Influence of Traditional Prayers on the Communication of the Gospel in the Agikuyu Community

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of Agikuyu traditional prayers on communicating the gospel in the Kikuyu community in Muranga County. The study focused on three specific objectives: analyze the structure, occasion, and performance of Agikuyu traditional prayers; explore key symbols, images, and beliefs that shape prayers; and establish how Agikuyu traditional prayers influence the communication of the Gospel. The study used the qualitative research method. The study participants were interviewed, and others filled out an open-ended questionnaire. In addition, five recorded Agikuyu prayers were reviewed. The study indicates that Agikuyu traditional prayers, punctuated with a particular chant (*thai thathaiya Ngai thai*), are mainly communal. Sacrifices and libation accompany prayers, unlike Christianity, where Christ is regarded as the ultimate sacrifice. These prayers were mainly offered during a calamity or a rite of passage celebration. Having the Agikuyu supreme being domesticated around Mt. Kenya means less focus is on the people from other communities and places.

Keywords: Agikuyu Prayers, Gospel, Sacrifices and Offerings, African Traditional Prayers.

Introduction

The African continent is home to many religions. There is a difference between how these religions were practiced in the pre-colonial era and how they are presently practiced. In the pre-colonial and colonial eras, the relationship between these religions was sometimes marked by hostility and mutual exclusion. Given the current quest for inter-religious dialogue, there have been efforts to ensure the engagements are defined by mutual respect and understanding. This new posture of less fighting and more collaboration is preferred because it is not

envisioned that either religion will become extinct.[1] Therefore, the relationship between Christianity and traditional religions is critical in understanding how African Christians understand and relate to God. Prayer is one of the ways people can cope with stressful situations in life. For this to be realized, there must be a strong bond between God and those praying to Him.[2] Boaheng examined how Akan Christians of Ghana engage in prayers and noted that although the Christians are committed to prayers, they have not internalized the content of their prayers from an African perspective because of their language. He argues that to internalize prayers well, one must also be able to pray using their mother tongue.[3] It is also clear that prayer, instrumental to how people connect with God, has a significant role in either catalyzing collaboration or conflict between two or more religions.

In the Agikuyu community, prayers are offered mainly during great need. The Supreme Deity was not supposed to be bothered so much when the community was experiencing prosperity. Prayers are primarily done during epidemics, drought, or during the different rites of passage. In the Agikuyu, the Supreme Deity is believed to be interested only in the issues facing a community. In case of individual need, one is encouraged to consult the traditional doctor and then the living dead, and if no solution is found, they can proceed and engage with the divine.[4]

Problem Statement

Christianity has been one of the dominant religions in the Kikuyu community, but it continues to face cultural challenges, false teachings, and unbiblical practices. Many gospel musicians have switched to singing songs that praise the traditional God of the Agikuyu. Likewise, some gospel ministers have struggled to define the relationship between Christianity and the Agikuyu traditional religious beliefs. Notable political leaders who profess to be Christians still have allegiance to the Agikuyu traditional religion. During the rites of passage, some families mix Agikuyu traditional and Christian ways of conducting the ceremonies. This scenario creates confusion on how Christians from the Agikuyu community should relate to their cultural background. Therefore, there should be a proper understanding of the gospel and key cultural elements that become a bridge in communicating the gospel.

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[1] David T. Adamo, "Christianity and the African Traditional Religion(s): The Postcolonial Round of Engagement," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32, no. 1 (March 4, 2011): 10 pages, https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v32i1.285.

[2] Marcin Wnuk, "Bond with God as a Moderator of the Relationship between Prayer and Stress of Chilean Students," *Religions* 14 (March 6, 2023), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030345.

[3] Isaac Boaheng, "An Akan Reading of Matthew's Version of the Lord's Prayer (Bono-Twi Translation) in Dialogue with Akan Libation Prayers" 2 (December 1, 2021): 41–58, https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-7644/2021/v2n2a3.

[4] John S Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa*, Three (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1970), 198.

Prayers have been one of the primary ways of communicating with the divine in any religion; thus, this study determines how Agikuyu traditional prayer influences the communication of the gospel. The study sought to address the phenomenon of prayer in the Agikuyu community and its influence on the communication of the Gospel. The study will enable the church to know how to respond to the questions on the relationship between Christian and Agikuyu traditional prayers and avoid syncretism.

Specific Objectives

   i.   To analyze the structure, occasions, and performance of Agikuyu Traditional Prayers.
   ii. To explore the key symbols, images, and beliefs that shape Agikuyu traditional prayers in Murang'a County.
   iii. To establish how Agikuyu traditional prayers influence the communication of the gospel.

Research Questions

   i.   What are the components of Agikuyu traditional prayers in Murangá County?
   ii. What are the key symbols, images, and beliefs shaping Agikuyu traditional prayers in Muranga County?
   iii. How do Agikuyu traditional prayers influence the communication of the Gospel in Murangá County?

Literature Review

Prayer is a critical discipline in any religion and central to how different people practice religion. Prayer is argued to be the most vital component of theology as it is the way of communicating with God [5] Wayne Grudem defines Christian prayer as "personal communication with God." [6] Karl Rahner defines prayers as "the explicit and positive realization of our natural and supernatural relationship with the personal God of salvation. It realizes the essence of the religious act." He adds that prayer constitutes all religious acts directly or indirectly related to God. [7]

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[5] Marilyn Mccord Adams, "Prayer as the 'Lifeline of Theology,'" *Anglican Theological Review* 98, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 271–83, https://doi.org/10.1177/000332861609800203.
[6] Wayne Gruden, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction of Biblical Doctrine* (InterVarsity: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 376.
[7] David Marshall and Lucinda Mosher, *Prayer: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 41.

Eriksen notes that prayers play a significant role in understanding the core of any church and its missions.[8] One can learn a lot about a religion by focusing on prayer. Prayers are understood to be either private or collective prayers.

Personal prayers benefit an individual's spiritual formation. It allows one to be vulnerable before God and confess their sins. Praying leads to a deeper connection with God than in a cooperative setting.[9] Collective prayers allow for involvement to establish a sense of belonging. With this established connection, people can focus on one thing that affects them all. Given this connection, corporate prayers enhance community among those involved, benefiting everyone involved. Having a balanced approach to private and corporate prayers is healthy for the growth of a believer.

Prayer in the African Christian Context

Prayer is a conversation with God influenced by one's desire to connect with God. Among Africans, prayer is one of the Christian disciplines observed with seriousness. One of the qualities that define prayers in the African context is the energy, passion, and loud voices. Although one would expect different approaches to prayer, most Christians in Africa use imprecatory prayers on almost every occasion.[10] According to Douglas, in Independent African churches, the place of loud sounds has been argued to represent the commitment of the believers to follow God. Prayer has also been claimed to be a strict discipline for Christians to exercise. The balance between praying for personal issues and others has also not been easy.[11] In his book Celebration of Disciplines, Foster notes that to pray is to change because prayer is the central way God uses to change us.[12] It would explain why, although many know the place of prayer in one's life, they fail to engage in prayer.

In the Christian faith, prayer is also a critical element of opening one's eyes to the beliefs about God that one has. How one talks to God in prayer significantly influences one's belief in God. To understand prayer in the Christian faith, one must study the different practices associated with prayers. One rule associated with prayer in Christianity is that it is

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[8] Stian Eriksen, "Changing the World through Prayer: Prayer as Mission Strategy among Migrant Churches in Norway," *Mission Studies* 35, no. 1 (2018): 124–51, https://doi.org/10.1163/15733831-12341550.

[9] Leslie J. Francis et al., "Modelling the Effect of Worship Attendance and Personal Prayer on Spiritual Well-Being among 9- to 11-Year-Old Students Attending Anglican Church Schools in Wales," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 23, no. 1 (February 2018): 30–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2017.1419938.

[10] Frederick Mawusi and Isaac Boaheng, "Use of Imprecatory Prayers in Contemporary African Christianity: A Critique" 1 (September 14, 2015): 86–104.

[11] Douglas E Christie, "The Joy of Feeling Close to God: The Practice of Prayer and the Work of Accompaniment," *Anglican Theological Review*, n.d.

[12] Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), 30.

done in private and public. All Christian traditions have a public form of prayer, making the faith more social than individualistic. The place of Scriptures is also central in the practice and discipline of prayer. Meditation, which is a reflective way of processing the knowledge of God and a vital part of the process of prayer, is possible when one has engaged with God's Word.[13]

Prayer is a significant practice in the life of a Christian as it is the means one can connect with God. Praying is an avenue for one to connect with a transcendent God. The connection one experiences when connecting with God in prayer is so influential as it is one of the ways to relate with the state of the soul. Therefore, it is right to view prayer as the surest way to enhance the connection between a human soul and God. Holding this view about prayer will lead one to have a holistic view of prayer.[14] Prayer is most effective when one is fully open to God. Prayer calls a person to connect with God emotionally, physically, and intellectually.[15] Thus, it enables a person to look at their life retrospectively and see the areas they need to change. A study among older women found that prayer connects them with God and others.[16] Therefore, prayer creates a connection between man and God and between two or more persons. When this established connection is sustained, it leads to a greater awareness of self.

Prayer in Traditional Religion

Prayer is one of the standard practices associated with traditional religions as a way of connecting with God.[17] African theologians concur that prayer is Africa's most common means of worship. The prayers Africans make to the supernatural are human-centered. Jomo Kenyatta, in his book *Facing Mount Kenya*, notes the following regarding the prayers by the Kikuyu community. The Kikuyu of Kenya pray to their Supreme God, 'Mwene- Nyaga,' expecting their prayers to be favorably answered in return for the presents offered. The prayers to the ancestors are governed also by the law of give-and-take.[18]

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[13] Marshall and Mosher, *Prayer: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, 42–50.

[14] Douglas E Christie, "The Joy of Feeling Close to God: The Practice of Prayer and the Work of Accompaniment," *Anglican Theological Review*, n.d.

[15] Derek R. Nelson, "The Speaking That Silence Is: Prayer as Openness to God," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 52, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 332–39, https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12069.

[16] Susan Perschbacher Melia, "Solitude and Prayer in the Late Lives of Elder Catholic Women Religious: Activity, Withdrawal, or Transcendence?," *Journal of Religious Gerontology* 13, no. 1 (March 2001): 47.

[17] Richard J Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2005), 321.

[18] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Traditional Life of the Gikuyu* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1978).

Idowu also affirms this view as the same purpose for prayers in the Yoruba culture. He notes that prayers are for material blessings, such as children and huge harvests. In Africa, prayers express human desire rather than a hunger and longing for fellowship with God. Adeyemo expresses that Africans do not long for God for the sake of fellowship but for immediate benefits.[19]

Many reasons make people in traditional religions come to God in prayer. Some pray regularly, while the majority pray when there is a crisis or as our way of thanking God for doing something good for them. Most of the time, prayers are made through invocations and appeals. Some of these appeals follow specific formulae, while others are random. Different cultures adopt many positions during times of prayer. Postures like sitting and standing are the most common among many traditional religions. Facing a specific direction is a standard quality of how prayers are conducted. In the Gikuyu community, worshipers face Mount Kenya.[20] Prayers play a crucial role in enhancing the relationship one has with the supreme being in any given culture.

Comparison of Christianity and Traditional Religions Prayers

There is a need to explore areas of convergence between these two religions, especially given their inevitable co-existence in Africa. A study done in Siera Leone painted a not-so-good image where Christianity disregards traditional religions from ecumenical conversations by stating that these religions are primitive and that the majority of practitioners are already Christians. This approach does not promote co-existence but fuels animosity.[21] The existence of conflicts between these two religions is also expounded by Onuzulike, whose study examines how Christianity has struggled to penetrate Nigeria because of a lack of appreciation of the place of traditional religions. The paper argues that African culture is embedded in traditional religions; therefore, exploring the relationship between these two religions is critical.[22]

Christian and Traditional Beliefs and Practices on Prayer

One of the main things that affect one's prayers is believing in God as the creator of all things. When one views God as powerful, and it is because of Him that all things exist, then a

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[19] Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Salvation: In African Tradition* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 35–36.
[20] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa*, 195–210.
[21] Prince Sorie Conteh, "The Place of African Traditional Religion in Interreligious Encounters in Sierra Leone Since the Advent of Islam And Christianity," 2008.
[22] Uchenna Onuzulike, "'African Crossroads: Conflicts between African Traditional Religion and Christianity,'" *International Journal of the Humanities* 6 (January 1, 2008): 163–70, https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9508/CGP/v06i02/42362.

person's faith in God is deeply rooted, and they can pray without doubting God's ability to meet their needs. This view of God as a creator is held by many people; many people engage in the discipline of prayers even when their hearts do not fully believe in other aspects of God.[23] When one is fully engaged in prayers, one's understanding of God as a creator is enhanced by one's ability to live a life that honors God.[24] Ndemanu argues that traditional beliefs and practices influence one's thought processes and worldviews in the Bangwa community in Cameroon.[25] Given that one's prayers are significantly influenced by one's worldview and thought process, it is, therefore, accurate that one's traditional beliefs affect how someone engages in prayers.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research approach, and the primary data collection method was interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Qualitative research is appropriate for studying human behavior, like how people pray. This is because it is possible to engage the respondents to understand why they do what they do. By appropriating this approach, the study could engage the issue of prayer comprehensively.[26] Rahman affirmed this view while discussing the advantages of qualitative research design.[27]

Target Population

The target population is the total count of all possible people that the study focused on in collecting data and whose characteristics expounded on prayer among the Kikuyu community[28]. The target population of this study was 18,498 people.[29] People comprised of males and females from the Agikuyu community aged 35 years and above from Muguru Ward, Muranga County, Kenya. Church members from the Anglican and Full Gospel

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[23] Gerrit Immink, "The Sense of God's Presence in Prayer," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72 (November 28, 2016), https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.4122.

[24] "What Does Prayer Teach Us about God?," accessed October 11, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X211028949.

[25] Michael T Ndemanu, "Traditional African Religions and Their Influences on the Worldviews of Bangwa People of Cameroon: Expanding the Cultural Horizons of Study Abroad Students and Professionals," no. 1 (2018).

[26] Haradhan Kumar Mohajan, "Qualitative Research Methodology in Social Sciences and Related Subjects," *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People* 7, no. 1 (March 30, 2018): 23, https://doi.org/10.26458/jedep.v7i1.571.

[27] Md Shidur Rahman, "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language 'Testing and Assessment' Research: A Literature Review," *Journal of Education and Learning* 6, no. 1 (November 10, 2016): 102, https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v6n1p102.

[28] Michael Willie, "Differentiating Between Population and Target Population in Research Studies," June 23, 2022, https://doi.org/10.47191/ijmscrs/v2-i6-14.

[29] Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, ed., *2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census* (Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Churches were engaged. Members of *Kiama Kiama* who have engaged in Agikuyu traditional prayers were also interviewed. This is a group of Kikuyu elders who are determined to re-stating that reverting to the Kikuyu culture is the surest way to guarantee the stability of the Kikuyu community. This target population was carefully selected so that they were able to provide relevant information on the subject of prayer. Key informants in the study included scholars, theologians, and clergy members.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study employed a non-probability sampling technique to arrive at the sample. Purposive and snowball sampling methods were employed. The study employed a purposive method to engage members of the local churches, while snowballing was used to engage members of Kiama-Kiama and other key informants. Data was collected until the study achieved a saturation level.[30] A triangulation approach was employed to confirm saturation. The thick description was used to enhance saturation, where the study sought to be as detailed as possible in the engagement with the respondents.[31]

Data Collection Instrument

The study employed semi-structured interviews among the key informants. The conversations during the discussions were carried out using interview guide questions developed in advance. Open-ended questionnaires were also used to collect data from church members and members of Kiama Kiama. Participant observation was also employed, and the data was captured using an observation checklist.

Data Analysis

Data from the Interviews was transcribed and translated into English (where the recording was done in Kikuyu). Data from open-ended questionnaires and participant observation checklists was compiled and analyzed following the objectives. The study carried out data analysis of all the data obtained from all the data collection instruments. The researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the data. Once that was done, the different themes were assigned different labels. The researcher then categorized the data, generated the key themes, and then did the write-up where narrations were used.

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[30] Benjamin Saunders et al., "Saturation in Qualitative Research: Exploring Its Conceptualization and Operationalization," *Quality & Quantity* 52 (July 1, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8.
[31] Kelvin Mwita, "Factors Influencing Data Saturation in Qualitative Studies," *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147-4478)* 11 (June 5, 2022): 414–20, https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v11i4.1776.

Findings of the Study

Occasions Agikuyu traditional prayers are offered

Agikuyu prayers were mainly held when an occurrence such as drought or famine affected the community. One informant said, "You do not bother God with small things." Small things touched someone personally. For small things, one needed to engage with their ancestors. The engagement one would have with ancestors was not known as *mahoya,* which meant prayers, but was called *kuhorohia* or to appease. Such a view pointed to an image of the deity who only gets involved in the affairs of men when they are touching the community and not an individual. Although individual prayers were made in the Agikuyu community, this was not individual praying for themselves but communal prayers offered on behalf of an individual. Some of the reasons for such prayers were done when someone was sick or struck by lightning.[32]

The other set of communal prayers was done during the rites of passage. These would include the celebration of new births, initiation, and dowry during the funeral services. In times like marriage, the prayers were on thanksgiving; during circumcisions, the prayers were for integration because this man needed to be integrated into the community. The prayers were said to help the circumcised person connect with those who have been circumcised before him. According to Nwadiokwu et al., rites of passage greatly influenced African culture. In the Agikuyu community, a pregnant woman could not sleep in the same room with farm implements to ensure they would not harm her.[33]

The communal prayers would also be conducted when there is a unique occurrence in the community. The falling of a Mugumo tree would qualify as an exceptional occurrence warranting a time of communal prayers. Prayers are made after the falling of a *mugumo* tree, and elders conduct prayers with women observing from a distance. The same is seen when elders seek permission from the Supreme Being to cut down a *mugumo* tree.

Performance of Agikuyu Traditional Prayers

Only men who fit specific criteria can facilitate prayers. These criteria included having nothing to do with any evil, either a man thought to have no sexual feelings or was done with family matters. The elders would also take some days fasting to be declared holy before God while conducting the prayers. The person who met these criteria was called an '*Amunagatho*'.

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[32] Gerald Joseph Wanjohi, "African Conception of God: The Case of the Gikuyu," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 9, no. 2 (1978): 136–46.

[33] Dr C N Nwadiokwu et al., "Rites of Passage African Traditional Region" 4, no. 9 (2016).

Amunagatho was a highly respected office, and one had to go through the other main stages of becoming a Kikuyu elder. Those helping the facilitator would also be men, but women would be present at different prayer occasions.

Structure of the Agikuyu Traditional Prayers

The statement '*thai thathayia ngai thai*' is the most common chant in the Agikuyu traditional prayers. Whenever the leader of the prayers said these words, the other participants responded affirmatively by saying the exact words. The leader begins with a phrase, and then the audience responds. The leaders say some prayers, and the audience repeats the common phrases as the leader continues. This chat, therefore, is one of the most common parts of the Agikuyu traditional prayers, and the prayers can be summarized as a call and response. The prayers begin with acknowledging God, praising him, and then making the petitions. The prayers were generally short, but the reason for making the prayer was a significant determinant of the time the prayers would take. The focus on God did not come with many words; they were straight and to the point. The study found that the frequency of the prayers was complex to quantify in terms of time, but the prayers were done on a need or seasonal basis. In Christianity, the length of the prayer is also determined by the need, but according to different denominations, prayer takes different formats. Common phrases are observed during the prayers, but again, they differ per denomination.

Symbols, Images, and Beliefs that Shape Prayers in Muranga County

The place where the prayers are conducted

The *Mugumo* tree was a unique place for the Agikuyu traditional prayers. Other areas highlighted included riverbanks, designated shrines like *Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga*, and venues where an occasion is held (like at a homestead during a rite of passage like *ruracio)*. Karangi notes that this *mugumo* tree is a principal site for worship and ritual sacrifices.[34] Not all *mugumo* trees were treated the same. The ones where the ancestors were known to conduct sacrifices were regarded even more highly. Such a *mugumo* could not be cut before making a sacrifice to request permission from the Supreme Being.

Belief in the Supreme Being

Agikuyu believed that the Supreme Being is the creator of everything and is all-powerful. One can see in the belief that God created all the mountains and that he lives on Mt Kenya. He

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[34] MatthewM. Karangi, "Revisiting the Roots of Gikuyu Culture through the Sacred Mugumo Tree," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 20, no. 1 (June 2008): 117–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/13696810802159339.

should be approached respectfully and not bothered with small things. Only the matters that touched the entire community were to be brought before him. When things are going very well, God is not involved in the affairs of men. He only gets involved when things have gone wrong. It is also believed that he will always answer the prayers made. If there were no answers to prayers, they would be made again, and the people would deeply reflect if they sinned against the deity.

Conversely, In Christianity, the belief is that the Supreme Being is the creator, but He is also available to intervene in all things that touch humanity. These include what would be considered personal and small and not to bother God with. Unlike in Agikuyu traditional religion, in Christianity, it is believed that God is never tired of being engaged by human beings. In Agikuyu, God is removed from the day-to-day engagement of the people, and when one wants to confront him, one must get someone respected in the community to engage with them on their behalf.

Belief in Ancestors and the Spirit World

In Agikuyu, the living is always connected to the dead. The living must appease the spirit of the dead, known as '*ngomi.*' Agikuyu believed three attendees were at every meeting: the unborn, the born, and the living dead. Because of this, Agikuyu enormously respects the place of ancestral worship. When one has personal challenges, the solution is to examine where the person might have wronged the living dead. One way to ensure the spirits were well appeased was to pour libation. Pouring libation meant informing the ancestors about what the living were doing. When serving alcohol, known as *muratina,* they will ensure they serve until it overflows, and what would pour down was meant for the ancestors. The practice was done every time elders would take *muratina*.

Agikuyu strongly believed in a vital power (*Hinya*) and the ancestors (*Ngoma*). The other belief was on the place of a Supreme Being(*Ngai*), which was complementary in that one could not have one and deny the other. The coming of missionaries found it hard to reconcile how one can believe in God and yet hold the belief in ancestors with the high regard the Agikuyu did.[35] The idea of the name of evil spirits or the devil was translated as *ngoma,* according to one member of the *Kiama Kiama,* because the missionaries convinced the Agikuyu that what they called ancestors was equal to evil spirits. As a result, the missionaries

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[35] Kamuyu-Wa-Kang'ethe, "African Response to Christianity: A Case Study of the Agikuyu of Central Kenya," *Missiology* 16, no. 1 (January 1988): 23–44.

could not have the correct view of the Agikuyu culture, given that the Agikuyu religion and culture are the same.

Belief in Sacrifices and Offerings

Sacrifices were part of the prayers; without them, the process of coming to God in prayer would not be complete. Sacrifices were mainly in the form of a goat. The sacrifices are used to appease God so that the petitions can be granted. Agikuyu also had a 'granary of god.' A house was built along the road. After the harvesting period, community members would put the equivalent of 10% in the granary of god. The foodstuff was meant for the unprivileged in the community. In the Agikuyu traditional prayers, every time prayers were made to God, a goat or sheep would be slaughtered and offered as a sacrifice.

Prayer Beliefs and Practices and Communication of the Gospel

Inform Preaching of the Gospel

Agikuyu's traditional beliefs are that the Supreme Being is domiciled in Mount Kenya and that there is no intermediary between the people and their God. This has made preaching about Jesus Christ a challenge. The Christian faith is perceived as foreign and does not locate God in one specific place. Given the belief in place of ancestors in one's life, many Kikuyu preachers are studying more about the ancestors and other cultural practices than the scriptures. One way this is expressed is in the examples they cite in their sermons and applications. Today, preaching is "influenced more by the cultural views than the Holy Spirit." Some see Christ as foreign and advocate for duality in light of culture and Christ. Some sermons have been made to take this direction.

Informing one's character and lifestyle

Many Christians find their faith in conflict with Agikuyu traditional beliefs, especially when they are going through rites of passage like circumcision and marriage. Many Christians opt to have their allegiance to both Christianity and Agikuyu traditional beliefs. These beliefs have led to Christians who call themselves Agikuyu Christians. These are those who are first Agikuyu and then Christians. Many Christians are challenged to determine to what extent they can have traditional beliefs that inform how they practice their rites of passage. Most of them opt to have both beliefs inform how they carry out their practices. According to Lindhardt, this same tension is seen among the Pentecostal Charismatics in Tanzania in their relationship with

traditional religions.[36] This identity crisis, in my view, has led many to abandon Christianity or become syncretic in their conduct.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Agikuyu traditional prayers are offered on specific occasions, which include when there is a calamity, and it affects the whole community. Another occasion that would warrant a time for prayer is the celebration of rites of passage. In response to the structure of Agikuyu traditional prayers, this study concludes that the Agikuyu traditional prayers are characterized by a common chant, '*thai thaiyaiya Ngai thai.*' The prayers are also facilitated by an elder known as Amunagatha, who is respected in the community. The study further concludes that Agikuyu traditional prayers are shaped by some key beliefs, like in sacrifices and offerings, but also in the place of ancestors in influencing the affairs of the living.

Concerning the influence of Agikuyu traditional prayers on the Communication of the Gospel, the study concludes that because of the inclination to their ancestral spirit, the communication of the gospel through preaching focuses less on Christ and His work on the cross, and the people are reminded to watch their relationship with the departed. The study also concludes that because the Supreme Being was domesticated in Mount Kenya in the Agikuyu traditional religion, there is minimal emphasis on fellowship with people from other tribes- e.g., what is fostered through church-organized circumcision.

The church should develop a liturgy that can be used in communal meetings. There should be an organized way for the church to support those going through the rites of passage. Many times, the church leader is not well-guided on how to help young men during their circumcision. The Agikuyu elders have raised concerns that the boys are neglected, ultimately meaning the whole community will lose. The same applies when the church supports someone through their wedding plans.

There is a need for a good balance between proclamation and demonstration or social transformation. There has been this divide in some Christian circles; in some denominations, either side has been affirmed. The study has shown that communal prayers are held in the Agikuyu traditional religion because they affect the community. When the Christian faith emphasizes living right and remaining faithful to God so that we shall go to Heaven, the

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[36] Martin Lindhardt, "Pentecostalism and the Encounter with Traditional Religion in Tanzania: Combat, Congruence and Confusion," *PentecoStudies* 16, no. 1 (2017): 35–58, https://doi.org/10.1558/ptcs.32092.

Agikuyu traditional religion lacks something because it does not respond to the issues affecting the people.

The lack of solid demonstration of the work of Christ and salvation in the lives of Christians becomes a discouragement for others to consider Christianity. When those in the Christian faith are not able to show love to people from different tribes and involve them in their family activities, then what Christ has done in them is not visible to the outside world. When preaching the Gospel in church does not provide alternative solutions to the issues people are going through but draws them to the ancestors, the power of the Gospel is weakened.

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