

The Social Impact of Western Christianity on Marakwet Traditional Funeral Rites

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Abstract

This paper investigates the adopted, abandoned and retained funeral rituals by Marakwet people as a result of contact with western missionaries in the 1930s. This is based on the fact that Christianity clothed with western cultures had misconceptions about Marakwet cultural rites and the bearers of the Christian message saw themselves as having the role of bringing the Marakwet out of what they considered backward cultures. The study area is in Elgeyo Marakwet County, Marakwet West Sub-County, Moiben/Kuserwo Sub-Location in Yemit and Jemunada Locations. The paper was compelled by the persistent problems faced by Marakwet Christians in their attempt to be Christian and Marakwet simultaneously. This raises the question of whether it is necessary to discard one's cultural background in order to be a Christian. This in turn raises the question of whether one can be a true Christian and remain a true Marakwet. This paper highlights the Marakwets' interaction with missionaries and their cultural traditions relating to funeral rituals before the arrival of western Christianity. The impacts of western Christianity on Marakwet funeral rites are explored to bring out the interaction of two cultures for mutual enrichment. Descriptive design was used in this qualitative research and purposive sampling was used at two levels; first to identify African Inland Churches (A.I.C) established in the area and two; to identify traditional religious specialists who are converted members of A.I.C. Other informants were identified by snowballing through the church pastors. Tools of data collection included interviews, observation and focus group discussions. Data was analyzed qualitatively. The findings revealed that western Christianity, coupled with other factors like westernization, have played a major role in changing Marakwet funeral rites in Marakwet West Sub-County. These changes include; the abandonment of some ritual; burying barren corps in middle of forests, dumping and killing deformed children. Others were incorporated and merged to the Marakwet culture include; cleansing, cursing of murder, memorial service (keam kindo), corpse cleansing and handling of the dead. However, some Marakwet traditional rituals retained include; night rituals, marrying the corpse and consulting the dead. This paper recommends integration of Marakwet death rituals into Christian rituals because they provide solutions to some cultural death problems.

Keywords: Christianity, Marakwet, Missionaries, Death and Burial ritual

INTRODUCTION

The contact between African Nations and the western World begun at the advent of the 15th century. According to Barret (1973:21), the first missionaries to arrive at the coastal part of Kenya were Roman Catholic missionaries with the company of Vasco Da Gama in the year 1498 around March. Johann Ludwig Kraft of the Church Missionary Society arrived in 1844. Two years later he was joined by John Rebmann and together they established a church and a school at Rabai.

Kibor, (2005:36) say that the people living in Marakwet received the missionaries and Christian message later than other Kalenjii speaking groups who had received the same message as early as 1929. The Roman Catholic missionaries arrived at Tambach towards the

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end of 1930. The same year African Inland missionaries visited Marakwet with a view to starting mission work in the area. They acquired land at Kapsowar where they settled and established a mission station. Their establishment paved way for missionary activity in the area. Kipyatich, (1998:3) argue that the birth of A.I.C. in Africa started with the mission of Peter Cameroon Scott who arrived in Mombasa in 1895 with other missionaries.

African death rituals

Goring and Whaling (1992:184), point out that the burial ritual or disposal of the dead is an attested feature of human culture dating from Paleolithic times. The practices seem to reflect a belief in some form of an afterlife. According to Mbiti, (1969:149), Mugambi and Kirima, (1976:205) both write that death stands between the world of the living and the world of the spirits, and the event of death is not thought to terminate the existence of a person, but to transform the nature of existence. The African traditional rites on funerals observe rituals that involve the disposal of the body; preparations performed by ritual leaders and elders and the funeral rites to be performed after burial. These include fasting that is broken by the communal feasting, no work for a number of days, shaving of hair, mourners smearing themselves with white clay. Melanie (2013:3) points out that in some African communities' personal belongings are often buried with the deceased to assist in the journey to the ancestral land. Among the Ga both finger and toe nails are cut short because the Ga believe that someone will die if scratched by the nails of the dead person (Gehman1999: 18). The disposal of the corpse among the Bagesu of Uganda involved eating the flesh of the corpse then burning the bones.

Christian death rituals

During the Christian funeral, a religious service may be held in the home or at the church and at the cemetery or crematorium. This reminds the participants of the realities of death and judgment and expresses the Christian hope in sharing in Christ's resurrection, and committing their departed to the love and mercy of God (Goring and Whaling 1992:185). Mugambi (1989:102) narrates that Christianity came with new rituals for the burial of Christians. The liturgy for burial reflected the Church's belief in eternal life and resurrection of the saints. The Christian's funeral was a new cultural experience in Africa in which texts from the Bible were read and new hymns sung. There were no more African ways of dancing, eating flesh shaving nails) for the fear of reincarnation of the unknown and further streamlined and harmonized funerals among communities.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research method of gathering information from key informants on the study area and also sorted for secondary data from scholarly documents and manuscripts. Descriptive design was employed in reporting of the findings and the tools of data collection included interview, focus group discussions and participant observation. This study was carried out in Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Marakwet West Sub-county, Moiben/Kuserwo Ward. The research was carried out in the area purposively because the researcher has a prior understanding of some cultural practices pertaining to funeral rites, the presence of illiterate respondents who communicate in vernacular, a language understood by the researcher and the researcher's knowledge of the area topography.

The study targeted both Church elders and traditional religious specialists. The researcher targeted the above respondents because of their knowledge of both the missionary arrival in the area and the cultural practices of the people before the coming of the missionaries and after. Purposive design was employed to identify the African Inland Church (A.I.C)

established earlier in the area. The choice of A.I.C “*Kapchebisaas*” was motivated by the fact that the church has been very vocal in condemning the Marakwet rituals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Marakwet traditional funeral rituals

Death may be defined as a transition from the world of the living to ancestral land; death is as old as humanity. People fear death because humanity has never been able to conquer. It is said that people carry death in their hands and that it follows them like their shadow, which explains why it can strike any time. Thus, the continued existence of any human being can never be guaranteed. The presence of death made the Marakwet to come up with rituals that helped them deal with its effects. First were the rituals meant to appease god so that he would not destroy life by causing death. The ritual was performed when natural disasters took place; for instance, when the community was stricken with either an incurable disease or drought and famine. The occurrence of such natural disasters was interpreted to mean that god was angry with the living. This was most likely when the living broke societal norms and taboos. Thus, to restore the community to its normal state, a ritual was performed. The ritual was to bring the blessing of rain, escape of death through disease and restoration of harmonious existence between the two worlds.

The ritual required a male-person who's first born child was a girl, and who was righteous in his ways. This person acted as mediator and would intercede for others. His role can be compared to that played by the Holy Spirit or the Old Testament prophets in the Bible. Male community members whose first born children were boys were not allowed to officiate at this ritual. It was believed that when boys grew up, they would participate in raids, thus tainting their hands with blood. It was believed that this would contaminate the whole family. A sacrificial sheep was given by someone regarded as holy, and it was supposed to be of one colour. The sheep was taken to the sacrificial place (*kapkoros*) by a young, virgin girl aged twelve years. The ritual illustrated the holiness of God. The living was supposed to emulate him and when they tainted themselves with evil, they were punished through natural events that cause death. It was believed that the blood of sacrificial sheep would atone for sin while the blood of a goat was used for ceremonies like the marrying of a dead person to the living partner for married partners.

Secondly, there were those rituals that were meant to cleanse the living from the impurities of death. Different groups of people performed this ritual. First there was the group led by someone who had previously undergone similar ritual. An example of this is where a cleansed murderer took the role of cleansing other murderers. The ritual was restricted to murderers because it was believed that when somebody who had not murdered participated the expelled spirit would immediately possess him or her. In the absence of such a qualified person, the evil spirit was taken away by running water. Secondly are those that involved individual ritualization. Someone hired to bury the corpse of a barren woman or impotent man was required to be cleansed by undergoing a ritual. This ritual was necessary because being in contact with a corpse of such persons caused contamination. If not cleansed, the impurities would be transmitted to others.

Thirdly were the rituals performed by the living on a corpse. The rituals served a purpose that was important to both the living and the dead, as it ensured a smooth transition to the ancestral land and was a sign of a good send off by the living. This ensured peace for the living as they would not be disturbed by the spirit of the dead. The ritual was also meant to attract blessings. It is also important to note that the elaborate rituals were meant to pardon

people for their shortcomings. They ensured smooth entrance into ancestral land. Ancestral land was a place compared to the Christians' heaven and every member of the community yearned for it. Life in the ancestral land was comparable to life on earth, as there was continuation of earthly chores. While the Christians' heaven is portrayed as a place full of joy with no suffering, ancestral land does not give a clear picture. Those believed to have reached the holy land of ancestors were respected by the living, and were appeased and remembered through naming of children. Those whose ways were crooked became wandering spirits, causing disturbance to the living and probably to the ancestors since ancestral land was believed to be found within the homestead. It is because of this that one whose ways were crooked did not get proper burial. He/she was buried in the middle of a forest, a place far from residential areas. The ritual was performed to deny such people entrance into ancestral land. The animal to be slaughtered during any burial was determined by the sex of the dead person. For instance, a bull or a ram of any colour was slaughtered during the burial of a man while a cow or ewe was slaughtered for a woman.

Christian Death Rituals

The Bible lacks information on how death rituals should be carried out in an orderly manner. In spite of this, some death beliefs are drawn from the Bible while others are western in nature. The Christian rituals introduced to the Marakwet were either new to them or existed but had different interpretations. First and foremost were those beliefs drawn from the Bible. On the basis of the Christians' interpretation of the Bible, death is the transfer of an individual from the physical world to the spiritual. On transfer, the soul ends up either in good or bad place depending on one's earthly life. Unlike the Marakwet traditional belief, Christian death rituals do not determine the soul's entry to heaven. The souls of dead Christians are believed to be in heaven waiting for the resurrection.

Preaching, prayers and dirges are Christian rituals derived from the Bible. The beliefs include information on what death is and what is believed to take place after it occurs. Believers are encouraged to be strong in the knowledge that the fallen believer is with Christ in heaven. Preaching and dirges were new rituals for the Marakwet; prayer, however, existed even though it was directed towards a different being. Another ritual which existed but has been given a new interpretation is where a dying Christian is supposed to confess his/her sin. The ritual is necessary for the forgiveness of sins and to ensure the soul enter heaven when death occurs. In the traditional setup, a person at the point of dying would share his wealth, expose debtors and creditors and elders would bless their family members. Church services are carried out to honour God for the life of the fallen believer. Mourners are encouraged to believe in Jesus and to be saved. This ritual is absolutely new, even though the modern church can be compared with the traditional shrines. Other rituals that are carried out on the day of burial and are western in nature include: reading the eulogy, viewing of the corpse, procession to the graveside and graveside rituals. There is also the offertory ritual. The offertory is given as a sign of compassion to the bereaved family.

The abandoned rituals

The missionaries' arrival led to the abandonment of some rituals. This was due to Christian teachings, western education and the introduction of modern medicine. Christianity teaches that God is the giver of life and He takes it away as He wishes. Thus, the rituals of killing children born with disability or burying the corpse of a barren woman or impotent man in the middle of a forest are no longer practiced. Being born with a disability or dying at an early age is not believed to be the result of the individual having committed sin.

Western education and modern medicine were introduced by missionaries in the area. Education gave a new or different understanding of nature. For instance, the occurrence of floods or drought have been given acceptable scientific explanations by meteorologists. Thus, the ritual that was carried out with the belief that it would bring rain was abandoned. Modern medicine that cured or prevented diseases led to abandonment of those rituals that were meant to expel disease from the community. Finally, some rituals were abandoned with the introduction of new crops that took a much shorter time to mature and provided higher yields. Thus, the ritual that was meant to bring rain was abandoned

The Incorporation of Rituals

The incorporation of the Marakwet funeral rites into Christian rites is the focus of this section. Incorporation in this context refers to the process where traditional Marakwet rituals have either been given Christian meanings and importance or still carry the cultural meaning and importance but are practiced in the Christian setting. These rituals have been thus incorporated because Christianity does not offer alternative rituals to be performed in some very crucial or crisis situations. These rituals are also meant to give identity and enable the Marakwet to express their relationship with the spiritual world.

The arrival of missionaries and the acceptance of their message had other consequences for the converts. The converts were expected to abandon their cultural practices, based on the missionaries' perception that their culture was of the devil. But this was not the case among Marakwet Christians of the African Inland Church "*Kapchebisaas*" which literally means a group of people secluded from cultural practices. It came out during the research that funeral rituals are either incorporated and performed publicly without any sense of guilt or performed secretly by Christians. The following are the incorporated rituals by Marakwet culture drawn from the Christian perspective.

Cleansing The Belongings of A Departed Christian

The day after burial, a cleansing ceremony (*Bitop karin*) takes place. The ritual traditionally took place one month after burial. Nowadays it is performed a day after burial due to factors like urbanization that has led to migration and settlement of people in far places. The ritual is compulsory because it is believed that anything that was in contact with the dead person is unclean and the ritual must be carried out to get rid of all impurities.

The cleansing of the belongings of a departed Christian depends on the family's perception of the culture. Some families assemble together the belongings of the departed, including blankets, mattress, sheets, clothes, shoes and utensils and request a member of the clergy to cleanse the belongings by laying hands on them and praying. Other families attach grass (*seretyo*) to a stick and use it to sprinkle either blessed water or soda on the belongings. The soda/water is believed to possess the power to dispel any bad spirits that may still be attached to the belongings. The prayer is meant to give psychological assurance to the new owner of the belongings that no bad spirit shall possess them.

The ritual is important because it is believed that after it has been carried out, the spirits which would haunt the new owner are expelled. Nobody is allowed to possess the belonging of a dead person without this ritual being performed and those found going against this rule are termed as *sugoran*. The ritual is necessary due to cultural belief that forbids anybody to wear the belongings of a deceased person before it is cleansed. It is believed that death follows anybody who goes against such taboo.

Community cursing of a murderer

When death strikes a family, it is not seen as an individual affair but communal affair. The community comes together to support the bereaved family economically, spiritually and socially. When news is announced through the modern means of communication that a certain family has been bereaved, community members are supposed to go to the bereaved family to offer their condolences as a sign of solidarity with them. However, in a case where somebody is murdered and nobody is linked to the action, the community is forced to call for a gathering. There are usually three gathering, and during each gathering an opening and closing prayer from any Christian is mandatory. The first and second gathering is meant for investigation with the aim of identifying the culprit. In the third gathering, the community expels a curse. Before the cursing ritual begins, the community members present are given another chance to reveal the truth.

The ritual is only carried out by the uncles of the deceased who should either be beyond siring age, barren or impotent. This is because should the murderer get to hold soil from the grave the curse would get neutralized and the curser would bear the consequences through death. When cursing starts the present members are required to remove their sandals while facing east to symbolically declare their innocence to their god- *Asis*. At the same time, the cursers are supposed to be naked while facing west and speak their curses upon the murderer. He/she is cursed to set like the sun and never come back again to the world of the living. The cursers then take a bow and arrow and aim towards the east. This is symbolic communication with god- *Asis*, asking him to aim at the murderer and kill him/her.

Finally, a tree (representative of the murderer), is cut and made to fall towards the western direction to symbolize the future death of the murderer who will set like the sun. The ritual is carried out to hasten the death of the murderer who might commit another evil act in the near future if he/she is not dealt with.

Memorial Service (*keam kindo*)

For Christians, a memorial service takes place one year after burial for purposes of settling debts and recognizing the contribution that the deceased made to the community, family and church. *Keam kindo* symbolically means eating the dead person but because he cannot be eaten, his personal belongings, like a cow, is slaughtered and eaten. The blood that is poured from the slaughtered animal acts as a sacrifice to the ancestors. During the ceremony the spirit of the departed person is welcomed home by an elderly family member and invited to come and share the meal with his family members and the community.

A member of the clergy is given a chance to pray, preach and recognize the important roles that the deceased played in the church; such work calls for celebration. An identified elder is required to ask both creditors and debtors present to reveal what they owe or were owed by the deceased. In cases where the deceased was the debtor, his belongings are used to settle the debts. In instances where the deceased was poor, his children or family members have the responsibility of settling the debts. Sincerity is required and it is mandatory that such debts and credits are paid. It is believed that once this is done, the spirit gets detached from the world of the living and has the freedom to travel to the ancestral land; there is nothing to tie it to the world of the living. This ritual is the opposite of the burial rite where mourners lament making the spirit know that he or she was loved and valued by the community members present in such ceremonies celebrate with happiness and joy to make the departed spirit happy wherever it is. Friends, age mates, co-wives, neighbours, children and parents of the deceased are given a chance to remember and describe the good moments and things

they shared with the departed person. The day's ceremony ends with a prayer. The pastor assembles the family members and prays for them, asking God to protect them against evil plans of the devil. The pastor then finally blesses the family.

The following day family members, village elders and church members are required to gather in the same home. The belongings of the deceased that may include land, rental houses and livestock are shared among the children. In cases where the deceased wrote a will it is usually followed without altering anything because people fear going against the wishes of a dead person. Church members present act as overseers and offer prayers when required. The rituals give a chance to those who did not attend the burial to get to know each other as they socialize.

The corpse cleansing ritual

Someone who died with either eyes or mouth open had to be asked to close their eyes and mouth. Open eyes or mouth was interpreted to mean that the dead person has a grudge against the living. Those who die in hospital are convinced by close relatives to close their eyes and even assisted to do so before the body is taken to the mortuary. Immediately the corpse of such person arrives from morgue a cleansing ritual is supposed to be carried out before mourners are allowed to view it. For those who die at home, the cleansing ritual takes place immediately. The cleansing ritual is a communal affair where members participate at different levels. The elders have the role of investigating the person who did the evil act. In cases where the evil-doer is a staunch Christian who believes that he/she is immune to the curse because he forgave the dead person, the elders and traditionalist have a responsibility to convince or force the culprit to carry out the ritual to avoid generational misfortunes.

The ritual can take place at any time of the day but at a specifically designated place. For example, it can be done inside one room of the house where the cleanser is comfortable because he/she is naked while performing the ritual. People keep their distance from such rituals to avoid contamination. The church members are aware of what is going on but because they cannot offer a solution that people can cling on and believe that it can solve their problem, the ritual is allowed to continue so that the family can have their satisfaction, knowing that there is harmonious existence between them and the departed. At end of this a Christian offers prayer to God, asking Him to forgive them and the evil doer. It is believed that if the ritual is not carried out misfortune may affect not only the culprit but his descendants and those who heard or witnessed the evil act and failed to reveal it. The person who did the act shall be labeled *kimumaya*, a name that is used to describe somebody who did an evil act that goes against the set taboos.

Cleansing ritual for the bereaved

This cleansing ritual is usually carried out on family members when their relatives die of mysterious diseases, commit suicide or are struck by lightning. The ritual is compulsory. The life experiences of the people in the area of study seem to have caused them to believe that Christianity does not offer solutions to particular cultural problems. An example of this was given where a Christian family who had refused to undergo the cleansing ritual claiming that the blood of Jesus had washed their sins is cited. This Christian family later requested the elders to perform the ritual on them because their members continued to die and the causes were associated with an ancestral curse. Their members would be infected with mysterious diseases and behaved like they were chasing bees from their bodies, before succumbing to death. It was believed that the family was suffering the consequences of an ancestral curse; that their great-grandparents probably used to steal another person's honey. The family was requested by village elders to undergo the ritual to stop further deaths.

Some members accepted the ritual while others refused. Those who refused finally agreed to the ritual years later when they realized that their Christian prayers were not yielding a solution to their problems.

The ritual is supposed to be carried out once per year for four consecutive years. At the end a pastor or a Christian believer is supposed to pray for the family members. In the prayer the pastor declares that the powers of the devil have been conquered, asks for God's protection and declares that the family is covered by the blood of Jesus.

The cleansing ritual is also performed on new items like vehicles and motorbikes. Assets like cars involved in accidents several times call for the cleansing ritual. After elders perform the ritual, Christians can take their belongings to their respective churches for prayer and blessing by their church clergy. It is important to note that when these Christians bought these assets, they first took them to church for prayers and that it was only after they had been involved in an accident that they sought a solution from their traditions.

Night vigil

A night vigil is a common Christian ritual where Christians have a chance for pastoral care, are encouraged, consoled, pray and worship God in the midst of their mourning. Night vigil is usually a family affair but the church members of a neighbouring local church are involved in comforting the mourners. A preacher will encourage the mourners to be strong emotionally the following day and accept the departure of their loved one. While this is taking place, a fire is usually built within the homestead for the purpose of chasing away evil spirits associated with darkness. During this moment the casket is placed in a lighted room which symbolically means that the place that the dead person has gone to is a good place full of light. Men and women are supposed to sleep in adjacent rooms if the dead is a fellow man or woman. During night vigil consoling songs are sung.

Cleansing a murderer

A murderer is supposed to serve a certain number of years in jail. While in jail the members of the two families negotiate through a mediator (*assiswo*) and payment of compensation commences. A murderer is not supposed to join his family immediately on release from jail but goes to live with persons who are not related to him or her either through blood or marriage. He/she is not allowed to join family members or relatives before the cleansing ritual is carried out. It is believed that the evil spirit which made that person commit the evil act of killing may be transmitted to relatives. It is believed that the spirit cannot recognize people who are not related to the murderer but does recognize relatives. The murderer will be allowed to join his family members when the cleansing ritual described earlier has been carried out. The bloodshed by the sacrificial sheep used for cleansing is believed to carry away the sins of the murderer, thus achieving forgiveness.

Those who refuse the ritual claiming that they got saved while in jail are labeled as *sugoran* for going against culture and the community discourages their children from either marrying from that family or getting married in that family. After undergoing the cleansing ritual, the murderer is welcomed by both family and church members. While in church the clergy prays for the murderer and proclaims the defeat of the expelled bad spirit. The ritual is meant to create peace between the two families. Therefore, for a murderer to gain acceptance in the society and church, he or she should undergo the ritual even though the same community will continue to identify that person as a murderer for the rest of his/her life. Christians recognize the importance of the cleansing and compensation ritual and do not allow a murderer not cleansed to join them. This seems to imply that some spirits get

expelled through cultural rituals and are resistant to Christian prayers, and that the church is not ready to deal with such spirits which are considered more powerful.

Another aspect related to the above is where an individual commits murder and his family is supposed to immediately and secretly take a cow to the family of the deceased (*Chaprang*) to serve the purpose. It is important to highlight that the cleansing ritual, as indicated earlier, is mandatory to both families. It is believed that the spirit expelled from the murderer lands on those who do not go through the ritual. Therefore, to ensure that the evil spirit does not get any landing ground, it is mandatory that the two families undergo the ritual so that the evil spirit gets banished from the family.

Burial in the ancestral land

Most bereaved person(s) in the area of study make sure that their relative is buried in the ancestral land because of the cultural importance attached to it. For the spirit of the dead person to receive the protection of his/her ancestors he or she should be buried in their place of birth and among, his/her ancestors. Burying an individual in his/her own ancestral land is more beneficial to the living because of the important roles that the spirit of the departed is believed to play. The spirit acts as mediator between the visible and invisible worlds and can communicate with their respective family members and warn them of impending dangers and watch over them. A burial is considered proper when it takes place in the ancestral land because the spirit does not become a wandering ghost in a foreign land. It is believed that since ancestral land is situated near the homestead, the spirit and the body reside at the same place. This implies that the spirits of those buried in foreign lands are forced to stay there because of the attachment between the body and the spirit.

It is believed that if the dead are not buried in their ancestral land, their spirit will come back to haunt the living. For this reason, people make sure that the dead are buried in their ancestral land to avoid the possible disturbance. Apparently, even Christians buried in foreign lands due to unavoidable circumstances demand, usually through dreams, that they be taken home because of their inability to reach ancestral land; others claim that they are not at peace. This implies that for the Marakwet community, in matters relating to death, traditional culture is regarded as the final authority.

Gehman (2005:15) narrates the story of a prominent Nairobi advocate, Mr. S.M Otieno, whose death brought conflict between his wife and his family. The long-running conflict was due to Mrs. Otieno's decision to bury her husband in Nairobi. The Luo elders were against it and a court ruled that Mr. Otieno be buried according to the Luo customary law. Mr. Otieno was buried according Luo traditions despite the fact that he had attended a mission sponsored school and was a baptized member of a Christian church. This implies that many professing Christians in Africa rely on their traditions in times of crisis.

Handling the corpse

It is also interesting to note how carefully the body of a Christian is handled at every stage: when it is dressed, placed inside a coffin, during transportation and when it is lowered into the grave. It is believed that the dead person is aware of what is happening and can even feel pain. It is believed that, if hurt, they will come back in the form of a spirit and haunt the living, demanding to know why they were hurt. To avoid rituals that the living might be forced to perform as they ask for forgiveness from the dead, the living take a lot of care not to hurt the dead.

Grave digging

The grave is dug during morning hours because it is believed that when the sun rises it comes with blessings. But before digging the grave a member of the clergy prays and blesses the ground. A corpse should face east all the time pending burial. This is the direction believed to be the original place where the Marakwet ancestors came from and where *Asis*, their source of blessing, rises from. While inside the coffin, the body, whether of a male or female, should lie on the left hand. This is meant to facilitate continuity of life in ancestral land, which includes interactions with others and performing daily chores which largely depend on the right hand. This ritual does not take into consideration left-handed persons. A left-handed person is buried as dictated by culture and his/her spirit cannot haunt the living.

A corpse, both male and female, is also not buried with inner clothing, even though such clothing was not part of the traditional Marakwet culture. It is believed that burying one's body dressed in under garments causes inconvenience to the dead person as he/she will not be able to have sexual relationship and children in the next world. The dead enter the spiritual world with earthly gender and roles. Finally, the wishes of a dying person are respected, even if they go against the Christian faith. This is because it is believed that if the wishes of such person are not followed, his/her spirit returns and causes disaster to the family and sometimes to the community.

Retained rituals

Even though incorporation is evident in the area, there are still a few church elders who disapprove of the involvement of Christians in traditional funeral rituals. Their disapproval is mainly based on the views of the Western missionaries who had a negative attitude towards Marakwet culture and considered it barbaric, pagan and heathen. To them anything that conflicts with the bible is viewed as evil. Their level of education does not appear to have equipped them to realize that the Christian message brought by the missionaries has undergone incorporation. History says that Christianity originated from the Middle East and diffused to other societies through various means. It is correct to observe that these societies did not live in a vacuum but had their own world view. The interaction of Christianity with their world view gave birth to a Christian faith clothed with several cultural practices.

The same church elders were against incorporation of funeral rituals that are carried out secretly and would prefer those involved to either abandon it or continue to perform them secretly, as long as other church members were not aware. The image of the church and the mission sponsor's reaction were more important than the funeral rituals and how members felt about them. Other informants, especially the converted traditional religion specialists, had no problem with incorporation of rituals performed secretly. This created tension and conflict because some supported incorporation while others did not, considering it evil.

Despite the condemnation of Marakwet ritual as devilish by some informants, documented research carried out in Africa has shown that wherever converted Africans are faced with difficult situation they seek solutions from their cultures. Magesa (1997:9) points out that educated Africans secretly revert to diviners or mediums in order to know what lies ahead while, at the same time, they publicly protest that diviners belong to "primitive" times and that they possess no mystical powers. In addition to incorporated rituals are those rituals performed by converts which goes against their Christian faith. Because of the belief among some church members that anything revolving around traditional Marakwet rituals is inferior, some Christians will continue to perform these rituals secretly because of the importance they attach to their cultural funeral rites. The existence of the two different world

views is also caused by the negative perception of some Christians towards their culture. The missionaries were able to convince the first converts that their culture was heathen. These converts handed down the same perceptions to subsequent generations. The missionaries did not take the time to understand the culture and its importance to the people. They quickly concluded that Marakwet cultural practices are backward. These rituals include:

Night Rituals

Christians are against rituals performed during the night. Biblical darkness is associated with the devil and this explains why some demons cast out by Jesus requested Him not to send them to the abyss, which is an endless dark pit. According to these Christians, darkness is associated with the devil. But even though Christians are against it, the reality is different when prayers fail to offer a solution. During one of the focus group discussions, a case study was presented in which a Christian family was undergoing a cleansing ritual. This exposes the reality. The family members agreed to the ritual after Christian prayer failed and there was a continuous loss of family members in mysterious deaths associated with an ancestral curse. The ritual was conducted at night by hired cleansers who were either barren or beyond childbirth age. This was to ensure that in case the ancestors refuse to forgive, the cleanser bear the consequence through death. (FGD, 18th June 2015).

Marrying the corpse

In Marakwet traditions any woman who was married and dies before the official traditional ceremony is conducted *-koito*, for her to be buried a special function called ‘fire lighting’- *kilaya ma* must be conducted which translates to marrying the woman posthumously. Christians are against wedding the corpse with the living partner. To Christians a wedding is covenant between two persons, and when one partner cannot participate because of his/her inability to communicate (dead) there cannot be an agreement or a covenant.

Consulting the dead

Christianity teaches that the dead should not or cannot be consulted. The dead do not possess any powers over the living and the fact that they are in different world disconnects them from the living. Consulting the dead is compared to divination which, the Bible does not allow. Furthermore, Christians are against any ritual that is carried out while an individual is naked.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It is necessary, therefore, for both groups to come together for a dialogue and formulate Marakwet Christian theology. Thus, church leaders, pastors and traditional religious specialists ought to come together and, through dialogue, develop a way forward for problematic situations that people find themselves in. The theology should accommodate each side because harmonious agreement between the two is a prerequisite for incorporation. The integration will be beneficial to the two world views and help members deal with the problematic situations that arise when death occurs. It will also help avoid conflict, create harmony, make people participate freely in some rituals and eliminate secret participation in rituals by church members.

The theology should have considerations on the importance attached to these cultural practices that Christianity has so far not been able to help the Marakwet Christian find remedies to difficulties arising from cultural problems. The church can also conduct

thorough evangelization in the area and convince people to have faith that the message of Christ can deliver them from their difficult situations.

Finally, it is important to note that those churches that are more accommodating to the culture had more adherents, compared to the new religious movements which have strict rules and regulations. These religious sects and movements in the area have either collapsed or had very few members. This study suggests that for Christianity to survive in the area of study, it may need to adopt the people's culture. The existence of Christianity in the area will probably not destroy Marakwet funeral rites. The community does not appear to be ready to abandon their cultural heritage with regard to death. This calls for accommodation by both cultures.

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