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**AN INVESTIGATION OF EFFECTS OF CULTURAL PRACTICES ON FUNERALS IN AFRICA INLAND CHURCH: NAKURU EAST REGION**

**<sup>1</sup>\*Josephine Wambui Kiarri & <sup>2</sup>Dr. Lawrence Oseje**

**<sup>1&2</sup>Mission Studies, Africa International University**

**\*Email of the Corresponding Author: [jkiariihope2001@gmail.com](mailto:jkiariihope2001@gmail.com)**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the Study:** This study investigates the effects of cultural practices on funeral rites within the Africa Inland Church (AIC) in the Nakuru East Region of Kenya. It specifically examines the tensions between traditional cultural practices and Christian teachings during funeral ceremonies, the factors contributing to the persistence of these practices, members' understanding of the church's constitutional and doctrinal position on funerals, and the roles of church leaders, elders, and youth in shaping or negotiating these practices.

**Methodology:** The study adopts a qualitative ethnographic research design to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of AIC members. Data were collected through open-ended interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation involving church members, elders, and youth from selected congregations in the Nakuru East Region. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, meanings, and interpretations.

**Findings:** Cultural practices surrounding funerals continue to influence church members despite established church doctrines and policies. Their persistence is largely driven by communal expectations, fear of social exclusion, and limited clarity in institutional guidance. Additionally, there are varying interpretations among clergy and congregants regarding the compatibility of certain cultural rituals with Christian teachings, which further contributes to inconsistencies in practice.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that the interaction between cultural traditions and Christian doctrine remains complex within AIC funeral practices. The lack of clear and consistent theological direction, coupled with strong cultural influences, creates ongoing tensions among church members and leaders.

**Recommendation:** The study recommends that the church provide clearer theological guidance and develop contextual pastoral strategies to address funeral-related practices. Strengthening doctrinal teaching, fostering open dialogue within congregations, and formulating practical guidelines can help members navigate cultural and religious expectations while upholding biblical principles.

**Keywords:** *Cultural practices, funeral rites, Africa Inland Church, ethnography, inculturation, Nakuru East Region*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Africa Inland Church (AIC), being one of the oldest Protestant churches in Kenya, continues to influence the spiritual and social life of its church members. Nevertheless, despite a well-developed constitution and clear doctrinal standpoints, conflicts persist between Christian doctrines and entrenched African cultural traditions, especially in funeral practices. Such practices can be traced back to ancient communal principles, ancestral devotion, and social pressures that dominate in the life of the church. Their ongoing interrelationship has created theological, pastoral, and social problems which influence spiritual development, unity, and expansion of the church. This article aims to analyze how such cultural practices manifest in AIC congregations in the Nakuru East Region, the forces that have perpetuated them, and the roles of various actors within the church in negotiating this tension. The article helps deepen the concept of contextualized Christianity within the African ecclesial experience by questioning these dynamics.

The predecessor of the AIC in Kenya is the Africa Inland Mission (AIM), which was founded in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1895. This interdenominational evangelical mission placed a strong emphasis on church planting and the establishment of self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating native churches (Karanja, 1999). This philosophy was noble, but it often did not go well with the realities of keeping doctrinal control and cultural purity.

The AIC was actually founded in 1943, but its origins go back even further. The initial missionaries faced very stiff opposition and gained recognition only slowly (Mumo, 1997). The church is governed by a special hybrid, a composite of episcopal and Presbyterian politics (AIC Constitution, 1981). At the regional level, bishops are in charge of ensuring that policy is followed, and day-to-day affairs are handled by local church councils, which consist of elders. This leads to an extremely strong reliance on local leadership in implementing national policy, which is a source of the very difference in practice that the current study seeks to explain.

The AIC is also keen on theological education, having established schools including Scott Christian University and Moffat Bible College. It is an interesting paradox that a church that trains its own theologically trained clergy is the one that is facing a rampant problem of syncretism at the grassroots level. This shows no relation between a neat theology training and the real-life theology of the local church- a field that this article will embark on.

## Background

Africa Inland Church (AIC) was a historic organization in African Christianity, officially formed in 1972 after a long, multiphased interaction between local converts and foreign missionaries of the Africa Inland Mission (AIM). Its formation was not only an administrative reorganization but a radical theological and sociological food court, where two differing ecclesiastical traditions were intentionally converged into a standard church structure that was a synthesis of Presbyterian and congregational forms of governance (Zabulon, 2019). This synthesis developed in an environment of tension: missionaries still held a good deal of administrative power, but the collaborative effort to create a single church was indicative of existing discord and a bargained-for, though not perfect, solution.

This historical origin summarizes the main dialectic that drives this dissertation: the frequently controversial tension between the missionary-initiated Christian orthodoxy and the formidable sub-currents of African cultural and spiritual traditions. The AIC was established as a carrier of a supposedly pure gospel, but from the outset, it was placed in a socio-cultural context full of ontological notions of life, death, community, and the sacred. As a result, the church became a novel place where these competing worldviews came together, conflicted, and were launched into a lengthy negotiation process.

The modern continuation of this longstanding conflict in the peculiar, high-stakes funerals of the Nakuru East Region of the AIC is questionable in the present research. In this case, formal written procedures within the church, defined in constitutions and bylaws, often coexist with, or subtly replace, established cultural practices. The emergence of the AIC is a physical consequence of the contextualization process that engulfed the continent after the missionary period. It expressed a complex negotiation between local agency and outside force, both in collaboration and essential conflict. The emergence of the AIC is a physical consequence of the contextualization process that engulfed the continent after the missionary period. It expressed a complex negotiation between local agency and outside force, both in collaboration and essential conflict. Most of the early missionaries of the Africa Inland Mission, as did many of their peers then, approached African Traditional Religion (ATR) and cultural practices with a sense of cultural and theological superiority. Being guided by the evolutionist theories and colonial mindset, they often held the indigenous beliefs as pagan, savage, and devilish (Zablon, 2019, p. 26). This resulted in uninformed and hasty judgment of complex social institutions like polygamy and female

circumcision, without an overall appreciation of their social, economic, and spiritual roles in the community.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Within the realms of funeral, the conflict between Christian-imposed eschatology, hope of resurrection, eternal life in Christ, and the cultural systems firmly embedded makes the situation even worse. The given temporality and ontological nature of death require certain rites; the death of an elder requires the slaughter of a bull in the case of a male elder or a cow in the case of a female elder, a tradition that was created to celebrate the greatness of the particular elders in society and to help them have a worthy journey to the ancestral world (Magesa, 1997). The main point presented in this review is that ritual continuity cannot be properly discussed within simple dichotomies, such as tradition and Christianity, orthodoxy and syncretism, or fidelity and compromise. These dichotomies blur the complex processes of identity formation, existential anxiety, communal obligation, historical missionary legacy, institutional ambiguity, and theological negotiation that define the lived African Christian experience. Funeral rituals hold a very special niche in that they address personal transition, family continuity, community legitimacy, and spiritual stability.

### **The Concept of Culture in African Societies**

Cultural patterns consist of several universal aspects through which each society or *Volk* expresses its distinctive characteristics. Although these aspects are generally present across societies, their specific forms vary from one culture to another. These facets include economic organization, technological development, systems of reproduction and family life, social organization, systems of governance, military organization, legal and judicial systems, religion, knowledge systems, artistic expressions, education systems, language, value systems, and games and recreational activities. Together, these elements shape the overall cultural pattern that defines a particular community.

The cultural life pattern of a *Volk* is acquired gradually by its members through a continuous process of socialization and education. During this process, the community's values, beliefs, and norms become deeply embedded in the individual's personality. New cultural elements, whether created internally or adopted from external influences, become part of the culture only when they are accepted and integrated into the existing pattern of life.

This raises a very important analytical question: why are some ritual practices in evangelical settings exceptionally resilient, while culture is seen as dynamic? A potential explanation is in the difference between the surface behavioral adaptation and deep cosmological continuity. Even as external appearances might modernize, with cash replacing livestock in bride-wealth payments and church buildings serving in wedding rites, existential fears of the legitimacy of marriage, fertility, death, and spiritual safety remain. Ritual practices that seek to respond to such anxieties thus continue to possess symbolic potential in the face of change in their external manifestations. Douglas (1966) contends that rituals concerning bodily limits and passages have special emotional significance due to the fact that they touch on the main human issues of order, danger, and purity. This ritual power is particularly awakened in death as those changes of social and existential status. Another explanatory theory is the intellectualist theory of African traditional religion (Horton, 1971). Horton claims that traditional African cosmologies are explanatory and predictive systems that address misfortune, fertility, and survival.

According to Bediako, contemporary African theologians practice a similar kind of discernment, discovering areas of continuity and discontinuity of African categories and Christian faith. Bediako's translatability thesis is endowed with considerable historical and theological merit. Throughout its history, Christianity has already embraced linguistic and philosophical classifications of the host cultures: Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Germanic, and Slavic. Even the New Testament is a translation of Aramaic oral tradition into literary forms of Greek culture influenced by Hellenist rhetoric and philosophy. Had Christianity been inseparably connected to a single cultural manifestation, it would not have become the world religion it is today. Critics are, however, doubtful of the fact that the ancestral mediation and sacramental categories are completely equivalent. All of these strategies may be used by African Christians who engage in the rituals of their ancestors, even though they profess to be Christians. Others can redefine family rites as cultural rather than religious without accepting that their involvement would constitute a theological impairment.

The Turaki model allows radical appropriation of cultural values while still upholding Christological exclusivity. Nonetheless, to use this framework, we need exactly that type of contextual judgment which institutional documents so frequently lack.

## **Funeral Rites and Transitional Anxiety**

Cosmological assumptions are enhanced through funerals. The end signifies change and not destruction. The cleansing through rituals, night vigils, and the movement of the symbols are to ensure the safety of passage. As Hertz (1960) avers, the classical anthropological study of the ritual of death sheds light on the reasons why funerals are so significant in other cultures. Hertz argues that death is not an occasion but a process that entails the physical breakup of the body as well as the social transformation of the dead person out of the living community to the community of the dead (1960). This dual change is handled by the funeral rituals, which carry the deceased through the perilous liminal phase in which they neither exist nor die, but exist as vulnerable beings that are potentially dangerous to the living. This is the theoretical insight into the significance of ritual accuracy; failure to perform it correctly will leave the person in the afterlife trapped in the liminal state, which may plague the living.

Christian funerals are grounded in the hope of the resurrection. Pauline corpus works out the further contemplation of death as sleep, of which believers see as a state of entering ancestorhood, but as a process of interlude before being resurrected. According to this view, the dead cannot be consulted, or have any part in the affairs of the world; but wait the general resurrection in the rest of Christ (Phil. 1:23). This eschatology approach is quite unlike the ancestral cosmology that assumes that there is continuous contact between the living and the dead. But there are scholars who believe that Christian funerals do not properly serve the fear of spiritual contamination. Parkes et al. (2015) compare the cross-cultural differences in bereavement practices and prove that rituals to manage the fear of the dead are almost universal. The rituals also have psychological purposes as they lessen anxiety and offer particular answers to uncertain and emotionally painful situations. Families engage in night vigils with drumming and dancing, slaughtering animals whose blood is poured rationally, and post-burial cleansing rituals, all the time being full members of the church. These rites are not seen to conflict with Christian faith but are seen to be covering aspects of death that are not covered by church services, such as the safeguarding of the living against spiritual pollution, the adequate inclusion of the dead into lineage community, and the recovery of broken social bonds.

Ekore and Lanre-Abass (2016) review the concept of death within African culture and its potential consequences of end-of-life care. They state that Western biomedical models, which consider death the biological conclusion, do not address the existential and relational

aspects that African cosmologies identify. This observation can be applied to the funeral rites: the church worship patterned according to Western liturgies can equally lack the ability to respond to the entire scope of issues that death entails in the African worldviews. Whatever the theological issues of traditional rituals, they tackle them with existential immediacy that Christian liturgies do not always have. The current analysis explores whether these practices in AIC Nakuru East are the result of fear, social pressure, generational struggle, or institutional confusion. These motivations do not exclude one another; they can interact in complex ways. A widow who has undergone cleansing rituals could also have a fear of spiritual pollution, pressure from the extended family, and the need to memorize the life of the husband who passed away, as well as her uncertainty about whether the church teaching is sufficient to cover her predicament. It is necessary to understand these motivational setups through the type of deep qualitative investigation this research employs.

Historical analysis indicates that the church's disciplinary measures were sometimes punitive, pushing such practices underground rather than eradicating them. By excommunicating members who indulged in the traditional rituals, churches did not always put an end to the practice; they merely sent them outside the church. They were practiced by families privately without being exposed to the scrutiny of missionaries, and families remained members of the church. Magesa (1997) offers the concept of symbolic reinterpretation as one of those bases of interest in African traditional religion. Instead of neglecting the use of the ancestral practices, Magesa proposes that they can be redefined with consideration of the Christian faith, and the symbols of the practices can be redefined, but the shapes should remain. This pastoral has the advantage of preserving continuity with the cultural tradition while changing the meaning. But critics are doubtful of whether symbolic reinterpretation engages the theological content of the ancestral practice. Since ancestors were traditionally construed as intermediaries between the living and the divine, do they retain the form while emptying the content by redefining them as models of faithful living?

The literature has critically assessed interdisciplinary studies in culture, identity, syncretism, ancestral cosmology, mission Christianity, and modern African theology. It has been shown that the persistence of rituals cannot be reduced to ignorance or uprising. Rather, it comes out of stratified identity, existential anxiety, communal duty, historical missionary past, institutional ambiguity, and theological negotiation. The chapter has also

indicated that there are major gaps in current scholarship, namely, limited localized study in mission-founded evangelical churches, insufficient analysis of generations, and limited investigation of constitutional policy awareness at the congregational level. Symbolic interactionism and cultural dissonance theory offer theoretical approaches that provide an analytical purchase for investigating these processes without necessarily reducing them to binary categories. These frameworks, combined with inculturation theology as expressed by Shorter, Mbiti, and Bediako, are alerting the researcher to the process of meaning-making, interpretive negotiation, the cognitive inconsistency management of lived religious experience.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodological framework that dictated the study implementation process of the persistence of cultural practices in funeral rituals within the Africa Inland Church (AIC), Nakuru East Region, has been elaborately and extensively expounded and expressed. Qualitative research requires a stringent and clear methodology that can guarantee the credibility, ethics, and academic credibility of the results. As a result, the philosophical assumptions, research strategy, design, theoretical lens, and all practical procedures that organized the investigation between the conceptualization stage and the data analysis are carefully described in this chapter. The main objective was to define the systematic procedures that are used to explore the intricate, subtle, and well-entrenched realities of the perceptions, bargaining, and actualizations of death issues of the church members, in relation to the church's beliefs of African cultural heritage and Christian doctrine.

Interpretivism is epistemologically that the knowledge is jointly constructed as a result of interaction between the researcher and the participants. It was not aimed at verifying a hypothesis or quantifying variables (as is the case in positivism) but to attain *Verstehen* a profound, empathetic insight into the meanings, motives, and interpretations that people give to their actions and the social world (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). This was in line with the aim of the study of the exploration of how and why some cultural practices have continued, what they mean to the various actors and how they are negotiated in the context of the Christian faith. Rather, the researcher was not an impartial observer but instead a partaking, reflexive participant in the knowledge generation process.

### **Qualitative Research Approach**

A qualitative research method was premeditatedly chosen as the most suitable way of this inquiry. Qualitative research essentially deals with the investigation and explanation of phenomena as observed through the eyes of people who undergo it. It tries to provide answers to questions concerning the why and how of human behaviours, which is concerned with meanings, processes, and contexts (Creswell 2014). This is in contrast to the quantitative research which pays attention to what, where, and when, and in many cases uses statistical analysis to test the hypotheses that have been set beforehand.

The need to use a qualitative approach in this study was complex and strong. To begin with, the character of the research problem required a delve into the depths of conviction, internalization, figurative interpretations, and interpersonal procedures. Questions like How do members mediate the tension between cultural demands and church teaching? or What theological meanings are attached to ongoing cultural rites? are in nature qualitative questions. They need techniques that can be used to get beyond superficial conduct so as to determine motivations, fears and aspirations. The survey might find that 70% of members underwent post-funeral cleansing rites and this may not be sufficient to understand the strong feeling of fear and communal duty that makes a devout Christian conform to the ritual that is against his or her theological beliefs. The emotional and cognitive dissonance of Cultural Dissonance Theory could only be tapped through discussion and observation.

The meaning-making and lived experience were the main points of the study. The essence of this project was how people and society come to the meaning of their hybrid reality. It is a dynamic, dialogical, and implicit process of meaning-making. In-depth conversations, interactions, and participation in the daily life enabled the qualitative approach to help the researchers observe meaning being constructed, contested, and affirmed in the real-time. To illustrate, at a funeral, the researcher was able to note that a reading in the Bible about the resurrection was immediately preceded by an elder whispering on how the grave should be properly oriented to the ancestors (Ammerman, 2007). This juxtaposition, the study of varying systems of meaning in action, and how the attendees resolved or segmented these messages, were possible because the qualitative approach permitted them to capture it. One of the main features of qualitative inquiry is this focus on lived religion, that is, religion as practiced and experienced as opposed to religion as merely professed.

The qualitative approach is flexible in nature which means the focus of the study can be narrowed in the course of fieldwork. Some themes that appeared in the initial interviews

could be developed further in further observations and discussions, which would result in more developed and more grounded results (Merriam, 2009). This is one of the major strengths of qualitative design as it is an iterative process of data collection and analysis whereby the research is responsive to the realities in the field as opposed to a fixed original plan.

To practice the qualitative method in the interpretivist paradigm, the research design in this study was ethnographic, which would be interpreted through a critical ethnographic approach. Anthropology gave birth to ethnography which is the examination of people and culture within their natural setting over a long duration of time (Berry, 2005). It aims, first of all, at offering a deep, holistic, and contextualized description of social life as the members of the culture themselves see it- an emic perspective.

The ethnographic design was chosen for a number of reasons. The requirement of the immersion and the extended time of involvement demanded a prolonged field work in the AIC congregations of Nakuru East Region. It was not a succession of isolated interviews but a constant attendance at church services, committee meetings, social life, and last but not least the planning and carrying out of funerals. This ten-month immersion was crucial to the development of trust (rapport) and watching behaviors in their natural settings and experiencing the unspoken rules and mutual understandings that regulate the life of a community. It is this continued presence that helps the researcher to transition beyond the status of an outsider to one that is familiar with the participants and allows him or her to gain access to more genuine behaviors and discussions (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). It allowed the researcher to be there both during the Sunday service wedding, but also the nerve-inducing dowry negotiations at the house of the bride the week prior when the cultural pressures were most evident.

This triangulation method reinforced the results since there was cross-validation of information between various sources (Merriam, 2009). As an illustration, a pastor may say in an interview that the church highly disapproves of ancestral libations. Nonetheless, observing participants at a funeral could give an insight into his head-bowed silence throughout a short libation by a family elder before he goes to the pulpit to guide Christian worship. The official position is expressed through the interview, and the negotiated, lived reality is expressed through the observation. By triangulating these with a church document which does not comment on the issue, we get the whole picture of the policy-practice gap.

The design also examined the reproduction of gender dynamics in the ritual practices. It monitored and asked questions regarding the various expectations of men and women when mourning, when dealing with bride price and during the post-funeral rites. It touched the economic and class aspects of rituality, asking how rites such as extravagant funeral feasts or excessive bride price money could become an economic burden to the poor family, and created some kind of coercive social duty, which is against the Christian doctrine of stewardship and justice. Critical ethnography does not assume the social order of the church but explores how it is produced, maintained, and disputed, in practices such as funerals.

Therefore, it was not a passive observation of what happens but an intense, critical task that examines the social and power structure that determines the continuity and change of cultural practices in this Christian community. It enabled the study to not only document the harmony but also the tensions, silences, and contradictions, which are the main focus of the inculturation process. It conformed to the theoretical scenario, in that it saw inculturation as a struggle, rather than a facilitated, mutually comfortable process (had it been perceived as a mere descriptive ethnography), but as a place in which theological ideals, cultural imperatives and social power were negotiated. This critical prism was needed in achieving the goal of the study to have the perception and roles of various actors (elders, youth, pastors) and in coming up with the recommendations that were responsive to questions of power and justice in the church.

The research was carried out in the Africa Inland Church (AIC) congregations in the Africa Inland Church within Nakuru East Region in Nakuru County in Kenya. This area was chosen strategically due to its socio-demographic differences as it offered an excellent comparative setting to study the impacts of the different social changes on the continuity and change of cultural practices. Even Nakuru County is a cosmopolitan center of the Rift Valley, commonly referred to as a mini-Kenya on account of its ethnic heterogeneity. The target population This was all registered and active AIC members in Nakuru East which made the target population. This covered people in the entire spectrum of life in the church and the social positioning, which made the study to reflect the polyvocality of the community. The population was also intentionally selected to comprise: Ordained Clergy (senior pastors, associate pastors), who provide a definition of the official doctrinal position and bear pastoral responsibility to resolve conflicts, Church Elders (male and female), who have a dual role being ecclesiastical leaders, and in many cases, the family

and community leaders with a deep religious background; and the General Congregants, who are the ones who experience the tensions of their personal and family lives. church.

A total of 73 participants engaged in the formal, in-depth, semi-structured types of interviews. Also, 8 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were organized, wherein 6-8 participants took part. FGDs were also homogeneous (e.g., Young Men, Elderly Women) in order to facilitate free discussions and observe group processes and the development of consensus under sensitive issues. The sampling was carried on until theoretical saturation occurred, when the new interviews and FGDs did not generate any meaningful new themes or insights but only supported and elaborated on the previously determined categories in the analysis (Charmaz, 2014). This was determined when the interview was about the 65th, although the other remaining predetermined meetings were also done to avoid any special outliers being missed as well as to add more weight to the data.

#### *Data Collection Procedures and Methods*

The use of data collection was the phased, multi-method process scheduled to be conducted during a 10-month intensive fieldwork, January to October 2024. This was to be given enough time to gain trust, to watch the seasonal changes in rituals, and to be in place when the funeral occurs unexpectedly. Participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and focus group discussions were the major techniques and document analysis was used to provide the necessary contextual support. The combination of methods was crucial to developing a multidimensional and strong construction of knowledge.

#### *Participant Observation*

Being the key of the ethnographic design, participant observation entailed the researcher integrating with the everyday and ritualistic existence of the chosen AIC congregations. The observation was observed on a spectrum between passive observation to active participation. The observation made by the researcher of observing cultural rituals made him consciously adopt an observational role as a researcher since he is a pastor in the AIC and has been a natural participant in religious activities. Observed Contexts were selected in a strategic manner to give a holistic picture: Based on the thematic synthesis, the cultural practices being upheld in the AIC Nakuru East Region were not upheld under a theological belief but rather as a result of social pressure, institutional silence, and normalization. The findings suggest that compliance to culture was a survival strategy in the family and community system and not a faith commitment act.

## **FINDINGS**

This section presents the findings explaining them in connection to the objectives of the study, research questions and theoretical framework of inculturation theology. Instead of reciting the results of the empirical studies, the chapter critically discusses how the results are applicable to the Africa Inland Church (AIC) in Nakuru East Region with due consideration to theological soundness, church policy, leadership practice, discipleship, and pastoral care. The argument combines the field information and the available literature and theological reflection to clarify how cultural issues of funeral arrangements have been negotiated in the church. In this synthesis, the chapter makes some practical suggestions that can help to guide church leadership, inform policy making, enhance Christian witness, and be responsive in engaging the culture.

This chapter does not just offer a description point, but constructs theological and practical involvement. It acknowledges that AIC Nakuru East does not merely solve the problem of cultural practices in the area but rather appreciates and addresses the issue pastorally. The analysis follows five movements, the first step is returning to the objectives of the research and the research questions in the light of the findings, the second step is how the findings can be interpreted using the inculturation theology articulated by Shorter, Mbiti and Bediako, the third step is the analysis of the institutional and policy implications to the AIC governance, the fourth step is the analysis of the pastoral applications to the clergy and congregational leaders and the fifth step is proposing specific and practical recommendations on how to address the identified tensions.

The implications of the study findings concerning theology, leadership, and practice in the Africa Inland Church, Nakuru East Region, have been discussed in this chapter. Through a critical and pastoral engagement with culture, the church can provide an opportunity to enhance its testimony, to protect the purity of the gospel, and to achieve a holistic discipleship in its own cultural context.

The clergy say they have no church manuals that they can use to teach. The constitution is silent about cultural practices in the church and has no policies that stipulate the same. There are influencing factors from the prior knowledge practiced outside the church by the same leaders who came to church, some of whom claim were appointed to take positions having fulfilled solemnizing weddings, which they think is the determining factor for leadership and ministry. Some feel it is wrong and it violates Christ's teachings, but have no platform to express their feelings. A few consult others outside the church personnel,

and are very encouraging that a small percentage have come together to seek what the Bible says concerning the cultural practices in the church. There is a ridge that has been existing, and an unresolved issue that requires addressing. Culture and the church are inseparable institutions.

In summary, cultural practice in the Africa Inland Church, Nakuru East, is a reality. Some members are not happy about it and would wish the church to reflect the picture of the church and be the church. People practice, participate, and adhere to cultural practices in the Africa Inland Church. Cultural practice brings a picture of respect and adoration to the cultural demands of ancestral worship, yet God cannot share glory with any other.

### **Discussion of Salient Findings as Relating to the Research Questions**

The research findings showed that institutional silence, confusion of leadership, and lack of explicit doctrinal direction were the main contributors to the perpetuation of the cultural practices in AIC Nakuru East, especially concerning funerals, instead of making a conscious theological belief. This goes to confirm the argument taken by African theologians of inculturation, according to which when the church does not interpret culture critically using the gospel, then culture interprets Christianity instead.

The meaning of this discovery has significant hermeneutical value. It implies that the silence of the church is a kind of connotative authorization. Seeing that there is no condemnation or discussion of the cultural practices of a congregation, it is logical that congregants will assume that the practices are acceptable. Such a lack of teaching is in reality, a teaching of accommodation. Such a dynamic resembles what social theorists call the null curriculum, which not only institutions do not teach but also say much about. In the case of AIC Nakuru East, the null curriculum on cultural practices has conveyed the message that these cultural practices are beyond the theological consideration, and the members are left to deal with two competing forces of the church without ecclesial support.

On the first research question about contributing factors, the results indicate that social belonging, fear of conflict in the family, and wish to maintain cultural practices were the main factors that led to continuation of cultural practices. These aspects demonstrate how the church is struggling to combat deeply rooted social systems that go beyond the individual faith to the communal identity. Its findings can be linked to a claim made by Mbiti according to which the African identity is essentially communal, thus religious decisions are hardly made independently of family and community organizations.

This discovery highlights the weak character of individualistic discipleship. When the concept of Christian formation is imbued with the vision of individual change, it will not respond to the community-related aspects of the African social life of making decisions. Proper discipleship should be able to acknowledge the fact that a believer does not make decisions alone and rather is a human being in a family or a clan and in a community. This acknowledgement does not reduce the issue of personal responsibility but puts it in the context of the relational webs where actual decisions are made.

Concerning the church's perception of cultural practices, the research study did reveal that there was no common theological interpretation as perceived by the clergy, the elders and the congregants. This lack of agreement is an indication of what Shorter refers to as a process of inculturation that has not been fully accomplished and in which Christianity has been accessed and not adequately interpreted in local cultural realities. Members believed that the church was condoning it through its silence, resulting in syncretic practices that made the line between Christian worship and cultural ceremony thin.

A catechetical failure is shown by a lack of common interpretation. In case the pastors, elders and laity have different interpretations of the church's position, then the church has not communicated its teachings effectively. This communication breakdown has different levels: Seminaries might not prepare pastors to answer questions of culture; pastors might not transmit their insights to elders; elders might not communicate to congregants; and congregants might get mixed messages through observation of flawed practice. To deal with this failure, it would take purposeful action on all levels of the teaching ministry in the church.

The third question of research on church constitution and policy showed that there was a big institutional gap. Lack of clear policy guidance on the practices of culture made the church leaders lack a guideline to discern or intervene. This observation highlights the need of African Christianity to have theological self-determination based on Scripture without passive attention to culture, as opposed to the cultural rules of the inherited missionary taboos or cultural suppositions.

This is not an administrative but a theological institutional gap. It is an indication of theological ineffectiveness in thinking about gospel and culture that has reduced the church to reliance on either inherited missionary taboos (which can be culturally unacceptable) or unwise cultural accommodation (which can be theologically unsatisfactory). To achieve true theological self-determination, the church needs to formulate its own form of critique

in judging cultural practices, which is made based on the Scripture and informed through contextual knowledge. This is exactly what inculturation is, a critical, dialectical process of figuring out how gospel and culture interact as Shorter puts it.

Regarding youth, elder, and church leadership, the paper identified that the elders and pastors tended to act like cultural interpreters and not as theologians, and the youth and women were those who suffered the most by not resolving cultural conflicts. This movement posed radical political enquiries of power, voice, and participation in church organizations and the importance of inclusive theological discussion.

The disproportionate effect on young people and women is the subject matter of ecclesial justice. When some groups end up with disproportionate load related to the unresolved cultural tensions, then the inability of the church to access these tensions is a failure of pastoral care by the church to its most vulnerable members. Young people lacking educational opportunities because of culturally required funeral postponements, women who are marginalized in the course of rituals, and people who are spiritually confused because of not being able to resolve dual allegiance, all are pastoral crises that need to be met with compassion. It is not only necessary that the policy is clear but also that the voices of the affected are deliberately incorporated in the theological discernment in order to address these emergencies.

### **Inculturation Theological Implication of AIC**

The results indicate that there is a necessity of deliberate inculturation theology in AIC Nakuru East. Inculturation does not mean that cultural practices should be accepted without probing, but it requires discernment that supports cultural values that are in line with the gospel, but rebuffs cultural practices that weaken the Christian faith, human dignity, and justice. The research established that in the places where this discrimination was not practiced, the rituals of fear, mediation of the ancestors, and patriarchal order were directed into the operation of the church, and thus, undermined the prophetic functions of the church.

The difference between inculturation and accommodation is very important in this case. The inculturation, as it should be understood, is not a passive acceptance of the cultural practices but an active and critical engagement. It does not just demand to find out whether a practice is traditional or not, but whether it is consistent with gospel values, whether it is conducive to human flourishing, whether it is consistent with the character of God, and

whether it can be truly incorporated into the Christian worship and life. By contrast, accommodation tolerates practices that lack such discrimination, and thus culture forms the agenda, and the church just blesses what culture creates. The results indicate that AIC Nakuru East has been living in accommodation instead of inculturation, and the outcomes are foreseeable: the practices that are incompatible with the Christian faith have penetrated the church without being critically evaluated.

That there exist rituals of fear, practices driven by fear of displeasing the ancestors, or the spiritual pollution, tells us that Christian doctrine has failed to properly accommodate the existential anxieties that the rituals are dealing with. Christians are still afraid of what they think the church is not able to save them. This fear is not just theological perplexity but the failure of a pastor. The proclamation of the victory that Christ has over all the spiritual powers (Colossians 2:15) in a church needs to make believers feel that victory in such a manner that it will address the greatest fears of the believers. This involves the use of teaching that involves the worldview level and not just behavioral teaching.

## **DISCUSSION**

Observation highlights the ritual practices as culturally constructed. What is natural and inherent in one setting may be bizarre in a different setting. The dilemma of AIC is not to maintain African culture intact and to assume its place with the Western forms but to identify the relationship between the gospel and the culture in the particular area of Nakuru East. It involves theological thinking that does not disregard culture, but neither does it make it normative; neither does it idolize tradition, but rather should find ways of practice that are faithful Christian and genuinely African.

In funerals, there are procedures at every stage, and people have different perspectives that should be respected. We start training ourselves to think from a more positive perspective, and this will help us face the challenges of life. Shifting our perspective isn't an easy process. Cultural practices are teaching and a learning situation that we ought to teach and, in a manner, preach the gospel. There is a need to understand the cultural practice in the church and the reason why this cultural practice. According to the respondents, the church constitution did not mention anything about cultural practices in funerals. The ministry of Jesus also consisted of teaching and exhortation. 19:10 gives the direction of ministry, 'For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. People were urged to accept the good news, which taught that Jesus had come to establish the Kingdom of God,

and thus, they were to repent and put their faith in Jesus. We are Christ-like and coworkers with Jesus.

The missional effects of the current research are great. In the event that the church is supposed to meet its mission of seeking and saving the lost, it has to reach people in their locales, even their culturally embeddedness. This does not imply that it supports whatever culture teaches, but encounters people in their cultural contexts and takes them through the transformation process in the name of Christ. The gospel is always presented to people culturally; the question is, what are the forms that we are using to communicate gospel meaning or to muddle it. In the case of AIC Nakuru East, this involves creating liturgical and catechetical tools that communicate the gospel in cultural ways that will bring its contentment.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined the effects of cultural practices on funerals in the Africa Inland Church (AIC), Nakuru East Region. The findings show that the persistence of these practices is driven less by deliberate rejection of Christian doctrine and more by institutional silence, unclear policy direction, leadership ambivalence, and strong family and community expectations. In addition, funeral practices continue because they address fears, emotional needs, and social obligations that many members feel are not adequately addressed by church teaching and pastoral care.

The study, therefore, concludes that the challenge facing AIC Nakuru East is not simply cultural disobedience, but a need for clearer theological guidance, stronger pastoral response, and more inclusive dialogue within the church. If the church engages these practices critically and biblically rather than ignoring or merely condemning them, it can strengthen its witness, support its members more effectively, and promote a form of Christian faith that is both doctrinally sound and contextually relevant.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Review the AIC constitution and policies to provide clear biblical and theological guidance on funeral-related cultural practices.
2. Strengthen theological training for pastors and elders in inculturation, African traditional religion, and pastoral care.
3. Develop congregational teaching materials on funerals, culture, and Christian doctrine for use in Bible study, counseling, and discipleship programs.

4. Prepare practical pastoral guidelines to help church leaders handle funeral-related cultural issues consistently and wisely.
5. Promote intergenerational dialogue so that youth, elders, and women can openly discuss cultural practices and their implications for Christian life.
6. Increase women's participation in church discussions and decisions on funeral practices, since they are often highly affected by these rituals.
7. Design contextual funeral liturgies and Bible study resources that uphold biblical truth while responding to the cultural realities of members.
8. Encourage continuous research and documentation on cultural practices in AIC to guide future policy, teaching, and pastoral action.
9. Implement the Cultural Practices in Church Reconstruction Model (CPCRM) as a framework for promoting critical, faithful, and constructive engagement with culture in the church.

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