Inculturation Task: Rooting the Gospel Firmly in Luo Culture

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Abstract

Inculturation refers to embodying the Christian message in a specific cultural setting through elements unique to the culture while serving as a guiding principle that unifies and revitalizes the church. In this study, the author argues that evangelization in the Luo culture must incorporate the principles of inculturation in order to have a deep and meaningful impact. This approach allows for the critical integration of culture into the church's life, moving away from the traditional one-way approach to evangelization and towards a more interactive and complementary process. Using library research, this paper argues that inculturation is needed for the gospel to make a lasting impact in the Luo culture. Through inculturation, the church can reassess its evangelizing mission, building on its past successes and redefining its objectives and direction. This paper highlights themes such as family, marriage, hospitality, veneration of ancestors, respect of the elders, and death as critical in rooting the gospel firmly in the Luo culture.

Keywords: Incarnation; Inculturation; Luo; Culture; Christianisation; African Christianity.

Introduction

One of the most challenging problems the Christian community has faced in the 21st century is how to relate the Christian gospel to different cultures. Unfortunately, some have termed certain cultures evil and condemned communities for their cultural practices, while others have adapted to their practices and uncritically accepted everything in a culture. In most instances, the message Africans received from the missionaries was that their culture and traditional practices were no good. Edusa-Eyison states that the Western missionaries did not respect the people's culture as "everything Africa was primitive, pagan, fetish, and heathen in the eyes of Europe."[1] In this respect, most of the Africans were told that in order to become

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[1] Edusa-Eyison, J. M. Y., "Kwesi A. Dickson: The Bible and African Life and Thought in Dialogue," in African Theology in the 21st Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers, Vol. 2, edited by B. Bujo, & J. I. Muya (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006), 93-123.

Christians, they must renounce their cultural practices and accept that of the Europeans. This teaching made people develop inferiority complexes concerning their cultural identity. According to Schreiter, it "undermined African Christians in two ways: by demeaning their own sense of worth and dignity as Africans."[2]

It is essential to relate well with a particular culture to reach them. Thus, this paper contends that the integration of the gospel into the Luo culture is paramount. Through inculturation, a more deeply Christianized community can emerge, fostering transformation across various aspects of life. Waliggo alludes that "the simple rules of communication require that the speaker adapts himself to the audience, and his message, in order to be understood by his audience, has to be clothed in the thought patterns of the hearers."[3]

This paper argues that the Christian gospel message cannot be limited to one cultural expression. It analyses the historical example that illustrates the concept of inculturation and the various theological approaches to this process. It explores potential methods for transforming identified cultural themes of the Luo community through inculturation. In the 21st century, the task of spreading the gospel in African cultures lies primarily in the hands of Africans, who should take the inculturation process seriously. In light of this, it is suggested in this article that the church in the Luo community must prioritize inculturation as an essential and pressing aspect of their mission to spread the faith.

Literature Review

Brief Historical Background of the Luo Community

The Luo community forms part of the Nilotes. Concerning their origin, Ogot asserts that "the cradle land of the Nilotes is a difficult historical problem which, like the original homeland of the Bantu, has so far defied any satisfactory solution."[4] He cites J. P. Crazzolara, who locates the Nilotic cradle land to the west of the Nile in the Barhr-el-Ghazal just to the south of the area today occupied by the Dinka, about 50 miles south of Rumbek.[5] The Nilotes built their villages and permanent settlements on the higher and relatively flood-free ground, leaving the vast grasslands to provide pasture for the cattle."[6] During the rainy season, "they moved their

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[2] Schreiter, R. J., "Jesus Christ in Africa Today," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, edited by R. J, Schreiter (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), viii.

[3] Waliggo J.M. "Making A Church that is Truly African." In: Crollius R. A., Nkeraminhigo et al. (eds.), *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*. Nairobi: St. Paul`s Publications, 1996, 14.

[4] Bethwell, Ogot. *Peoples of East Africa: History of the Southern Luo*. Nairobi, Kenya: East African Publishing House (Digitized Oct, 2008), 40.

[5] Ogot. "*Peoples of East Africa,*" 41.

[6] Ogot. "*Peoples of East Africa,*" 41.

heads to the rivers in the flood-plains, which provided them not only with green pastures for their cattle but also with lagoons and pools in which to fish."[7]

One would wonder what caused the migration of the Nilotes from their cradle land. In an attempt to answer this question, Ogot states, "Soon, due either to overpopulation or overstocking or because of external factors, the Nilotes started to expand. First to leave were the Dinka and the Nuer, whose traditional evidence indicates that they have only moved a short distance from their original home."[8] The other Nilotic sub-groups, including the Luo speakers, moved southward towards the Juba-Nimule area.[9] However, the movement of the Luo from the North into Uganda and Western Kenya was slow and spread over several generations until the 20th century.[10] Ongong'a Jude remarks that the Luo, being a nomadic group, possibly left their original land in search of suitable pasturage due to their demographic increase and fear of being absorbed by their neighbors.[11]

Concerning the meaning of the name Luo and its migration patterns, Ogong'a states,

> According to the tradition of the Luo elders, the name 'Luo' was derived from the fact that members of this group of Nilotes were constantly following one another in groups in search of better pasturage. Their constant movement was determined by geographical conditions, like floods along the Nile and frequent droughts. Each time a lineage unit moved ahead, it was followed by another. Such migrations were usually taken along the rivers, as has been said. Now the Luo word *Luwo* designates following after one another. The same word is used for following along the river or mountain.[12]

Ongong'a states that the Luo community did not have kings or law enforcers. One would expect to find a chaotic society without any proper leadership. However, the author narrates that "they were politically autonomous units that respected socio-religious political functions of the father, the head of the compound, the medicine man, and the elders."[13] The society was made up of clans composed of lineages of extended families. Each clan had its own territory and leadership.[14]

Brief History and Usage of the Term Inculturation

In this section, the researcher establishes the theological foundation for inculturation by presenting different terminologies that preceded the term inculturation. A concise overview

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[7] Ogot. "*Peoples of East Africa,"* 41.
[8] Ogot. "*Peoples of East Africa,"* 42.
[9] Ogot. "*Peoples of East Africa,"* 42.
[10] Ogot. "*Peoples of East Africa,"* 42-43.
[11] Jude, Ongang'a. "The River-lake Luo Phenomenon of Death: a Base for Religious Interlocutors." *In Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa,* (1998) 224-39. (S.I): Cardiff Acad Pr,7.
[12] Ongang'a, "The River-lake Luo Phenomenon of Death," 8.
[13] Ongang'a. "The River-lake Luo Phenomenon of Death," 8.
[14] Ongang'a. "The River-lake Luo Phenomenon of Death," 9.

of the historical development and usage of inculturation will also be provided, along with its meaning and significance. Numerous writers have tried to employ various terms to describe the interaction between the Christian message and African culture.

The primary foundation of engaging in theological study revolves around the pursuit of comprehending the nature of God. Through this pursuit, we realize that God surpasses any specific cultural framework. He cannot be confined to operate solely within the boundaries of one particular culture. Consequently, theology takes on its true significance when it is practiced within the context of diverse cultures and everyday realities. By doing so, theology becomes authentic, applicable, and directly pertinent to our lives. It follows Umeh's submission that "theology should always articulate God in a way that He will be understandable to the people." [15] Before introducing the term "inculturation," other terminologies were utilized. In an endeavor to clarify the concept of inculturation, several related terms have emerged. This article defines related terms such as adaptation, indigenization, contextualization, enculturation, acculturation, and incarnation.

Adaptation

The term adaptation originates from the Latin word "*adaptare*," which means adjusting something to an existing thing in order to achieve balance, perfection, or maximum potential.[16] Adaptation implies that certain traditional rites and customs are selected, purified, and inserted within Christian rituals where there is any similarity. In Africa, the term 'adaptation' was initially accepted with joy and great enthusiasm, "but later, it was realized that adaptation meant a peripheral, superficial activity that contained some elements of Western dominance. It was therefore rejected and not accepted."[17] Even though this term has been criticized as inadequate, it still has theological relevance in the church today. According to Schineller, "Adaptation refers to a more creative method of pastoral activity, by which we try to adapt the message we share and the liturgy we celebrate to the customs of those we work among."[18] In the words of Schineller, adaptation means making fit, which implies that one takes serious listening and studying a particular culture to adapt to it. According to many critics, 'adaptation' is deemed insufficient and seen as a means of imposing without genuine consideration for the local culture.

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[15] Emmanuel C. Umeh. *African Theology of Solidarity.* Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 2008, 8.

[16] Rey, Alain,*Dictionnaire historique de la langue française.*Paris, Armand Colin, 2011, 3-4.

[17] Mawasi, Emmanuel, *Inculturation: Rooting the Gospel Firmly in Ghanian Culture*, 2009, 57.

[18] Peter Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation.* New York: Paulist Press, 1990, 16.

Acculturation

Acculturation is "the encounter between one culture and another, or the encounter between cultures."[19] The term shows the contact between cultures together. Acculturation pertains to the encounter between one culture and another, or the encounter between cultures, which brings about cultural change.[20] Acculturation is borrowing traits and elements between diverse people, eventually resulting in new and blended patterns.

Enculturation

According to Alyward, enculturation is "the cultural learning process of the individual, the process by which a person is inserted into his or her culture."[21] It involves adapting and being immersed in one's culture to understand its customs and beliefs. Through this process, individuals are taught the expectations and values of their society. Enculturation can occur without conscious effort through the influence of cultural events and behaviors.

Contextualization

According to Imbisa, "contextualization is the weaving together of the Gospel with every particular situation. It does not speak of cultures but of contexts or situations into which the Gospel must be inculturated."[22] The concept of contextualization does not explicitly refer to culture but rather to the various situations and scenarios in which the gospel is adapted to fit. It entails the act of conveying or interpreting the gospel through the use of local expressions and language, as well as culturally appropriate methods. Hesselgrave and Rommen defined Christian contextualization as "...The attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation . . . and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts."[23]

Indigenization

According to Kalilombe, "Indigenization means the effort to Africanize Christian doctrine, cult, pastoral practices, and art, basing them on African culture and religious tradition."[24] This definition meant that foreign missionary structures were replaced with African faces in the church so that the church appeared less foreign but more local. Schreiter contends,

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[19] Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation,* 16.

[20] Shorter Aylward, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation.* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1999, 8.

[21] Aylward, "*Toward a Theology of Inculturation",* 5

[22] Imbisa. *Inculturation.* Mambo Press, Gweru, Zimbabwe, 1993, 43.

[23] David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods and Models*, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000, 199.

[24] Kalilombe P. A., "Black Theology," in D. F. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*. New York/ London: Basil Blackwell, 2005, 202.

"Indigenization emphasizes that theology is done by and for a given geographical area by local people for their area rather than by outsiders."[25] Writing from the social sciences, Mark Mullins argues that "Indigenization is understood more broadly as the process whereby foreign-born religions are transformed through contact with native religion and culture ... [and] includes cultural adaptations in social organization, liturgy, leadership, and theology."[26]

Inculturation

The term inculturation was coined by anthropologist Melville Herskovits in the 1930s, although with no theological meaning.[27] The Society of Jesuits primarily pioneered the introduction of the term inculturation at the 32nd General Congregation in Rome from December 1974 to April 1975. Brian Stanley remarks that the idea of inculturation is much older than the term itself.[28] This word became popular and acceptable, and each society has its own culture, functioning as an integrated system of assumptions, practices, and symbols. This popularity came following the publication of a letter from the Superior General, Pedro Arrupe, in which he defined inculturation as follows, "The incarnation of Christian life and the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remarking it to bring about a new creation."[29]

The Jesuits utilized the Spanish term "enculturation," which was later translated to Latin as "inculturation." This concept is currently used in theological circles and refers to the dynamic interaction between the local church and the culture of its people. Inculturation involves placing the gospel within a specific culture transforming cultural expressions and values. At the same time, culture can contribute valuable elements that enhance gospel propagation. As a result, Christianity and the church are enriched by developing a new Christian message within the cultural context.

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[25] Schreiter, Robert J. *Constructing Local Theologies*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993, 5.

[26] Mullins, Mark R. "Christianity Transplanted: Toward a Sociology of Success and Failure," in *Perspectives on Christianity in Korea and Japan: The Gospel and Culture in East Asia.* Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995, 65.

[27] McGarry, Cecil (ed.). *What Happened at the African Synod?* Nairobi: St. Paul's Publications Africa, 1995, 52.

[28] Stanley, Brian. "Inculturation: Historical Background, Theological Foundations and Contemporary Questions" in *Transformation* 24/1 January, 2007, 21-27.

[29] Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation.* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999, 172.

Shorter argues that "the term inculturation can best be understood in the context of evangelizing in a cross-cultural setting."[30] Ndegwah expresses that inculturation means an honest and serious attempt to make Christ and the gospel understandable to people of every culture.[31] He further postulates that in Christian missiology, inculturation refers to "the adaption of the way the gospel is presented to specific cultures being evangelized."[32] To demonstrate how inculturation works, Aylward explains that "Christianity wears one cultural dress and encounters a non-Christian culture, and then incarnates itself in the new culture."[33] When this is done, the end result is that "Christianity will challenge and reform that culture. This scenario involves two processes, which include the concept of Christianity from a foreign culture and accommodating Christianity in the indigenous culture."[34] Ocso argues that "inculturation is not merely a social phenomenon but a spiritual and theological reality that takes place when a cultural tradition is put into contact with the Gospel or with a way of living the Gospel."[35]

According to Magesa, inculturation is "the process of rooting Christianity into a culture; celebrating liturgies in an African way; integrating cultural elements into Christian worship; evangelizing Africa in an African way; immersing the Christian faith in the local culture."[36] Waliggo provides an elaborate definition of inculturation as follows:

> Inculturation means the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation evermore understood by people of every culture, locality, and time. It means the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought pattern of each people. It is the conviction that Christ and his Good News are even dynamic and challenging to all times and cultures as they become better understood and lived by each people. It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity truly 'feel at home' in the cultures of each people.[37]

According to Magesa and Waliggo, the goal is to facilitate the connection between Christ's teachings and a community's customs. This is achieved through the practice of inculturation, where the gospel is shared with individuals from various cultures, allowing Christianity to influence and be influenced by different cultural environments through a more

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[30] Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation,* 87.

[31] Ndegwah, D. *Biblical Hermeneutics as a Tool for Inculturation in Africa: A Case Study of the Pokot People of Kenya.* Kijabe, Kenya: Creation Enterprises, 2007, 36.

[32] Ndegwah, *Biblical Hermeneutics as a Tool for Inculturation in Africa*, 65.

[33] Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation,* 69.

[34] Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation,* 72.

[35] Ocso, Armand, *"Kurisumala: An Example of Inculturation,"* *Istercian Studies Quartely* 40.3 (2005: 279-292), 280.

[36] Laurenti, Magesa. *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa*. Nairobi, Pauline Publications Africa, 2004, 62.

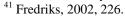[37] Waliggo, *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency.* 12.

profound understanding. Uzukwu states, "Inculturation is a process through which a mutual interaction between the gospel and people's cultures are enriched through sharing the culture of the host and the hosted."[38] According to this perspective, each individual believes their cultural and moral values have been embraced and acknowledged. Building upon the topic of inculturation, Tomko has defined it as follows, "the profound insertion of the Gospel in the very heart of a determinate culture so that the fertile seed of the faith can germinate, develop and fructify, according to the potentiality and peculiar character of that culture."[39] From this definition, the idea of inculturation is hinged on the Gospel message, a variable culture, and the challenge that the gospel presents to them. Nasimiyu elaborates that "the Jewish people adopted circumcision ritual from the Egyptians as a symbol of a covenant between God and the descendants of the patriarch Abraham (Genesis 17:9–14)."[40]

In inculturation, elements from other religions are subjected to Christian scrutiny and interpretation, rejecting false doctrines, superstitions, and all forms of sin and evil. This means that Christians draw their heritage elements consistent with their faith so that their faith can be enriched.

Theological Bases of Inculturation

The first step in inculturation is the understanding that creation manifests God's love in all created realities. As stipulated in John 1:3, all created things in heaven and on earth; everything visible and visible was created in the Word of God. While considering the theological bases of inculturation, the beginning point should be the study of divine revelation, which is the model and the source of all inculturation. In the second step, Christ's transformation of the world is affected by the process understood as incarnation. Fredriks argues that inculturation indicates "the process of incarnation or submergence of the gospel in a particular culture, a process which changes both the culture and the way in which the gospel is always transmitted in the cloth of a certain culture and needs to shed its cultural garment and reincarnate into a different shape when it encounters a new culture."[41] Lastly, through the process of incarnation, the church comes into existence and becomes localized and concretized in a human community. The church interprets the kingdom's mysteries through the local cultural forms and thus enriches the universal church.

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[38] Elochukwu Uzukwu. *A Listening Church*: *Autonomy and Communion in African Churches.* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006, 82.

[39] Josef Tomko, "Inculturation and African Marriage" *AFER*, Vol. 28, no. 3-4, (June-August), 2006, 155.

[40] Nasimiyu, A. Christology and an African Woman's Experience, In *Faces of Jesus in African.* Schreiter, Robert. (Ed). Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015, 78.

[41] Fredriks, 2002, 226.

Transformation of Some Luo Cultural Themes Through Inculturation

The concept of culture is central when discussing inculturation because the gospel, intended for all, must be integrated into every cultural context. When the gospel's message becomes a part of a specific culture, it becomes relevant and native. In this paper, we aim to explore the concept of culture while examining the Luo community's specific cultural themes and values and their potential role in promoting the inculturation of the Gospel in Africa.

Standaert argues, "Culture is the way or pattern of life, acquired through learning, which characterizes a human community."[42] The concept here is that an individual does not have their own culture but is a part of a larger culture. According to the document of the Vatican II Council on *The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, culture is defined as follows:

> The word culture in the general sense, refers to all those things which go to the refining and development of man's diverse and physical endowments. He strives to subdue the earth by his knowledge and by his labor; he humanizes social life both in the improvement of customs and institutions; he expresses through his works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations of men throughout the ages; he communicates and preserves them to be an inspiration for the progress of many, even of all mankind.[43]

Culture is the unique expression of a community, shaped by its members and their relationship with the world around them. It encompasses the knowledge, beliefs, and self-evaluation that define a group's identity and contribute to their overall well-being. According to Lutzbethak, "culture is basically a system of meaningful forms which provides human beings with a "shared design for living."[44] Culture is the way we do things. Eric Ayisi demonstrates some elements of culture as "implements, artifacts, paintings, figurines for religious observances, and all the integrative forces such as religion."[45]

Through the practice of inculturation, cultural norms and individuals are confronted by the principles of the gospel. Christians must embrace profound gospel values that may contradict certain cultural norms. The section below explores specific Luo cultural values and themes that are distinct and significant in inculturating the gospel. Some of these values have the potential to enhance the global church community.

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[42] Standaert, N. *Inculturation the Gospel and Cultures*, Manila: St. Paul`s Publications, 1994, 9.

[43] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 53.

[44] Loius Lutzbethak, *The Church and Culture: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology.* New York: Orbis, 2015, 61-63

[45] Eric Ayisi. *An Introduction to the Study of African Culture* (2nd edition). Nairobi: EAEP, 1992, 2.

The Family

The family is vital in African communities, serving as the fundamental unit of society. Among the Luo people, the family is esteemed highly, and those who do not belong to a specific family are considered outcasts. One finds recognition, security, and acceptance through the family, fostering a sense of belonging. Additionally, inheritance of land and other assets is passed down through the family. To integrate the gospel into African culture, the Fathers of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops suggested using the concept of the church as the family of God as a guiding principle for spreading the gospel throughout the continent. According to *Ecclesia in Africa,* "not only did the Synod speak of inculturation, but it also made use of it, taking the Church as God's family as its guiding idea for the evangelization in Africa."[46] The Synod Fathers recognized it as a manifestation of the church's essence that is especially fitting for Africa. This held significance because the church demonstrates concern for others, fosters a spirit of unity, cultivates warmth in human connections, embraces acceptance, promotes dialogue, and encourages trust.

The Christian family setting represents the family of God, which, in essence, is the church. The family in a Christian community should be considered as a domestic church in which new citizens are born. John Paul said "In African culture and tradition, the role of the family is everywhere to be fundamental. Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African love children, who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God."[47] This aspect is essential for the inculturation of the gospel. The concept of the children born in the families can be used to explain that the new members converted to Christianity become members of the household of God. Moral values are usually passed to children by the parents at the family level. The church can use this principle to instill faith values in children. The church as a family can be an effective imagery of the body of Christ in the Luo culture. Jude states, "The portrayal of the church as family is an effort to forge a synthesis of biblical tradition and a symbol very dear to the African psyche."[48]

Family in the Luo Community goes beyond spouses and children but includes extended family such as the uncle, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, and grandparents. Everyone is born in an extended family. The idea of extended family has been explained by Francis Arinze as follows;

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[46] Paul John II, *Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa* (On the Church in Africa). Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995, 63

[47] John Paul II, *"Ecclesia in Africa,"* 43.

[48] Ruwaichi Jude. "The Newness and Pastoral Implications of the Church as a Family" in Patrick Ryan et al. (eds.). *New Strategies for a New Evangelization in Africa.* Limuru: Kolbe Press, 2002, 24.

> Africans are at home both in the nuclear family and in the extended family. The sense of family belongingness is rather strong. Many African languages have the same word for brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews and nieces, the same word for grandfathers and uncles, and sometimes even the same name for fathers and mothers. The sense of family belongingness pervades all these scales on the genealogical ladder.[49]

The concept of the extended family holds great importance in the Luo community. It serves as a collective where everyone is included. When referring to the church of God as a family, the idea of an extended family is fitting because it provides a place for everyone. This family encompasses individuals of all genders, tribes, races, and nations. Everyone is regarded as a child of God, regardless of their location in this generation or the next. In the Luo community, the church should be seen as a large homestead with various houses within the same compound and neighborhood. The church must display love towards its members and guide them towards Christ. There should be no discrimination within the family of Christ, just as there is none at the community level. The church should take advantage of this opportunity to integrate the gospel deeply into the Luo community. Healey and Sybertz argue, "The church can be pictured as a great family with Jesus Christ as the head serving under the Father. Humankind is bonded together in a universal brotherhood and sisterhood. All Christians are adopted sons and daughters. Jesus is the eldest brother. One part of this great family is the African community in Christ."[50]

Marriage

Marriage has long been regarded as a significant institution. In the Luo culture, marriage is a social institution that not only brings together a man and a woman but also unites their families and clans. This belief aligns with the biblical teaching found in Genesis, where it is stated that God created males and females to become one through marriage. Despite the increasing advocacy for same-sex marriage, this concept has not affected the Luo concept of marriage. Within the Luo community, remaining unmarried is seen as inappropriate. They view life as something that should be preserved and continued, believing marriage and procreation are crucial to achieving this. Procreation strengthens the family because it signifies continuity for the family's generation.

In society, marriage is often seen as fulfilling one's social responsibilities, as it ensures the continuation of the family lineage through the birth of new members to replace

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[49] Francis, Arinze. *Reflecting on the Church as a Family.* Lectures, Rome, 1995, 2.

[50] Healey, Joseph and Donald Sybertz. *Towards an African Narrative Theology.* Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2000, 127.

those who have passed away. If a couple fails to have children, it is often believed that the blame falls on the bride, who may face divorce or be replaced by another wife. The presence of children is always associated with happiness, as they bring comfort and joy to their parents' lives. Within the Luo culture, the payment of bride price holds great significance. The groom's family engages in a lengthy negotiation process with the bride's family, which can span several years. The bridewealth exchange is crucial in legalizing marriage within the Luo community. Shorter states, "Bridewealth was a real symbolic gift of exchange legalizing a marriage, legitimizing the children of the union, indemnifying the bride's family, stabilizing the marriage to a limited extent, and propitiating the lineage spirit."[51]

According to the traditional society of the Luo people, marriage was considered a lifelong commitment once the bride's wealth was paid. Divorce was not permitted, except in rare cases where the partners were utterly incompatible. If a divorce were to occur, it would only be accepted after thoroughly examining the grievances of family members, lineage, and clan elders responsible for arranging the marriage. This strict approach was taken because the Luo community placed great importance on marriage. Mbiti has pointed out, "Once a full marriage contract has been executed, it is extremely hard to dissolve it. If dissolution does come about, then it creates a scar in the community concerned."[52] Luo believes divorce cannot occur after the bride price has been exchanged and the children are born. Even if separation happens, the couple is still considered to be married.

The Bible greatly emphasizes marriage, considering it to be sacred as God established it. It symbolizes the unconditional love between Christ and the church, likening Christ to the groom and the church as his bride. This divine love is eternal and unchanging. The Bible cautions against divorce within the church, permitting it only in cases of infidelity. Taking into account this biblical understanding and considering the cultural background of the Luo community, I believe it is possible to utilize the analogy of marriage to convey the gospel message to this community effectively. By understanding the concept of marriage, a Luo person can easily relate to Christ's love for the church with that of the couple. Since Luos takes marriage seriously, they should also expectedly be able to take the love relationship with Christ so seriously.

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[51] Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation,* 63.
[52] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (2nd ed). Ibadan: Heinemann Publishers, 1999, 145.

Veneration of Ancestors

The Luo religious belief is founded on the veneration of ancestral spirits. Ancestral veneration becomes intelligible in the context of what constitutes a man. Luo believes that man is made up of visible and invisible parts. The invisible part is known as *tipo* (shadow). The union between the visible part (body) and the invisible part (shadow) forms life. Luo believes the body becomes dust at death, but the shadow vanishes and becomes spirit. This spirit retains the individual identity and becomes more intelligent and powerful than when it was alive. They believe this spirit continues to exist as long as the people who recognize it remain alive. He became a demon when the circumstances surrounding his death were abnormal.

Importantly, ancestral veneration does not involve worshipping the deceased members of African societies. Veneration of ancestors is an act of honoring and loving certain deceased members of the community who had lived an exemplary life once a life. According to Shorter, ancestors were "created beings who lived a historical life on earth and who maintain solidarity with their descendants."[53] Those who lived exemplary lives while on earth are elevated by the living kinsmen to become ancestors. This means that not everyone who dies becomes an ancestor. Nyamiti observes, "No one can attain ancestral status without having led a morally good life, according to traditional African moral standards. For an ancestor is regarded as a model or exemplar of conduct in the community, and as a source of tribal tradition and its stability."[54] The idea of attaining ancestry can be used to inculturate the gospel and encourage people to remain faithful and live exemplary lives in the community. Those with good morals will be remembered even when they are dead.

A Christian Luo can remain faithful to his traditional ancestral beliefs and practices and, simultaneously be a faithful Christian who enriches Christianity with his cultural traditions. This is the process of inculturation where Christianity and culture enter into mutual and honest dialogue. Some authors have compared African ancestors with Jesus Christ in the name of inculturation. In their theological inquiry, Nyamiti Charles has put forth the notion of Christ as an Ancestor, provided that the African ancestor concept is cleansed of its negative associations. Nyamiti views Christ as "the "Brother-Ancestor" who brings together all believers in the supreme God and in the Family of God as one."[55]

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[53] Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation,* 103.

[54] Charles Nyamiti. *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*. Gweru, Mammbo Press, 1984, 4-5.

[55] Nyamiti, 1984, 61. Nyamiti, "*Christ as Our Ancestor,"* 61

Several scholars have established similarities between ancestral veneration and the Christian communion of Saints. According to Sarpong, the Saints are venerated when Christians honor them for their edifying lives; they pray to God through them. When Christians address prayers to the Saints, they are not asking for help from the Saints but asking for the intercession of the Saints to direct their prayers to the Supreme God.[56] Sarpong "argues that if in ordinary life, we ask our friends to pray for us when we are in difficulty or when we want something like a pass in examination, then why can't we ask the Saints to pray for us?"[57] Sarpong observed:

> Let it be stressed from the beginning that the …(Africans) do not think of their ancestors as gods. They were human beings on earth and remain human in incorporeal existence where they are now. 'They are therefore considered, not as gods, but as relatives' who see us and have sympathy for their relatives on earth. Only their form as mundane creatures has changed.[58]

Sarpong emphatically argues that Africans do not worship ancestors. He said, "The ancestors are not worshipped. They are not deified. The ancestors remain human beings, relatives of the living, and they are referred to as such… no African will consider an ancestor as a god, although there are cases of exceptional nature where an ancestor has come to be regarded as a god."[59]

Sense of Hospitality

The Luo people derive great pleasure from both visiting others and being visited themselves. Within the Luo community, visitors are held in high regard as they are believed to bring blessings to the family. Whenever visitors arrive at a homestead, they are treated to a delicious meal, symbolizing the high esteem in which they are held. It is customary and polite to accompany guests when they leave rather than simply saying goodbye at the door. Doing so is considered inhospitable unless some circumstances prevent one from leaving the house.

The sense of hospitality amongst the Luo community is similar to the value of hospitality in the Bible. Romans 12:13 stipulates, "Extend hospitality to strangers," while Hebrews 13:2 (NLT) reads, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." The essence of hospitality lies in the connection between individuals, God, and one another. This fundamental principle aligns with the core values of Christianity. Jesus Christ exemplified this by extending a warm

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[56] Sarpong, P. K. *Archbishop Sarpong Explains Key Christian Topics*. Accra: SNAM Press, 2016, 50.
[57] Sarpong, *Archbishop Sarpong Explains Key Christian Topics,* 50.
[58] Sarpong, P. K, *Ancestral Stool Veneration in Asante*, Revised Ed. Kumasi: Good Shepherd Publishers, 2001, 152.
[59] Sarpong, *Ancestral Stool Veneration in Asante*, 130.

welcome to people from all walks of life, including the impoverished, sinners, outcasts, pagans, and those afflicted with diseases. The 21st-century living trend has made people very suspicious of everyone, diluting the principle of hospitality. African theology of hospitality confronts all kinds of social, racial, and gender discrimination. Healey and Sybertz argue, "Hospitality as an African cultural value and a deeply Christian value challenges the pervading individualism, selfishness, and exclusivism of the contemporary world."[60]

The idea of hospitality within the Luo community has the potential to inspire the Luo people to embrace Christ, allowing Him to not only reside among them but also become an integral part of their culture. This idea has been used by some people in the community who welcomed the missionaries who came with the gospel as good people, and this promoted the growth of Christianity in the region. On the brink of ethnic tension in Kenya that political wrangles have harnessed, the Luo community should learn to live hospitably with their neighbors. The post-election violence of 2007/ 2008 should not have occurred in the Luo community if they upheld their cultural value of hospitality to strangers and neighbors.

Sense of Respect for Elders

The concept of showing reverence towards older individuals knows no bounds. It is not only the obligation of a young person to demonstrate respect towards their elders, but it is also essential for the older generation to exhibit respect towards those who came before them and have now passed away. It is considered inappropriate for a young person to occupy a chair while an older person remains standing. Additionally, it is not permissible for a child to address their parents, grandparents, or individuals in those roles by their first names. Onwubiko argues that "Africans generally have a deep and ingrained respect for old age, and even when we can find nothing to admire in an old man, we will not easily forget that his grey hairs have earned him the right of courtesy and politeness."[61]

Among the Luo, elders are believed to possess wisdom and were regarded as great teachers. On most occasions, they are consulted for information. The idea of respect for older people comes from the African sense of community. Respecting life's spiritual and mystical aspects is crucial, along with showing respect for individuals and families. Magesa rightfully points out, "The African view of the universe contains the following major themes: the sacrality of life, respect for the spiritual and mystical nature of creation, and especially of the human person; the sense of family, community, solidarity, and participation; and an emphasis

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[60] Healey and Sybertz, "*Towards an African Narrative Theology,*" 188.

[61] Oliver, Onwubiko A. A*frican Thought, Religion and Culture.* Enugu: Snaap Press, 1991, 21.

on fecundity and sharing in life, friendship, healing, and hospitality."[62] The African teaching on respect for elders parallels Christian teachings, which teach children to obey their parents. Proverbs 23:22 (NLT) stipulates, "Listen to your father, who gave you life, and don't despise your mother when she is old." In addition, according to Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 5:3–8 (NLT), "Children …should learn to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repay their parents and grandparents for this is pleasing to God."

Death

Attending funerals is a significant duty within the Luo community. People from various places come together to mourn and are accommodated in the vicinity of the deceased's residence, where the burial will take place. This setting and the length of the funeral rites provide an excellent chance for young individuals to interact and observe individuals of the opposite gender. It also allows the elders to engage in conversations regarding potential marriage alliances they may want to encourage. A Luo Christian who still experiences the fear of death can find comfort in the fact that, just as the Lord promised to save the Israelites from death, they too will be saved from death through God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:5). The assurance of an eschatological bodily resurrection provides hope for Christians who are affected by the overwhelming fear of death, as they can anticipate a time when death, their enemy, will be overcome. This victory will occur when Christ raises their bodies from the dead and reunites them with their souls. Therefore, the Luo Christian can be confident that Christ's death and resurrection guarantee their spiritual salvation and future bodily resurrection.

Summary

This paper has discussed some of the Luo cultural values and themes that can aid the inculturation process to root the gospel in the Luo culture. The study highlighted that family is esteemed highly in the Luo culture, and those who do not belong to a specific family are considered outcasts. It was clear from the study that one finds recognition, security, and acceptance through the family, which fosters a sense of belonging. The study found that marriage is a social institution that not only brings together a man and a woman but also unites their families and clans. The study established that within the Luo culture, remaining unmarried is seen as inappropriate. Luo views life as something that should be preserved and continued, believing marriage and procreation are crucial to achieving this. The study

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[62] Laurent, Magesa. *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997, 52-53.

established further that by understanding the concept of marriage, a Luo person can easily relate to Christ's love for the church with that of the couple. The study further established that the idea of attaining ancestry can be used in the inculturation of the gospel by encouraging people to remain faithful and live an exemplary life in the community. The study argued that a Christian Luo can remain loyal to his traditional ancestral beliefs and practices and remain a faithful Christian who enriches Christianity with his cultural traditions.

The study found that visitors are held in high regard in the Luo community as they are believed to bring blessings to the family. The study established that the idea of hospitality within the Luo community has the potential to inspire the Luo people to embrace Christ, allowing Him to not only reside among them but also become an integral part of their culture. Respect for elders also remains an important cultural element harmonizing with biblical teachings. Regarding death, the study found out that the Luo Christians can be confident that Christ's death and resurrection guarantee their spiritual salvation and future bodily resurrection.

Conclusion

The church's mission to spread the gospel relies heavily on inculturation, emphasizing the harmonious interaction between the gospel and different cultures. The Christian message must be inclusive of all cultures and not limited to any specific one. Inculturation enables the gospel to be accessible to everyone by introducing new elements from the gospel into a culture and allowing the culture to contribute its own unique aspects to the richness of the gospel. Inculturation aims to maintain the authenticity and deep-rootedness of African Christianity while also addressing cultural disconnection, bridging the gap between faith and everyday life, and resolving the spiritual inconsistency affecting many individuals.

The inculturation of the gospel involves allowing the message of God to profoundly impact people's lives while being cautious not to impose foreign cultural elements that may hinder their genuine reception of that message. The church has consistently recognized the importance of inculturation. There is a strong desire in Africa to establish an authentic form of Christianity deeply rooted in African culture, with the Church and traditions inseparable. There is also a longing to free the gospel from its colonial past, which devalued indigenous African cultural values, and to establish a stronger connection with African life.

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