of palm wine that one brings into the sacred groves; even though we have palavered against this abuse. [Bulletin, 1896: 317]

Diola steadfastly refused to abandon the ukine as a condition for entering the Church. Father Pellégrin described the Christian community of Kagnout:

For several years this station has been evangelised, one can even count here a hundred confirmed Christians; but alas, a diabolical fetishism reigns in the village, so tenacious that it seems to paralyse the propagation of the faith and the activities of the catechists. The Christians of Canut [Kagnout], perhaps baptised too easily at first, willingly obey the old pagans and scarcely respond to our zeal. 38

At Carabane, missionaries called for Christian abstinence from Diola circumcision rituals, but with little response: ‘at the mass the fewest people of the entire year; at the evening prayer the church is almost deserted. The men
remain in the circumcision encampment... here are the reasons for which they forget the good Lord and the sainted Virgin. The traditional rites still had great power, even in a community where missionaries had been installed for twenty-six years and which had been a major administrative and trading centre.

Finally, there was the issue of marriage. Missionaries believed that the Catholic prohibition of divorce was the primary source of discontent: ‘As for marriage, it is, alas! very difficult for the Blacks; as they have so much fear of the indissolubility of the sacrament’ (Bulletin, 1896: 317). Hilaire Djibune, a catechist at Kagnout, also saw Christian marriage as an obstacle, but the problem was property rights, not divorce.

In times past, they say that they [the converts] were very numerous. What broke this was the issue of marriage. People came from Carabane and said that if you did a church wedding, then when you died, your wife received your home and your land. She could then give it to her brothers.

The people of Kagnout believed that Christian marriage would threaten their whole system of inheritance and disrupt the lineage's control over rice paddy land. Furthermore, missionaries asked people planning a Christian wedding to abstain from the ritual greetings of the ukine on behalf of the engaged couple. This threatened the couple's fertility as guaranteed by the family shrine of Hupila. It is significant that the first Christian marriage at Kadjinol occurred between a man and woman who both had been raised at the Carabane Mission. The wedding was described in a parish bulletin:

In this land of fetishes, where the mores and beliefs have so little in common with the doctrines of Christianity, this marriage was a novelty. And then, the two young people who were getting married, both children of the village, were also both raised in the European style [à la manière touhabe].

The boy, Emile, has been an employee of the Maurel and Prom Company of Ziguinchor for a long time. The girl, Marie-Thérèse, has just completed two or three years at the home of the nuns.

With the outbreak of the First World War, several of the missionaries were mobilised to serve as military chaplains. Those who remained were generally older and, with at most only one other priest per mission, far less able to go out on tours of the surrounding villages. Many Christians, deprived of regular contact with the clergy, returned to the traditional faith. This period is generally referred to as the time when the priests went home. The Christian community of Esulalu shrank to a small group, dominated by the mission-raised and educated.

During the first phase of mission evangelisation, the Diola of Esulalu were ready to receive the missionaries as purveyors of certain kinds of truth and certain types of knowledge. They accepted the mission's infirmaries and schools. They were pleased that Europeans took an interest in their welfare and would offer prayers, in European fashion, for the benefit of Esulalu. Many were even willing to be initiated into the new area of spiritual knowledge. Despite their interest in Christianity, however, most converts were not interested in turning away from traditional beliefs and practices, but in seeking a powerful supplemental force that promised a degree of success in
the European-dominated sectors of life. Thus the chance to learn to read and write were powerful incentives for attendance at catechism classes. However, when missionaries asked the Esulalu to abandon traditional practices, they met with quiet refusals or outright hostility. Still, for a few people, those raised by the missionaries and those who left the villages with their new-found rudiments of literacy to seek their ways in cities, there was a clear breaking away from Diola tradition. Those who followed this latter path were usually children at the time they began, still only somewhat aware of the mysteries of their own traditions. In many cases, as charges of the mission, they had been isolated from much of the parental teaching that is so important in the socialisation process in any society.

The middle period, 1918–45
The First World War demonstrated the weakness of French control over the Casamance. Many Diola sensed the fragility of the French position and resumed old practices of tax resistance. Military recruitment could only be carried out by force. After the war the French increased their military presence in the region and created a system of canton and province chiefs that provided a grassroots base for French authority. Aware of the south shore Diola’s fear of the Mandinka and of Islam, but needing some literate local officials, they turned to the mission-raised and educated Benjamin Diatta, then an interpreter in the region. He was given authority over the Subdivision of Oussouye with power to make arrests and appoint local canton chiefs. He selected Paul Sambou of Kadjinol-Kagnao as the canton chief of Pointe Saint-Georges (basically Esulalu). Paul had been baptised just before the First World War and had spent several years in Dakar working as a carpenter. Virtually everyone who knew him described him as a huge man, chosen as canton chief because he was stronger than anyone else. He had clear instructions: taxes must be paid and the villages must provide labour contingents for work on the roads being constructed through the region.

The French had not substantially altered their anti-clerical policy of the pre-war years, but they realised that the leaders of Diola resistance were, in most cases, the priests of the major ukine. Those who counselled resistance to taxes, to military conscription or to government agricultural initiatives were arrested or imprisoned. The government tried in all conceivable ways to limit the influence of the ‘fetish priests’. One administrator even prohibited the harvesting of palm wine as a way of breaking the hold of the awasena faith.

After 1918, the Holy Ghost Fathers faced the task of re-establishing an active presence in the region. An elderly Father Wintz maintained the Carabane Mission but could no longer tour the surrounding villages. Four priests designated for work in the Casamance died in a shipwreck, thus extending the critical shortage of clerical manpower well beyond the war years. In 1926, Father Juloux, working from Zouinchor, began to tour in the Huluf area. He opened catechism classes near Oussouye with the assistance of a young man from Kadjinol, Mathieu Sambou. Shortly thereafter, Father Juloux sent one of his students, Georges Manga, still unbaptised, to work in Kagnout: ‘He said that when the priests left in the Fourteen War, all the Christians returned to the ukine and left Christianity. . . . My first work was to find the Christians. Some were interested in returning to Christianity,
others were not. Some of the old Christians returned; some new people came. In some compounds, however, Georges was greeted with hostility and taunting.

In 1928, Father Joffroy, who had previously worked among the north shore Diola, was assigned to the new mission of Ouassouye. He immediately took issue with Juloux’s policy of widespread evangelisation by only slightly trained catechists:

We have eight or ten catechists, who are, I believe, well intentioned, but who are... no use, or almost that, from the point of view of the purpose of catechists. Dear Father Juloux wanted to go very quickly and open up many villages. I think that it would be preferable to first train good catechists and to not send them out until that is done.

Joffroy was particularly disturbed by the massive return of Diola Christians to the traditional religion during the war years. He believed that in order to withstand the powerful pressures brought against those who converted, Christianity had to be firmly implanted through the careful training and supervision of catechists, the establishment of medical dispensaries, and through an attempt to stop Diola migration to the cities. He described his plan of mission work to his father superior:

1) the training of excellent catechists who are sufficiently compensated and who are supervised very closely. 2) the establishment of dispensaries where the catechists become nurses healing our poor Diolas and ease their maladies... and make them also respect and love the mission. 3) the creation of industries that would allow our Christians and our catechumens to earn money at home, to meet their needs, and thereby to break this obstacle to evangelisation that presently exists; all of the youth are absent from January until July (and everyone is in the fields from July to January). When does one catechise?

In Casamance, at least, movement into a wider world removed the Diola from contact with catechist and missionary. In order to overcome this problem Father Joffroy developed a plan for mission-directed economic growth that would keep young Diola in the villages and make a:

good impression... on the Administration, in addition to the remunerative work that this would provide to numerous Diolas, who would see that we do them good from a material point of view; leaving the youth at least to be won over to our holy faith, one would thereby find some resources for the mission.

Father Joffroy advocated a dual mission policy: strict supervision of mission agents and absolute orthodoxy in mission practice combined with the provision of services to the community in an effort to woo its support.

When Joffroy first came to Esulalu, he was accompanied by Benjamin Diatta and was introduced by Paul Sambou. At the Mlomp meeting Paul told the assembled people that the priest and catechist had come to teach them the way of God. He stated that if they refused to let their children attend catechism, he would look into it. At Kadjinol he threatened to have an argument with anyone who refused. Many people were afraid of Paul and sent their children. At Kagnout, Joffroy lodged his catechist at the home of a village chief appointed by Paul Sambou.

Once again, the desire to learn to read was a major factor in attracting people to catechism classes. An awasena who attended catechism, but was
never baptised, described the argument in favour of catechism given by the catechist Homère Bassin:

If you study catechism, you will learn to read, you will have work. The awasena path is bad because you do not learn how to read and you cannot understand the Europeans. Reading is very good. You can go to Senegal and have work. 19

The catechism book used during this period was the Syllabaire Diola. Beginning with phonetics and simple vocabulary, the Syllabaire gradually introduced the student to the basic terms of Christianity: Sambun (Hell), Malaka (angel), Yesu (Jesus). At Page 18, one begins to learn about Church doctrine. The work concludes with an article called ‘The religion of the Mohammedan did not come from God’ (Syllabaire, 1912). 20 The desire for literacy brought people to catechism who might otherwise not have attended. For some it created an intense desire for reading and for others it created a strong interest in Christianity. Some young people enjoyed the opportunity to do something their parents disapproved of and the opportunity to meet members of the opposite sex. 21 However, there were many who chafed at the discipline of the class and lost interest in catechism. They stopped going.

The priests and catechists actively recruited students for catechism. Father Pierre-Marie Senghor remembers that the catechist came to him when he was herding cattle and told him and his friends that they must come to catechism. The catechist sat them down under a tree and taught them how to make the sign of the cross, taking them by the hand and moving their hands through the motions. The next day, he would be back to see if they had learned it. Initially they thought of it as a joke, but they joined the classes.

Once again, the elders did not object to the literary aspects of catechism or even to some aspects of religious teachings. Robert Manga, the deacon of the Mlomp church, described how at ‘first they sent their children to learn what is good of the whites . . . like school. . . . When they heard that they were saying . . . leave the ukine, then they refused.’ Opposition also came when the catechist told the children that Jesus rose from the dead. This type of information was absolutely forbidden to women and uninitiated boys. It provoked the elders’ refusal to let their children attend catechism. 22 However, catechism schools could no longer be shut down. The catechist’s position was protected by the Christian canton and subdivision officials. None the less, many parents refused to allow their children to attend. Others withheld food from their children when on Sundays they went to church rather than to work. 23 Several of the leading Christians died suddenly. Some said it was the vengeance of the ukine; others poisoning by the priests of the ukine; still others said that they died of natural causes.

Isolated from their peers, the students of catechism were taught that awasena religion came from Satan. The awasena were seen as uncivilised and, in sermon after sermon, they were referred to as ‘Kusauvagaku’ (‘the savages’). 24 To struggle against the ukine and the traditions of their past was to advance the cause of God and civilisation. Father Senghor described how the catechists absorbed these teachings. ‘We children became fanatical. We were not afraid to be beaten.’ 25 Those who excelled in catechism schools were sent on to study at the mission at Ouossouye, in the hope of becoming catechists themselves.
Requirements for baptism were rigorous: three years catechumenate and the successful completion of an examination on Church doctrine. Furthermore, it was made very clear that the continuance of traditional religious obligations would not be permitted. Monseigneur LeHunsec decreed that no ‘pagan rites’ would be tolerated and that those who practised them would be deprived of the right to take communion. Marriages with non-Catholics would be allowed only when the clergy were sure that the Catholic spouse would determine the religious upbringing of the children. ‘Not only religious rituals and rites of passage were proscribed by missionaries. Because Diola wrestling matches were dedicated to the oeyi, Christians were not allowed to participate.’ The women’s dance (ignebe) was banned for Christians because it was performed at the women’s shrines during major rites. Even attendance at a traditional funeral could bring censure. Edouard Manga, the son of one of the first Christians at Kadjinol, reported that if one went to a traditional funeral, even that of a relative, Father Joffroy ‘would put you out the door of the church’.48

Those who sought to bridge the increasing gap between Catholic and awasena were publicly humiliated and denied access to the Church. For example when Sihendoo Manga decided to marry a Christian woman, he found himself in the midst of controversy. Sihendoo was a student in the catechism classes, but was not yet baptised. Whilst he wanted to be baptised and to have a church wedding, he insisted upon completing traditional marriage rites, especially since both sets of parents were awasena. When Father Joffroy heard of this attempt to reconcile the two sets of obligations, he decided to make an example of the couple. At the next mass in Kadjinol, he called Sihendoo and his fiancée forward and had them kneel at the altar. Then he gave a sermon on the evils of traditional marriage, referring to the kneeling couple as savage beasts who wanted to marry like pigs. Sihendoo married the woman anyway, but both priest and catechist urged her to leave him, which she did a year later.49

Some new Christians sought to advance their faith through direct confrontations with awasena. One convert desecrated his family shrine of Hupila by defecating on it. Others entered the sacred forests and cut down trees, or cleared such areas for farmland.50 The canton chief, Paul Sambou, would go to the shrines after religious rites had been performed and insist on being served palm wine, regardless of the interdictions regarding shrine access. He even drank at Ehugna, an exclusively women’s shrine. If a shrine elder refused him he smashed the drinking pots and no one could drink. These confrontations not only angered the awasena, they also provided a reaffirmation of the convert’s faith in a Christianity that could protect him from retribution for what awasena regarded as heinous crimes.

While a majority of the young people of Kadjinol and Mlomp attended catechism for at least a brief period, most did not convert. In the early 1930s, the number of both converts and catechumenates did not reach one tenth of the population.51 Catholic communities within each village were small and isolated from the mainstream of community life. Much of the social life in Diola villages involved drinking palm wine after the completion of religious rites. This socialising was off limits to Christians, so they established Christian drinking clubs which, while shorn of their religious significance,
gave the Christians the opportunity to meet and discuss mutual problems. Christian holidays and marriages also became important social events.

Christians saw themselves as people under siege, trying to protect themselves from the ignorance and persecution of their awasena neighbours. Religious discussions focused on ways of avoiding the continuing demands of traditional religion more than on embracing a positive ideal. Satan and his minions were as important as Jesus and the saints. For many of these Christians, God had given Satan power in the world in order to be left alone in His repose, Paradise. Satan created the ukine and the ukine possessed real power, but a power that was contrary to God’s will. Consequently Christianity provided an explanation for evil and counselled a difficult, self-abnegating path towards deliverance. Converts were held in a long apprenticeship to strong-willed priests who scorned traditional practices. According to Eduoard Manga, the priests considered their initial task to be the establishment of a new religious authority. ‘It was not persuasion in that epoch . . . it was necessary first to impose it . . . if one did not respect it, it was finished. It started from there.’ Father Pierre Diedhiou describes this early Christianity: ‘It was a Christianity of welcome only. . . . Passively . . . we [Diola] have swallowed everything.’ The new Christians were not permitted to incorporate traditional beliefs or encouraged to adapt Christian doctrine to Diola spiritual questions. There were no Diola priests or well-educated lay people to offer alternative interpretations of doctrine. Only a catechism, a collection of Bible stories and a prayer book had been translated into Diola. The priest remained the sole source of Christian knowledge and he was generally unwilling to adapt his message directly to the people with whom he worked. In this period, converts were encouraged to embrace the mission Christian stance as the only way of confronting the conflict between awasena traditions and the new faith.

Despite clerical prohibitions, many people turned to awasena ritual for those problems that Christianity seemed to ignore or to which it offered an inadequate answer. This could be done by going to Diola priests secretly in the night and having them conduct the necessary rituals, or by going to a relative who could attend on one’s behalf. In areas where Christianity did not offer specific teachings, traditional Diola concepts were retained to complete an emerging religious system. Without overt deviations from doctrine, crucifixes and saints’ medals were allowed to replace traditional medicines and Muslim charms that protected households from witchcraft and other forms of evil. Traditions developed concerning the power of the cross to exorcise spirits from sacred forests. ‘When Satani [the boekine] sees the cross, he will flee to Djougoutes.’ Accounts developed concerning an alleged mass the priests conducted for Benjamin Diatta, to protect him from knives and bullets. Several of the priests who were mobilised during the First World War were said to have displayed super human powers in fighting the Germans. Such powers in war were characteristic of Diola leaders with special mental powers (houkaw howwung). Like the awasena, Diola Christians saw signs of God’s punishment in the misfortune of others. Thus Paul Sambou’s blindness was seen as God’s retribution for the brutal way that he had administered his post as canton chief. Even if he was aware of the process, there was little a priest could do to stop the enhancement of
Christian symbols and the attribution of special powers to Christian clergy. These ideas entered the interstices of a Catholic belief system, not confronting it directly, but filling it out with the preoccupations of Diola religious thought.

For many people, too little opportunity existed for absorbing Christianity into a Diola system of thought. Some converts feared that the absence of rain and fertility rituals would lead to the disruption of the Diola’s relationship to the land and the failure of their crops. It was too difficult to do clandestinely that which a recently embraced religion deemed as sinful. Others found that the inheritance laws associated with Christian marriage and its indissolubility (even in the case of barrenness) prevented them from remaining in a Christian path. Their solution was to reconvert to the awasena faith, often carrying with them some Christian beliefs. These influences included the incorporation of fragments of Bible stories into Diola oral traditions (i.e. Aberman or Abraham) and of Christian concepts of sin and pollution; most important was the development of awasena apologetics that countered a Christian challenge. This last included the idea that both Jesus and ukine are children of Emitai, but the ukine are the older, and therefore more powerful offspring. Father Joffroy noticed a sharp decline in the size of the Christian community in Esulalu in the late 1930s. By 1939, Kadjinol’s Christian community had dropped from nearly 150 people to 121, with only two people in catechism. At Kagnout and Mlomp, there were even sharper declines. Again, the majority awasena community had refused to compromise traditional ideas.

Just before the Second World War, a separate apostolic vicariate for the Casamance was established. Joseph Faye, a Serer from Carabane, became the first bishop. His brief tenure, 1939–46, was hampered by a lack of funds and a shortage of priests: ‘The Prefecture had just completed its painful birth when the war erupted. The Fathers, already few in number, were partially mobilised; relations with Rome and France were cut; resources were completely insufficient’ (Bulletin, 1951: 162). Furthermore, the Church was caught in the middle of increasing hostility between the French administration and a Diola populace nearly in revolt against the French at Efok and Siganar. In 1942, a Diola prophetess, Alinesitoué, proclaimed that she had been sent by God to initiate new charities and religious rituals to secure rain and restore the purity of Diola religious practice. Thousands of Diola—awasena, Christian and Muslim alike—flocked to Kabrousse to hear her teachings. Shortly thereafter, nervous French officials arrested Alinesitoué on charges of obstructing the policies of the colonial administration, thereby heightening tension between Christian and awasena. Many awasena felt that Christians had encouraged the French to arrest her because of their fear of competition from a revitalised awasena tradition.

Personal differences between a young Senegalese bishop and an ageing Father Joffroy also hampered missionary efforts. Father Doutrémeuich replaced Joffroy, but continued his policies of confrontation with awasena. In December 1944, largely through the efforts of Monseigneur Faye, a small pre-seminary with eighteen students opened its doors. This was the only operating mission school in the entire region. It was also the only new mission initiative during the war years.
The post-war period, 1945–

After the Second World War new people took a leadership role in the Christian community. A diverse group, composed of returning war veterans and those who had managed to secure an education in the pre-war years, they had a far broader view of the French, of Christianity and of the colonial experience in Senegal than had the majority of Esulalu Christians. They worked actively for the creation of schools as a way for the Diola to secure their proper place in the economic and political life of Senegal and as a way of combating awasena dominance at the local level. The colonial authorities were not encouraging. Even Benjamin Diatta warned Diola farmers that if their sons and daughters went to school, they would desert their elders for jobs in the city. With opposition in government circles, the Christians turned to the Church. Here too they encountered some resistance: ‘The greatest opposition came from certain priests who, first of all, did not see the extreme utility of such a work from an apostolic point of view and who were afraid that they would be compelled to teach a class . . .’ (Bulletin, 1951: 162). Some clergy, including Father Augustin Sagna (now Bishop of Ziguinchor) gave enthusiastic support to their campaign for schools. In 1950, the mission opened a school at Mlomp. Within a few years, schools were opened at Kadjinol and Kagnout as well. The school became recognised as a primary means of evangelisation: ‘Today all the priests, without exception, recognise that the school is one of our major means of proselytisation, often the only one, in certain of the most refractory regions (Oussouye, Temento). One should open schools everywhere. . .’ (Bulletin, 1951: 162).

The response in Esulalu was overwhelming. While some parents refused to send their children to school, fearing that educated children would not remain as farmers, others saw it as a chance for their children to obtain good jobs in the city. Christianity was very much a part of the school curriculum. In addition to catechism classes, textbooks stressed religious themes. François Diatta started school at the age of six and studied catechism for half an hour every day. Examinations concerned catechism lessons as well as other subjects. François was baptised at the age of ten.62 Another man, a former Catholic, claims that he was sent home from school because he refused to attend catechism and was only allowed to return when he accepted religious instruction. In the schools children received religious answers at an age when they had not yet begun to formulate religious questions. While parents could demand that their children be excused from catechism, only Muslim parents availed themselves of the opportunity. For many parents Christianity seemed to be one of the costs of schooling and of gaining the chance to enter into an African elite. One hears repeatedly, ‘We live in an age of the European and, therefore, we must allow our children to take on the European religion’. To deny children contact with Christianity seemed like denying them a chance of getting ahead.

By 1974 a majority of the young people in Kadjinol (aged under thirty-five) and a substantial minority of those in Mlomp and Kagnout had been baptised. Many received their religious training in school; others received it during their temporary labour migrations to the cities. In most cases their baptisms did not entail a rejection of awasena religion, but an openness to a new tradition. Writing in 1958, Thomas was critical of what he regarded as
the mixed quality of Diola conversion:

The conversions remain superficial and apostasies are not rare. Many young people see Catholicism and its schools as a means to escape the influence of the elders, and the small amount of instruction that they seek out, allows them to take on a small job in the administration at Ziguinchor or at Dakar. [Thomas, 1959: 773]

A desire for education and jobs was a primary factor in attracting young people to mission schools. In their own accounts young people stressed the need for a new religion because times were changing and Christianity was the modern way. Some, after leaving school or having become disillusioned with life in the city, saw fewer reasons to remain Christian. Some continued, while others used rituals from each tradition depending on their location and problems. Still others abandoned Christianity. Despite the relative youth of the majority of converts, a Catholic marriage is still a rare occurrence in Esulalu.

In the early period of post-war expansion, until the mid-1960s, the Christian community adhered to beliefs quite similar to those of the pre-war Christians. Inter-faith relations remained tense throughout this period. Then things began to change. Far more Diola clergy were involved in mission work and consequently were capable of directing their message to specifically Diola spiritual concerns. The nationalist movement encouraged people to be assertive about their political and even their spiritual needs. Moreover, the mission-educated could read the Bible and discovered whole areas of Scripture to which they had not previously been exposed. Finally, with the Africanisation of the school curriculum, which in Senegal meant a strong injection of the philosophy of Négritude, there was increased pride in being African and in doing things in an African way. Where once Diola Christians had prided themselves on their distance from a 'savage' past, they began to show pride in their traditions: 'Je ne suis pas depaysé. Je connais les coutumes.'

With this new awareness, people began to bridge the gap between Diola traditions and Christianity. In the mid-1960s, a group of Christian boys joined in the Kahab Ebeh dance, which is connected with traditional funeral rites. The parish priest of Mlomp suspended all the boys from the Church. He required them to attend mass each morning and, before they left, to perform the Stations of the Cross. A man from Mlomp was censured for killing a bull in memory of a relative during the traditional funeral rites. Others were disciplined for similar infractions of Church codes of behaviour. In discussions at the Christian social drinking clubs and at more informal gatherings, people talked about Diola culture and Christianity. They were tired of the deep divisions in the townships. Many people began to attend the traditional funeral rites and to join in the nyakul or mourning dance. They also began to accept awasena invitations to drink at the ukine after the rituals had been completed. They, in turn, extended invitations to awasena to join in their celebrations of the Christian holidays. In the past sixteen years, Christians have begun to attend the meetings of certain ukine such as Hutendookai, associated with the governance of the community. The Christians of Kadjinol, though not those of the other townships, have begun to attend the boekine Houssanna, which was created in recent years to protect
the maternity house from witchcraft. In each case their palm wine is not mixed with that of the awasena to be poured as libations on the boekine, but they participate in the discussion preceding prayer. There is a widespread belief among the Christians in Esulalu that they do not have to be like Europeans to be Christians.

The missionaries have also changed. In the mid-1960s, a new order of priests, the Pierist Fathers, became the exclusive missionary order in Esulalu. The new missionaries brought with them an awareness of the need for an African Christianity and of the nature of peasant religion in their native Spain. Father Antonio Salla, the head of the Mlomp Mission until recently, is well aware that most people in Esulalu still believe in the power of the ukine. Rather than seeing this as a sign of Satanic influence, he sees it ‘as part of a universal need to find a protection against illnesses, misfortunes, etc’. Father Miguel talks of the deep religious sensitivity of the Diola and the parallels between Christian and Diola ritual and belief. He and a Diola priest named Nestor Diedhiou have been instrumental in urging Diola Christians to join in the traditional male circumcision ritual, Bukut, but accompanied by priests and with a mass said on their behalf.

Widespread changes in religious beliefs and practices have resulted from the attempts to end the divisions in Esulalu between Christian and awasena and to forge an African Catholicism. These correspond to the four common stances, described above, that Christian converts adopt towards their faith: 1) fully embracing a ‘mission’ Christianity and denying traditional culture, 2) seeking to use Catholic doctrine to answer specifically Diola spiritual problems and to build on a Diola cultural base (indigenisation), 3) adopting selectively from Christian and awasena practice (syncretism) and 4) reconverting to the awasena faith.

The way of the ‘mission’ Christian remains a force among the older Christians in Esulalu, who converted while Christianity was the religion of an embattled minority. Some more recent converts have tended towards this position, but they are in a definite minority. They have generally resisted recent reforms in Church practice, including the translation of the mass into the vernacular and the change in the rituals surrounding the consecration of the Host, both of which have been implemented throughout the Catholic Church worldwide. They disapprove of the attempt to incorporate traditional Diola ritual and customs into Christian practice. This opposition is based not only on a preference for Europeans forms, but on an awareness of the religious significance of the traditional ones. Furthermore, an Africanisation of the Church contradicts their fundamental conception of a besieged Christian way in a world dominated by the forces of evil. They still see traditional religion as the work of the Devil, but are willing to ease the social tensions between the religious communities.

The Diola-based indigenisation and syncretic stances towards Christianity are closely related. The strength of the syncretic position bears witness to the continued inadequacy of the mainstream of Esulalu Christianity. Those who have maintained a syncretic stance have found that Christianity has not provided answers to certain types of problems, or they do not accept the answers provided. Where Christianity has seemed ill prepared, they have turned to awasena religion. For the curing of disease, protection from
 witchcraft, avoidance of misfortune, problems of fertility, and procuring rain and good harvests, the *awasena* have offered coherent and clear solutions. Christianity has seemed hesitant to address these problems. Europeans appear unable to see the witches, have not been struck by many of the diseases and seldom farm (so it appears in Casamance), and so have not developed the solutions to these problems. They have no expertise. God has created many paths of religion, including that of the Diola and that of the European. This European Christianity has offered new ways of community prayer, new ways of approaching God, and a host of saints who could be called on for help. Christianity has been particularly helpful in confronting the problems of the city and of ethnically mixed communities.

The syncretic Christian saw the expertise of his new faith as lying in certain areas and that of the *awasena* as lying in others. This sense of ‘bracketing’ extended not only to control of the world’s events, but to theological issues as well. As the priest held that the possibility of direct human contact with spiritual forces was relatively remote, that the age of charismatic gifts was largely passed and that the possibility of ‘seeing’ into the spiritual world was a mirage, so the syncretist discounted European Christianity’s knowledge in these areas. To give a brief example, one day I was discussing the concept of after-life with a leading, ritually orthodox Christian of Kadjinol. He commented that if one is good one goes to Heaven and if one is bad one goes to Hell. When I asked him if one always remained there, he replied that people are eventually reincarnated. I asked if he learned that in catechism. ‘No, the priests say you remain there forever, but that is because they don’t have eyes to “see” them returning to be reborn.’ A whole range of spiritual forces and, by extension, a whole range of processes are beyond the range of European Christianity. Yet to these experiences the *awasena* faith has access. Syncretic Christians also attempt to fit their beliefs into Diola concepts of thought. Thus Jesus and Mary become *ukine.*7 One prays to Mary for problems of the household just as one prays at the shrine of Hupila.

Those who have tried to indigenise Diola Christianity began with the assumption that Christianity in Esulalu was constructed on an improper foundation. It grew from the missionary practice before the Second World War of viewing Diola traditions as the creations of Satan, thereby encouraging a sense of spiritual inferiority and negation in the new believer. The new Christian leaders sought to provide answers for those who had gone beyond the boundaries of Christian practice and for those who had rejected an entire tradition in an effort to be good Christians. This latter group, largely made up of Diola Catholic priests and the educated lay community, partially negated their cultural past as zealous, young believers. However, they read that the Christian tradition was not as narrow as missionary practice had once led them to believe. Father Pierre Diehiou claims that Diola Christians must now move from a passive reception of Christianity to an active role of making it their own and of becoming ‘a little more adult in the faith’.46 The new Christian leaders argued that there was much in common between Diola religion and Christianity and that these traditions should be reconciled. They sought, often self-consciously, to establish a positive Diola base from which a Diola Christianity could spring forth.

For Father Earnest Sambou, the synthesis must come at a deeper level,
built on the partial revelation received by Diola religion. One must build from the model of the oeyi as sacred and slave, a symbol of purity and the carrier of the community's sins, to that of Jesus and his sacrifice on the Cross. He contends that their Christianity must build upon Diola belief in a collective responsibility before God, in a 'conscience collective' that is central to Diola thought. Diola Christianity must become a witness against the individualism of European Christianity. Finally, it must assert its ability to offer solace in the face of people's problems. Father Sambou clearly rejects the charge that such a preoccupation with the affairs of the world is materialistic. Here he moves beyond the Western dichotomy of soul and body: 'Soul and body are one. A soul without a body is a phantom. A body without a soul is a corpse. They are one and must be treated together.'

From this new desire to build a Diola Christianity have come new forms of religious rituals instituted by Diola and Spanish priests alike. As a result, masses are now held to offer prayers for rain, to offer prayers for a good harvest, and to protect the lives of infants in the maternity house. Prayer meetings are held outside the daily routine of mass in Church in each quarter of each village where requested. Finally, priests have created a time in the mass when people can bring their spiritual concerns to the Church, articulate them, and have prayers offered for their resolution.

Despite these changes, many converts still find that Christianity has not met their religious needs. Reconversion continues to be an important option, drawing people back to the awasena path not only within Esulalu itself, but from the diaspora in Dakar, northern Senegal and France.

**Conclusion**

In approaching the study of conversion, one must begin with the assumption that two religious traditions come into contact, each implying a world view far more comprehensive than any particular statement of belief can fully articulate. In most cases a person's decision to adopt a new religion does not imply a complete break with the religious ideas of the past. In converting, new adherents accept a new source of religious authority but do not initially understand the full implications of the new teachings. New concepts are often understood through the categories of experience sustained by their prior religious knowledge. Only gradually can these deeper structures of thought be influenced by new religious experience. This persistence of pre-conversion modes of enquiry and explanation encourages the convert, where permitted, to establish links between the teachings and attitudes of his pre-conversion life and the demands of the new religion.

We have seen that Diola converts took four primary stances towards their new religion. In the period between the First and Second World Wars, when syncretism and a Diola-based indigenisation were publicly rejected, Diola Christians had two main options. They could fully embrace a new religion unassimilated to Diola spiritual needs and culture, or they could refuse the burden and return to the awasena religion. Syncretic practices could enter only into those areas of Diola Christianity in which missionaries had not condemned them. Otherwise, the syncretic mode existed as a shadowy alternative courting exclusion from the Church.

In the era after the Second World War, with a cadre of Diola Catholic
priests and cross-culturally aware missionaries, new possibilities for the growth of Diola Christianity became possible. Clergy and laymen alike became aware of the need to root the Christianity of the Diola in the concerns and needs of Diola communities. With members of the Diola community in positions of authority and with access to the entire Scriptures, this process could begin. The new Christian leaders sought to develop the points of contact between Christian and Diola traditions and to build their religious edifice on a shared foundation. This implied a reaffirmation of Diola cultural vitality that would distinguish them from other Christians and an involvement of Christian beliefs and practices in the daily lives of Diola Christians. Still, whilst the 'mission' Christian acceptance of an unassimilated Christianity appears to be losing its power, the return of Diola Christians to the atwasena path, through reconversion, continues to be a major force in Diola-Esulalu religious life.

NOTES

1 Research was conducted in the Casamance region of Senegal, primarily in Esulalu, in four stages between 1974 and 1986. The Thomas J. Watson Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, the Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Program, and the Ohio State University all provided generous financial support for this research. I would like to thank Professor Rosalind Shaw for her comments on this paper.
2 'Atwasena' is a term used by Diola to indicate adherents of Diola traditional religion. It literally means 'one who performs rituals'.
3 I would argue that Nock's view of conversion is also rare in Western religious experience and that conversion in Western religious experience more nearly approximates what I am describing in Senegal than is acknowledged by many scholars who examine conversion experience. See Nock, 1933: 6-7.
4 I am referring to the evolutionist school of comparative religion, which sees a natural progression from animism to fetishism and ultimately to monotheism. I am also referring to adherents of modernisation theory who see in conversion the signs of the emergence of a universal culture. An evolutionist approach to Diola religion can be found in Girard, 1969. Humphrey Fisher's critique of Horton's claim that African traditional religions can develop a monolatric focus also seems to depend on evolutionist assumptions. See Fisher, 1973.
5 My research among the Diola does not support Horton's assumption. Diola believe that the supreme being is involved in the microcosm and lesser spirits are not limited to the local area. See Baum, 1986, passim.
6 This description is only of limited applicability in Euro-American Christianity. It overlooks the rapid growth of charismatic churches in the United States and the fact that missionaries tend to see their religion as more of a resource for the resolution of life's problems than do ordinary believers. In Africa, Horton overlooks the rapid growth of charismatic religion within Catholic and Protestant churches as well as other groups. Within Islam, the Sufi emphasis on personal communication with God, the working of miracles and the receiving of blessings would tend to counter the claim that conversion is part of a depersonalisation of the African religious experience. See Horton, 1971: 96.
7 The best-known example of this revitalisation of Diola religion is the prophetic movement of Alinesitou Diatta of Kabrousse. See Girard, 1969.
8 For a description of a similar challenge to a system of explaining the world, see Alverson, 1978: 172.
9 This sense of sin has two origins. One stems from a view that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Diola disregarded the ways of the ancestors by becoming involved in the slave trade. The second view originates in missionary condemnation of traditional customs as sinful.
10 Interview, Kadjinol, 1 March 1978.
11 See for example: Bethwell Ogot's discussion of Padhole contact with Christianity (Ogot, 1972: 133); Lienhardt, 1982: 83.
12 In Diola belief, palm wine possesses a soul force that assists in carrying prayer from the supplicant to the boekine and ultimately to the supreme being, Emitai.

13 The oeyi possesses considerable religious authority and symbolises the spiritual unity of the community. However, he is also prisoner to a host of restrictions and a council of elders. He is a living sacrifice of the community for the fertility and harmony of the community. For a discussion of the parallels between the oeyi and Jesus, see Sambou, 1974.

14 A similar process of indigenisation transformed the Asian religion of Christianity into a European religious tradition.

15 David Barrett (1968) has found that access to Scriptures in the vernacular is crucial to the growth of independent churches.

16 Thus when the Haer quarter of Mlomp assisted Kadjinol-Kafone in a war, it was rewarded with rights to the shrines of Cabai, itself associated with war, and Ehugna, the primary women's fertility shrine.

17 Notably the Diedhiou lineage which controlled important blacksmith and fire shrines.

18 Métis are people of European and African descent. Grumetes are people of African descent who embraced an Afro-Portuguese cultural identity.

19 George Brooks’s recent work on Afro-Portuguese Christianity (1982) has demonstrated that rural Portuguese performed similar rituals on All Saints’ Day and shared many of the concerns denounced by nineteenth-century missionaries.

20 Interview with Antoine Houmandrissah Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 21 March 1978.


22 Archives of the Mission d’Oussouye: ‘Registre des baptemes, Mission de Carabane’.


24 This was particularly true of Fathers Wintz and Esvan. Wintz was ultimately deported for his interventionist policies. Esvan courted the possibility in his vehement opposition to military conscription. See PSE: R. P. Abiven, ‘Notes de R. P. Abiven pour une histoire religieuse du Sénégal’, Chapter X, pp. 29–31.


27 People at Kadjinol feared the power of marabouts to make talismans that promised protection against guns and knives (interviews with Sedu Benoit Sambou, Kadjinol-Sergerh, 10 July 1975, and Siliungimagne Diatta, Kadjinol-Kandianka, 7 May 1978).


30 Interview with Hilaire Dijbune, Kagnout-Ebrouwaye, 11 July 1978.

31 Interview with Antoine Houmandrissah Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 18 June 1978. He claims that many Christians continued to perform the greetings of the ukine despite having church weddings and that this continues up to the present. Hupila is seen as a particularly dangerous boekine.

32 ‘Toubabe’ is a pejorative term of Wolof origin to indicate a European (PSE: L’Echo de Saint-Louis: bulletin paroissial, 9 (2), August 1914).

33 Interviews with André Bankul Senghor, Kadjinol-Hassouka, 28 June 1975 and with Hilaire Dijbune, Kagnout-Ebrouwaye, 6 May 1978.

34 Interview with Georges Manga, Edioungou, 28 December 1978.


37 Ibid.


40 Syllabaire Diola, 1912.

41 Interviews with: Wulli Assin, Samatit, 6 December 1978; Robert Manga, Mlomp-Djibetene, 1 March 1978.


44 Interview with Edouard Manga, Kadjinol-Kafone, 2 August 1978.


46 PSE: Monsignor LeHunsec, 'Réalisation Quinquennale à la S.C. de la Propagande', 1925.

47 Interview with Antoine Diabune, Oukout, 3 January 1975.

48 Interview with Edouard Manga, Kadjinol-Kafone, 2 August 1978.

49 She eventually moved to Bathurst, The Gambia, where she became a Muslim. Sihendoo abandoned the Church and became an important awasena priest (interviews with: Edouard Manga, Kadjinol-Kafone, 2 August 1978; Sihendoo Manga, Kadjinol-Kafone, 15 July 1978).


51 In mission usage, catechumenate status is assigned to a person who regularly attends catechism in preparation for baptism. During the years 1930–34, the baptised and catechumenate Christians never numbered more than 150 people in Kadjinol (population 2,287), 96 in Mlomp (population 2,832), and 105 in Kagnout (population 1,367). PSE: 'Station de Ste Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus à Oussouye, par Ziguinchor, Casamance'.


53 Interview with Edouard Manga of Kadjinol-Kafone, 2 August 1978.

54 Interview with Father Pierre Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 31 December 1978.


56 This is still done today. In many homes there is a large crucifix over each entrance to the house. Many awasena homes have Diola or Muslim medicines over each entrance.

57 Djougoutes is north of the Casamance river. Interview with Antoine Houmandrissah Diedhio, Kadjinol-Kafone, 23 April 1978.


60 Diola discontent was fuelled by the government's burdensome requisitions of rice and cattle during the Second World War.

61 Interview with François Buloti Diatta, Kadjinol-Kafone, 7 October 1974.

62 'I am not uprooted. I understand the customs' (interview, Mlomp, 13 May 1975).

63 Interview with Girard Senghor, Kadjinol-Hassouka, 31 March 1975.

64 Interview with Father Antonio Salla, Mlomp Mission, 9 April 1975.

65 Interview with Father Miguel, Diembering Mission, 1 May 1978.


68 Interview with Father Pierre Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 31 December 1978.

69 Interviews with Father Earnest Sambou, Kadjinol-Kagneao, 14 March 1978 and 22 August 1978.

70 Something that was done in many rural Catholic parishes in the state of Ohio during the 1988 drought.

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Résumé

L’émersion du Christianisme chez les Diola

Cet article examine l’histoire du Christianisme au sein d’un sous-groupe de la population Diola du Sud sénégalais. Après une critique des théories existantes sur la conversion en Afrique, il analyse le processus d’interaction continu entre les croyances diola traditionnelles et les éléments propres à la foi chrétienne. Il suggère cinq façons de résoudre les tensions entre les aspects anciens et les aspects nouveaux du système de croyance du converti. Ces modèles sont appliqués à l’examen de l’histoire religieuse des Diola-Esulalu, une communauté comptant 15,000 personnes environ, au cours des cent dernières années. Il apparaît que lorsque les tensions entre la foi chrétienne et les croyances traditionnelles deviennent trop fortes, les Esulalu embrassent à nouveau la religion traditionnelle ou s’isolent de la communauté traditionnelle. L’article examine aussi deux voies d’évolution où les croyants diola ont cherché à tirer parti des avantages des deux traditions religieuses de façon à créer un système religieux susceptible de répondre à leurs besoins spirituels.