

Problems Faced by Today's Christian Families among the Agĩkũyũ in Kĩambaa Sub-County, Kĩambu County-Kenya

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Abstract: The family, which is not confined to the father, mother and their children but also includes the whole descendants, clans and ethnic community, seems to be overwhelmed by all kinds of evils experienced in the contemporary society despite some members being Christians in faith affiliation. The problems in turn lead to instability of the households hence individuals in their homes struggle to live as they ought to. Such evils do not spare the Christian families among the Agĩkũyũ who are supposed to lead a life based on their ethnic world-view family values that pleases God who freely gave them traditional cultural values and gratuitously endowed them with the instructions of the requisites of authentic Christian families. Failure to live family life fully according to the principles that Jesus Christ directed towards community welfare leads to suffering, vulnerability to emerging malevolent forces targeting families and other impediments that act as stumbling blocks in maintaining family standards of both ethnic traditional philosophy of life and Christianity demands. Such is the issue the paper grapples with. To delve in the problem then, the present study was guided by three inter-related theories in examining the problems that today's Agĩkũyũ Christian families face in Kĩambaa Sub-County, Kĩambu County. These are: general cum special revelation theory, mediation theory and redaction criticism theory. The endeavour involved qualitative method using a case study research design to collect secondary data from related written sources and primary data from the base community through the use of questionnaires and oral interviews. The findings of the study show that Christian families encounter various challenges such as poverty, conflicts arising from inheritance and ownership of property and suicide among others spelt out in the paper. As explained in the study, such issues have led these families into criminal dealings, pain of losing loved ones, destruction of homes and fleeing from their ancestral homes to live as destitute in diaspora. Among the recommendations the study provides is that of eliminating unjust cultural elements some of which are not developmental, parents being more consciously involved in the lives of their children not living them to teachers and peer members and the Christian Church's alertness on understanding and handling issues that affect her members so as to help them overcome their problems and realize a fulfilling Christian family life. The expectation is that the paper will assist respective families to be properly empowered to confront the problems passionately turning the disturbing elements into opportunities for family positive actualization.

Keywords: Agĩkũyũ, Christian faithful, Family and Agĩkũyũ world-view.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The present society is seemingly overwhelmed by all kinds of evil which negatively influence Christian family life. Christian families are expected to live according to the will of God as the originator of the family which is the basic institution in the society. Due to numerous evils taking place in the society and others cropping up, these covenant institutions, however, are visibly struggling to live as they are expected to. A disinterested observer will also appreciate that some apply double standards in family life and what appertains to this covenant institution. Just to give an example, the mass media is flooded with issues severely impacting on productive apprehension of married and family life. There is such an increase of components like many cases of separation and divorce, murder of one's children, reciprocated violence between couples some of them fatal and widespread distrust among the consorts such that we seem to have a fatigue of the trend. Such evils that run across communities and precisely Christian families are deemed to be the root cause of pain and un-freedom, elements that inhibit Christians from living a fulfilling Christian family life (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 1995: 63).

A number of people, who are Christians in the sense that they entered into the family institution through baptismal ritual and Church weddings rites as the sacrament of marriage requires, attend Mass or services regularly, enrol in ecclesial devotional groups and participate in enticing spiritual activities of the Church. Yet they are seen to be engaging themselves in the aforementioned incongruent activities that are repugnant to African family values and detrimental to Christian matrimonial family principles hence ruining their own families and others. Our research in Kĩambaa Sub- County revealed that despite being followers of Jesus Christ, many married men and women do not live as per the standards of the family of God willed by the founder. Because of this disturbing shortcoming, individuals in the modern society are left wondering whether members of Christian families as the representatives of the “Family of God” here on earth and socialized in African communities whose world-view is rich in family values play their role of being exemplary to the other families.

To tackle the issue, a number of researchers have come up with creditable works on the problems faced by today's Christian families at a scholarly level. To bring forth a few scenarios: Wachege's comprehensive monograph on *Third Millennium African Mothers and Mother Widows: Ethno-Religio-Philosophical-Touch* identifies and explains at least 31 categories of single motherhood families (Wachege, 2003:71-126), their multi-faceted causes (Ibid.,:130-151), how they are traditionally treated and mistreated (Ibid., 162-188), traditional perspectives, perception, treatment and mistreatment these families are subjected to (Ibid.,:190-222) and their relation with ecclesia, challenges to Christian family life and suggested accompanying way forward (Ibid.,: 252ff). Cheronno carried out an interrelated study on *Agikũyũ Single Fathers and Mothers in Kĩambaa Village, Kĩambu County through Christian Inculturation – Liberation approach* to come up with the challenges that single parents experience in living Christian family life and parenting (Cheronno: 2014).

Ndungwa further did a study on the predicament of family life by focusing on *Akamba Single Mothers in reference to Parenting the Boy Child in the Light of Christian Complementary Feminism* basing her study on Mwala District, Machakos County as a case study-therefore applicable to Kĩambaa too- (Ndungwa: 2012). There are some other renowned scholars with related publications which the limitation imposed on the paper does not allow us to document. Although the above publications are enriching, nevertheless, none of them or any other we are aware of has explored the subject explicitly in relation to African world-view and ecclesial instruction on family life within the context of the contemporary problems they are confronted with. The study focused on the above-mentioned issues to complement the above and other interrelated academic works. To be more precise, the kind of families our paper opted for are Agikũyũ ones who happen to be Christians thus qualifying as members of the Christian family of God basing itself in Kĩambaa Sub-County, Kĩambu County.

II. GUIDING THEORIES AND METHODOLOGY

The current study was guided by three interrelated theories which are: general cum special revelation theory, mediation theory and redaction criticism theory. General cum special revelation theory is propagated by scholars like Latourelle who expounds the issue of “external and internal testimony” animated by the Holy Spirit in generating consciousness (Latourelle, 1966: 383ff). Rahner explains it more clearly. He elaborates that God reveals Himself not just theocentrically in a generally way via own creation but also Christocentrically to His creature in a special way through Jesus Christ thereby making known His plan for salvation that includes married and family life (Rahner, 1978: 144-161). The other theory that guided the study is mediation theory. Its exponents are two Latin American brothers, Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, who are of international repute in Christian liberation theology. The scholars have come up with three methodological mediations called moments that are of immense importance in liberating and tackling concrete existential historical problems – family ones included. The first moment called “socio-analytical mediation” which has to do with insertion and making social analysis researchers thereby (L. Boff and C. Boff, 1987: 24-32) assisted the Researchers to be on the ground, i.e. Kĩambaa Sub-County, so as to get first-hand information regarding the challenges of Agikũyũ Christian family life in the area. The data acquired from the insertion will be scrutinized to come up with the reasons why the crisis occurs in the locality among that category of people despite being both Gikũyũ and Christians. The second moment is “hermeneutical mediation” that is imbued with theological reflections of the above data in relation to the Bible, Tradition and traditions (Ibid.,: 1987:32-39). It empowered the researchers to relate the findings in the above moment to the will of God to give it a Christian orientation since the study is basically theologically oriented. The main source here is the Bible, Christian tradition and Church teachings on family life. The third moment is that of praxis mediation (Ibid.,: 39-41) which enabled the researchers to come up with the possible transforming solutions to the subject chosen at both pastoral and scholarly level. The third theory known as redaction criticism theory that takes each Bible document as a whole considering characteristics like the authors, how they arranged their respective materials, their recipients, what they aimed at and their theological bend (Collins, 1992: 192-220). It equipped the researchers with a critical manner of sourcing from the Bible scientifically. It was propagated by biblical scholars like Bornkamm, Fuchs and Kasemann's. The theory, furthermore, conscientized us not only to take the Bible systematically but also to go

for Scriptural source texts like New Jerome Biblical Commentary, New Jerusalem Bible and renowned biblical lexicons.

The study employed the case study research design (Kombo and Tromp, 2006: 72) to investigate the challenges that Agikūyū Christian families in Kĩambaa Sub-County encounter in view of coming up with viable way forward. A sample of 50 respondents was selected from the larger population. The researchers used the non-probability sampling method to select 20 family members, 5 Church leaders from the two mainstream Churches in the area that is; Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Church using stratified sampling and 25 Church members using the stratified sampling method. Questionnaires, In-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions and the observation method were used to obtain first-hand information from the respondents. The data collected was then put together and arranged thematically. The descriptive method was used to analyse the findings of the research.

III. ISSUE FOR THE RESEARCH

According to the African philosophy of life, a family is “inclusive, complex, geared towards solidarity and well-disposed to authentic interpersonal relationship with others” (Wachege, 2017). Ndiaye argues that it “includes not only father, mother, and children but also a lineage, ethnicity, and clan as well as cousins, siblings, aunts and uncles, grandparents, and relatives by marriage who may belong to different ethnic groups, religions, and linguistic constituencies. It consists of a web of multiple solidarities and specific relations with economic dimensions and divisions of labour and goods that are often sources of conflict” (Ndiaye, 2015: 157-158). Additionally, Nyamiti brought forward and explicated five fundamental inter-related main factors in the African world-view so that the specificity of African family can be well understood by African themselves and other individuals in the world. These factors which Nyamiti explicates are life/vitality, power/dynamism, sacrality/sacredness, communality and anthropocentrism (Nyamiti, 2010: 55-74). Loyal adherence to these components of the African World-view develops harmony in an African family portraying uniqueness in such families.

In addition, since the study is based on family, then it is already involved in married life as the foundation of community living and assurance of descendants. It, therefore, follows that commitment to the aforesaid components of the African world-view leads to harmonious married and family life as well as a guarantee of descendants. Disrespect to these items results in family break-up together with other negative factors hence a big challenge to Christian family life that should be studied at the scholarly level. On the basis of aforementioned African philosophy of life, an African marriage and family life holds on to the Ancestors who give favours in terms of blessings to their descendants because of their consanguinity and closeness to God. Similarly, the descendants are obliged to venerate their ancestors by living harmoniously and involving them in their family events and naming their children after them as a relationality bond just to mention a few, for the good of families and the community as a whole (Nyamiti, 2010: 65-68). Apart from having a familial connection with the Ancestors, the terrestrial ones are also linked with the environment and to God, the Creator of all. That is why families are expected to come together to worship God and offer their sacrifices to Him as a way of showing their gratitude and seeking for more blessings (Wachege, 2017). Moreover, it is in the family that children learn from their parents and relatives to live their lives, respect the elders and venerate the ancestors as they adore God. Ancestors act as mediators between God and His people hence family members have to be in continued touch with their ancestors resulting in families extending from the terrestrial to the celestial world (Wachege, 2017). Additionally, there are those family and Christian values such as obedience, kindness and love that are meant to govern individuals in the community. These values are further aimed at developing meaningful, trustworthy and long lasting interpersonal relationships for the welfare of all. When individuals in a family are in good terms, then proper communication is facilitated, concern for one another is enhanced and each individual then works harmoniously with the rest for the common good of all (Ndiaye, 2015: 158).

With the above in mind, therefore, malicious powers and problems affecting married and family lives require to be scrutinized and handled not just largely but at a dedicated scholarly level focusing on a base community, like in our study that of the Agikūyū of Kĩambaa Sub-County, as a case study. The location chosen is predominantly Christian with a large number of Christian families facing quite a number of problems mentioned earlier in the study. The researchers settled for the Christian families because there are important ecclesial instructions that can be appropriately utilized for the well-being of the Christian family life. Furthermore, the African world-view would be suitably used to extract those African values that can be effectively used to tackle some seemingly overwhelming Christian family life problems. The bottom-line is our wonder as to why Christian families among the Agikūyū of Kĩambaa Sub-County Kiambu County are virtually succumbing to contemporary malevolent forces targeting the families and yet they are socialized in Agikūyū world-view rich in family values and Christian invaluable instructions on family life. The conviction is that the research findings shall provide useful transforming way forward as drawn out at the end of our paper.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The section deals with relevant publications and ideas from scholars who have done earlier studies on the related area of interest. The sequence is thematic. As such, we will focus on who the Agikūyū are and, Agikūyū spiritual beliefs that impact on family and Agikūyū value system. We will also examine works on the place of the elders among the Agikūyū and their roles in families together with Agikūyū family system. After that, we will explore Christian Church teachings to gain more insights into married and family life together with the accompanying problems and how to handle them.

4.1 Who the Agikūyū Are

Agikūyū major settlements are Kĩambu, Mũrang'a, Nyeri, Kĩrĩnyaga and Nyandarũ Counties. A large number of them live in the other 42 Counties especially Laikipia, Nakuru and Kajiado. To Wanjohi, the Agikūyū population inclusive of the dispersed ones is about 6.5 million. They therefore qualify as Kenya's largest ethnic community among the 47 in the Nation (Wanjohi, 1997: 19). Wachege identifies the Agikūyū as "an agrarian, patrilineal, large Bantu people (sometimes manifesting Maasai elements) with a remarkable, vitalistico-communal-relational world-view, belonging to both *mariika* (age-groups and generations) and the full nine *mihĩrĩga* (clans) named after the full nine daughters of their originating Ancestors namely: Gikūyū, their father whom they are named after; and his wife Mũmbi, their mother to whose *nyũmba* (household) they belong – both being the Agikūyū forefathers mysteriously created and endowed with properties from *Kĩrĩnyaga* (Mt. Kenya) by *Mwene-Nyaga*, the one and only *Ngai* (God) whom they adore." (Wachege, 1992: 11).

According to the Gikūyū creation myth, after *Ngai* (God) had created all things, peoples and nations, He took Gikūyū (the father of Gikūyū nation) to the top of Kĩrĩ-Nyaga (Mount Kenya) and showed him the land that he had given to him and his generations. God showed him a spot filled with fig trees and instructed Gikūyū to build his home there. He named the place Mũkũrwe wa Gathanga. The trees surrounding that particular spot were known as *mikūyū* and it is from this that the name 'Gikūyū' was perhaps derived. Therefore, a Gikūyū is referred to as a Mũgikūyū meaning the "the person of the fig tree." Gikūyū arrived at the place where God had instructed him to build his home and he found a woman awaiting him. He knew it was God who sent her to him and therefore, he took her as his wife and named her Mũmbi meaning creator or moulder. Together, Gikūyū and Mũmbi had nine daughters but no sons. They prayed to God about their family problem and God instructed Gikūyū to make a sacrifice to him under a holy fig tree (Wachege, 1992: 12ff). He was to make this sacrifice together with his wife and daughters, as a family, which became the nucleus of the Gikūyū community. After the sacrifice, Gikūyū and his family went back home and there, they found nine handsome men waiting for them (Kibicho, 2006: 17). The union of the Gikūyū's nine daughters and the young men sent to them by God then became the beginning of the Agikūyū family community.

4.2 Agikūyū Spiritual Beliefs that Impact on Family

Among the Agikūyū, it is believed that God manifests Himself to His people through the gift of life. It is therefore important to preserve and nurture human life to secure the growth of family life and the community at large. Such things as birth, marriage, blood, sex, relationships, planting and harvesting were all deemed to be sacred because they are meant to promote and sustain life. Moreover, the Ancestors are involved in family undertakings as part and parcel of them because of their concern for the welfare of family life. Shunning away from the ancestors means harm to the living members of the family through calamities, for instance, incurable diseases, family disintegration and children born with disabilities. Family members and the community as a whole are readily involved in appeasing the ancestors often so as to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships between the living and departed individuals. We sourced the data from knowledgeable respondents in our field research.

For the Agikūyū, the family was considered as the centre for worship and offerings. In worship and other religious rituals that take place in the family, the father as the head of the family, acts as a 'Chief Priest' in his home. He conducts prayers and offers home sacrifices to God on behalf of the other family members. From the myth of the origin of the Agikūyū, God Himself established the family as the basic unit where prayers and sacrifices can be offered to God: "The centrality of the family in Gikūyū worship is seen first of all in the fact that most of the religious acts of worship, sacrifice and other rites which any individual was involved in throughout his lifetime were celebrated by the whole family as a group. The most important were those connected with birth, initiation, marriage and death." (Kibicho, 2006: 36). Unlike individual and family worship, public worship and sacrifices to God take place at the sacred trees such as the *Mũgumo* (fig tree). These celebrations are led by elders from the "ceremonial council" for and on behalf of the families in the community. The sacrifices are meant to thank God for abundant harvests, to request for family favour and also to seek God's favour in times of crisis such as family problems, famine and sickness. Individuals from diverse families come together to pray to God put an end to the problems faced in their families and the community at

large (Kibicho, 2006: 39). To have a better understanding of the above, one needs to comprehend Agikūyū value system.

4.3 Agikūyū Value System

Our field work created awareness that there are five essential values which are involved in various aspects of family life among the Agikūyū. Such virtues could be used by persons in the family to deal with social evils which may lead to problems that interfere with the normal functioning of the family. Honesty helps family members to be true to one another. Wives are expected to remain truthful to their husbands who in turn are required to be responsible for maintaining their homes and also not to desire other women unlawfully. Children, both boys and girls, assisted in the daily house chores and are required to live at home until they mature and are ready to marry. Generosity creates a ground for family members to run to each other in times of crisis and to be of help to their neighbours without counting the cost also ensuring that every individual played commensurate assisting roles thereby discouraging laziness and selfishness in the family. *Kihooto* (justice) is mainly observed to maintain peace and harmony. Peace is achieved through solving of disputes among family members. The elders play a major role in dealing with these differences and they see to it that the victims are compensated. The offenders are however, helped out by their family members to compensate the offended meaning that family issues can be tackled effectively by the family as a whole.

Courage is the other virtue that is highly valued among the Agikūyū. It helps individuals, especially men, to protect their homesteads and the community from dangers within or outside the household. Temperance as the capability of an individual to control oneself enables individuals in the family and the wider community to exercise self-control thereby respecting the members of the opposite sex. During initiation ceremonies, boys and girls were put together as they were being taught community values by their elders and were strictly needed to live as brothers and sisters (Kĩnoti, 2013: 127ff). Sex before marriage is termed as *mūgiro* (taboo). A girl attaining the marriage age as a virgin is proudly known as *gathirange* (pure) meaning that she has had a good upbringing and her parents are applauded (Ibid.: 128ff). Experiential knowledge however, indicates that a good number of families in Kiambaa Sub-location have impoverished these virtues. This kind of abandonment of the aforesaid values is causing havoc to the families as a major problem. The neglect may then be said to impact negatively even to those Agikūyū families that happen to belong to Christian faith affiliation. The scenario was confirmed in the field research.

There also existed disciplinary committees in the traditional Agikūyū community referred to as *njaama*. The committees handled social matters concerning specific groups in the society. *Njaama ya nyumba* (family group council) dealt with issues attached to ownership of property, inheritance, debts and rights of orphaned children in the family thereby enhancing family solidarity. *Njaama ya riika* (age-group council) was expected to visit each other's families to make sure that the lazy age mates were punished and encouraged to work hard so as to provide for their families and refrain from giving the *riika* (age-group) a bad reputation. There was also the *njaama ya atumia* (women's council) which was fundamentally for women welfare and also responsible for demanding *ngoima* (fines) from those elders who mistreated their wives and children thus causing jeopardy to family coherence. With the existence of these councils and fines associated with them, individuals were keen not to neglect their duties to family life (Kĩnoti, 2013: 25ff). Moreover, for one to be suitable as a reputable member of the council of elders, he had to be the head of a family, a man who is fully in control of his family. *Njaama ya airĩrtu* (the initiated girls council) organized itself to forbid girls from inappropriate behaviour and keep them away from sexual promiscuity, feminine misconduct and early marriages. The above councils were further meant to push individuals in the society to act maturely and uphold the social values of the community in general and those of the family in particular so as to achieve a fulfilling kind of family life (Kĩnoti, 2013: 26f). As such, family problems were avoided and those which occurred were successfully confronted.

In the African philosophy of life, proverbs play significant roles in the welfare of family life and the community at large. They enhance wisdom to protect families from crisis and instil wisdom upon the members to face emerging problems boldly using them as opportunities for growth. Wanjohi from his indebt research on the Agikūyū argues that most of Gikūyū proverbs have to do with family affairs and diverse social realities. This may be explained by the fact that the Gikūyū, like most other Africans, place a high premium on familial and social affairs (Wanjohi, 1997: 40ff). Such a critical finding gives credibility to the current study since the family as the basic unit of every society is the very central point of social issues. Gikūyū proverbs are also concerned with discouraging things such as laziness, stinginess, violence, selfishness, breaking the law and encouraging hard work, kindness, peace, communality, teamwork and obeying the law. Moreover, proverbs describe the types of rewards that accompany good deeds and punishments that are associated with going against the laws of family and community. With the above, individuals are aware of the dos and the don'ts of the society and they will strive to do the right things so as to live peacefully as community. All these not only promoted the flourishing of Agikūyū families but also made family problems manageable. Yet, one cannot appreciate the foregoing without being well grounded on the perception of the Agikūyū elders and their indispensable roles in

respective families. The rationale here is that, as Wachege affirms in his *Mũthamaki* book, the world of the Agikūyū – family welfare included – belongs to the elders.

4.4 The Place of the Elders Among the Agikūyū and Their Roles in Families

Elders are very much respected in the Gikūyū community. They have definite roles to play, privileges to enjoy and powers to exercise authority for family coherence and continuity. As Wachege profoundly explains, they play a prominent role within the Agikūyū world-view which is so rich in vitality and family matters (Wachege, 1992: 17-73). Among the major roles they play for the betterment of the family are: being liberating messengers, reconcilers, guardians of religion, leaders and rulers, family establishers and stabilizers and promoters of healthy relations (Ibid.,: 31-38). They are also endowed with powers for instance: that of shepherding their people, reconciling and uniting, judicial powers, teaching and transmitting traditional cultural values, power to elevate their *marigithathi* (first born sons) to take after them in being family uniters, power to utter last will which is binding for family continuity and welfare and also power to be remembered after joining the world of the ancestors (Ibid.,: 39-42). Elderhood, therefore, penetrates the whole of the Agikūyū family and culture. It thus deeply penetrates into the Agikūyū social mode of life. One should further note that: An important element in Agikūyū social life is marriage. As already shown their social structure is particularly linked with matrimonial life. It is in marriage that the vitalistic, relational and communal elements of Agikūyū life emerge strongly and spontaneously (Ibid.,:71). One has to also be aware that: It is in marriage that one's fecundity is proved. As such, the status of the elders as primarily promoters of life, interpersonal relationships, families and realization of life in communities that cater for the welfare of families even when problems arise are not enough. They still are required to be exemplary helping to avoid family difficulties and being in the frontline in solving problems that families face (Ibid.,: 77-78). So, to be a reputable elder, one is expected to manage his own *mũcii*(family) well. An elder is also required to be wise and to have lived an exemplary family life and also be committed to the *kĩama* (council of elders) as one who graduated from the required elderhood initiation rites (Ibid.,: 17-70). The sacrifices in which they participate in are intended to please God so that he can bless their families, lands, homes and the community at large (Kĩnoti, 2013: 23-24). Such is the indispensability of elders in Agikūyū family life and in assisting to curb matrimonial difficulties and helping to alleviate problems families are subjected to.

4.5 Agikūyū Family System

At the beginning, Agikūyū family life was matrilineal but eventually, it changed to the present-day patrilineal system. Leadership of the community was directed to men but the original women names for the clans were maintained (Bottignole, 1984: 31). These clans are: Agacikū (from Wanjikū), Aceera (from Njeri), Ambūi (from Wambūi), Anjirū (from Wanjirū), Ethaga also called Ambura or Akĩūru (from Nyambura), Angūi also called Aithiegeni (from Wangūi), Angarĩ (from Wangarĩ), Aithĩrandū also called Angeci (from Waithĩra), Airimū also called Agathigia (from Wairimū), and Aicakamūyū (from Wamūyū) (Wachege, 1992: 7). The nine daughters met the same number of young men and took them as their husbands to enter into the realm of family life through marriage. The men appeared mysteriously from God after Gikūyū had made a sacrifice to *Nyene* (the Owner of all). Later on, the *marika* (age groups cum generations) family system cropped up namely: Kĩmerero/Kĩongo/Kĩambĩrĩria (generating generation i.e. Gikūyū's and Mũmbi's); Karirāū; Agu; Tirū; Mathaathi; Maina; Mwangi; and Irūngū were generated (Wachege, 1992: 8).

It is in the family that children from the Agikūyū community learn their duties and family values like respect for the elders and how to handle home problems according to their capabilities. The above is confirmed by an author arguing that “it was always within the family that the children learned their duties and rights towards their parents, grand-parents, relatives and members of their clan. Grand-parents and parents were the natural teachers of their children. The former taught them the legend and ethnic traditions transmitted orally from generation to generation, and tried to develop their memory.” (Bottignole, 1984: 31). She also explains that there is division of work among the children depending on their gender. The mother becomes a teacher of the daughters and the father of the sons. These children are taught to assist their parents in the daily chores like farming, rearing livestock and domestic chores. Mothers have their daughters help them with the house chores like cooking and cleaning while the fathers have their sons assist them in the farm and in the field looking after the family livestock. In this regard, single parents are underprivileged; the single mothers undergo difficulties in raising the boy-children while the single fathers experience the same in parenting the girl-children (Bottignole, 1984: 32). With the increasing number of single parenting mode of families, parenting problems among the Christian families in Kĩambaa Sub-County, Kĩambu County, become more prominent.

4.6 Christian Church Teachings on Married and Family Welfare

Christian teachings are clear that The Creator intended the family to be the basic unit of every society. Parents should at all times love their children and in the same way, children are expected to love their parents even in their old age (Pesckke, 1992: 542-549), (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Children have the duty to obey their

parents as clearly spelled out in the 4th commandment of the Decalogue: "Honour your father and mother so that you may live long in the land that Yahweh your God is giving you"(20:12). The commandment is so crucial that there is a reward attached to it – living long though not surviving long. It is interesting to note that of the Ten Words (Ex 20:1-17), seven of them namely from the 4th to the 10th (Ex.20: 12-17) have to do with how people ought to relate to one another as a community of the family of God. Moreover, the 6th up to the 10th commandments are prohibition for the welfare of the families (Ex.20: 13-17). In every family, parents have the responsibility to provide their children with daily needs. The kinds of needs referred to here are both material and also spiritual ones. That is how seriously God takes family well-being as God prohibits evils that would cause havoc to families like that of killing, committing adultery, stealing, bearing false witness against one's neighbour and coveting one's neighbour's consorts or property.

Parents as the first teachers are responsible for educating their children at home even before they join formal schools. Children grow spiritually at home and also their discipline is enhanced. Love is the greatest virtue in each family. Community members come into being through the family which is a source of life emanating from the love between a man and a woman who have entered into the marriage institution. The Pope in the encyclical (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1982: 42-43) upholds that the family is the foundation of values that guide individuals to live harmoniously in the community. Family life brings fourth essential virtues like sharing, kindness, listening and understanding each other hence, unity that is destined to keep a family together. Nevertheless, the modern-day Christian family has been overwhelmed by a number of problems which touch on family life. Despite these alterations that have led to numerous disturbances in living Christian family life, the family still uphold very significant values that guide family members towards living honestly, truly and generously. The Church is therefore, devoted to assisting Christian families in realizing their duties of loving each other, loving neighbours and being noble to humanity (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Familiaris Consortio*, 1982: nos, 42-43). The Church is also liable for preaching the Gospel to Christian families with the goal of helping the family members live their Christian family life as it is expected of them. Living according to God's will builds up the connection between God and His people. Furthermore, the Church is also obliged to fight for the less fortunate and encourage the Christians to live as brothers and sisters hence developing a compassionate relationship (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Familiaris Consortio*, 1982: nos. 1, 5).

In the New Testament, Christ is seen involving Himself in the restoration of marriage and family life so that consorts together with their children live as God had planned for them. "Through His Church, Christ bestows on marriage and the family the grace necessary to witness to the love of God and to live the life of communion." (Synod of Bishops, 2015: 15). Through God's grace therefore, family members are endowed with the power to tackle their marital and family life problems so that they can be unified and that these institutions begun by God Himself are not damaged. As such, a union blessed in the Church as a covenant calls on Christ to lead their marriage and family life so as to make their relationship stronger. "Christ the Lord comes into the lives of married Christians through the Sacrament of Matrimony and remains with them."(Synod of Bishops, 2015: 16). Having Christ as the head, a family is perceived as a home Church which discloses the entire Church of Christ. Family members are therefore, encouraged to lead a life that delights God who sent His only son Jesus Christ to bond them so that they can have a flourishing Christian family life.

V. PROBLEMS FACED BY TODAY'S CHRISTIAN FAMILIES

The Researchers identified various striking issues which are stumbling blocks to today's Christian families among the Agikūyū in Kĩambaa Sub-County, Kiambu County. Among them are conflicts arising from inheritance and ownership of property, poor communication between consorts, polygamy as a trigger of the problems and suicide among others discussed below.

5.1 Conflicts Arising From Inheritance and Ownership of Property

Among the Agikūyū, especially in the traditional community, women are not allowed to inherit and own property from their parents (Cagnolo, 1933: 29-30). The customs and traditions of the community prevent the families from generously giving property to their female children. Though they are Christians and want to treat their children with equality, parents are restricted by a culture that they are compelled to abide with. Some parents, however, chose to go against the culture that is deemed to be unjust and offer property to their daughters. A challenge though comes in when her brothers refuse to share property with *aka* (women) (Wachege, 2003: 164). As a consequence, there arises conflicts that could cause divisions among the siblings. In Kĩambaa Sub-County, families including the Christian ones face a number of problems emerging from the question of inheritance and ownership of land and other property. Some families take in lawyers to contest in Civil Courts of Law. These families may involve children contesting their father's will and the sharing of property amongst themselves. Often, the court proceedings take a long period of time, are tiresome and more so, large amounts of money are being put into use in court processes. Similarly, some judges can be easily compromised hence ruling in favour of one party at the expense of the other resulting in family animosity. The

disadvantaged party then feels discontented with the court's verdict and therefore, cause disputes out of bitterness. These quarrels then lead to divisions in the family and cause life time enmity among the family members. In extreme cases, siblings are seen assassinating one another as some of our respondents revealed to us. This then is a challenge to family especially as African Christians who are supposed to be valuing life as the best gift to them from God and living in harmony with each other. Additionally, it should be considered that women, according to the Constitution of Kenya are allowed to own property (The Constitution of Kenya, 2010). Such a perennial conflict between the New Constitution allowing women to inherit vis-à-vis traditional refusal of the same remains an ongoing family problem.

5.2 Poor Communication between Consorts

According to Peschke, individuals have varied characters, attitudes, choices and preferences because of different upbringing or background (Peschke, 1992: 545). Some consorts in the Christian families in a good number of occasions disagree when it comes to making decisions in the family. Failure to understand each other's choices and inclinations bring about conflicts that disrupt their relationship. Poor communication between the parents and children also lead to poor socialization. We confirmed the issue in our research for primary data in the opted for locality. When parents fail to instil good family and Christian values such as love, kindness and obedience, they not only fail to carry out their parenting duty but also fail to live as they ought to live their family life. They become ignorant and engage in deviant behaviours such as abuse of drugs like bhang which is harmful to their health. That is the reason why the power of parents over their children have diminished in the contemporary society (Ibid.,: 542).

Some parents we interviewed have also lost their children's trust because they are not available for them. Due to the nature of their jobs, parents have abandoned their role as the principal teachers of their children. They have delegated their duty to the teachers and argue that they pay money for them to be educated in school. Failure to talk to their children freely on matters involving their sexuality and other risks that they can be exposed to such as drugs endanger their lives. As adolescents, they are likely to engage in pre-marital sex, drug abuse and alcoholism which then negatively impacts on their lives as Christians. When parents are not ready to discuss issues with their children as they grow and want to learn more, the children lose that trust in their parents. They begin to keep secrets or find boy and girl friends to take their parents place and they lack proper advice and others are socialized into bad behaviours such as pre-marital sex and the misuse of drugs

5.3 Polygamy

Polygamy comes as a challenge to Christian families because it is against God's plan of total dedication of consorts to their marriage and family life (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Familiaris Consortio*, 1981). Traditionally, polygamy among the Agikūyū was meant to solve the issue of barrenness and to search for male heirs for the family. It was done with the consent of the first wife who still enjoyed her position in the home. As the first wife, she was referred to as the "mother of the other wives" and was entitled to referring to their children as her own. Additionally, a man who wished to marry more than one wife had to meet some conditions; he was required to be in a position to cater for all the wives and the children's education and to maintain harmony amongst the wives and children (Bujo, 1998: 108-109).

However, in the contemporary society, men including the Christian ones, engage in illicit and secret affairs without the consent of the wife. They keep concubines and raise other children out of wedlock. When the wife discover that her husband has another family outside their marriage, their union is ruined. A good number of men tend to neglect the children of the first wife and the mother is left to struggle for the children on her own. Other families take their cases to Courts of Law so that the man can continue paying school fees for his children and providing the money needed for their upkeep. In some incidences, there arises conflicts between the wives and it reaches a point where others plan for the murder of co-wives and their children. Quite a number of women have also ended up murdering their husbands because of unfaithfulness and neglect. Such crimes carried out of anger and bitterness drive them to face harsh punishments like lifetime imprisonment. They are then being separated from their children. These kind of conflicts impose great challenges to Christian families which end up being dissolved.

5.4 Suicide

The research outcome revealed that a number of youths from the Christian families in Kĩambaa Sub-County commit suicide due to diverse reasons. It is in the family that an individual is given a sense of belonging so that they can feel loved, cared for and part of the family. However, some parents maltreat their children because of committing some mistakes that they themselves see as unforgivable. For example, a girl becomes pregnant out of wedlock and her parents decide to disown her because of bringing shame to the family. Away from home, the girl endures so many troubles but out of frustration for being rejected by her own family and having no one to talk to, she decides to end her life so as to do away with pain and suffering.

Another case is whereby parents pressurize their children to engage in certain acts that are not their interests. A Christian family from the research area revealed how they forced their daughter, an only child, to take a course in the university and not considering her dreams. At the university, she continually failed her examinations and out fear for her parents' reactions and too much stress, she committed suicide in the University. Later on, a letter addressed to the parents was found. In the letter, the girl explained of how she wished she could realize her dreams that were cut short because of being forced to do what was not in her heart. Up to date, the parents live in guilt because of their actions and they encourage other parents to support the interests of their children to avoid such circumstances that bring pain to the family. Additionally, they suffer the consequence of being childless because of losing their own.

Similarly, there are those cases of a father who is the breadwinner of his family as the head taking his own life and that of his family members. In the locality, a man married at a tender age and had three children with his wife. Because of joblessness, he had to go from one homestead to another to do manual jobs which were not guaranteed. At some point, his academically talented son sat for his Kenya Certificate of Primary Education exams and scored very high marks. He secured a place in a very good national school but his parents could not pay school fees for him to continue his secondary education. The boy was so frustrated seeing how his mates went to school while he was left wandering in the village. He hated the family's status and from time to time, he wished he could be from a wealthy family. His father saw him suffer and because of his anger to the world that brought so much suffering to his family, he decided to end their pain. He set the house in fire where his whole family perished and he committed suicide.

5.5 Poverty

In Kiambaa Sub-County, poor families do not live as God intended them to because of the kind of suffering they are exposed to due to poverty. In a number of situations, the poor remain poor because the rich people prevent them from improving their status so that they can continue offering their manual services to them. They are also highly exploited and oppressed by their employers who give them very low wages yet they are overworked (Myers, 2006: 69-70). The Researchers observed how these kind of families struggled day in, day out just to make a living. A woman, especially one whose husband is drunkard and does not provide for the family carries a bigger burden. She has to overwork herself so that she can provide for the family especially her children. Combining manual jobs during the day to earn some money and later in the day and night working in her own house and farm exhausts the mother who has to be responsible to her children and an irresponsible husband. Even when she has a supportive husband, "the mother in the family is burdened with heavy weight duties that are even beyond her power. She has to work extra hard because there are those kinds of jobs that the father in a typical Gikūyū home cannot engage in due to their culture and tradition (Cagnolo, 1933: 51).

Poverty denies children from less fortunate families the opportunity to live a comfortable life as they ought to. They drop out of schools because of lack of the required school fees and are exposed to difficult manual jobs at very tender ages. Being unable to acquire education while their age mates are comfortable in formal schools make them bitter and at times, they develop an attitude of hating themselves and the whole family. With these cases, children are exposed to child labour whereby they earn very little to assist their parents. Despite all the hard work, the parents together with their children still earn very little wages that cannot even cater for proper meals. Therefore, they are forced to beg from other families and some end up being handed over to different families where they can get food but they have to work for it. In the long run, the children are denied the chance to live as a family and in some cases, they are mistreated by the so called 'well-wishers.'

5.6 Rebellious Children

Quite a number of parents we came across are willing to educate their children but they themselves are not ready to acquire education. Such a case is that of a very brilliant young man who excelled in his Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) exams and joined a very high-status school. In school, as early as in form one, the boy started to bully other students and eventually, he influenced some students to organize strikes. Together with his friends, they were expelled from the school. His parents were forced to transfer him to a different school. The circumstances worsened when the young man joined a group of students sneaking in and using drugs in school. The school management found out the case and he was expelled from school. The parents were very frustrated by their son. Their unending pleas and advices did not bear any fruit. The young man indulged himself more into drugs and unfortunately, he impregnated an underage girl who was chased from her parent's house and forced to live with the boy. A few months after the child was born, the girl disappeared because she could no longer stand a drug addict leaving the child behind. The child's grandmother was forced to take care of the baby. Being a sickly woman who has undergone a number of surgeries, she is troubled with the responsibility of caring for a child at a time when she is supposed to rest.

Another case is that of a secondary school girl who ran away from home to live with a man. The man was a heavy drinker and the girl had also started to take alcohol and also abusing other drugs like *bhang*. Out of

frustration, her parents went after her and eventually, they located the man's house. They stormed the house and found their daughter. They were overwhelmed with anger and bitterness and they decided to beat up the man who was at that time wasted in alcohol and drugs. Unfortunately, he died because he was very weak. The police came after them and the girl's father had to be arrested to pay for the crime they had committed. The mother lives every day of her life blaming her daughter for what had transpired in the family. The girl lives with regrets but she cannot reverse the situation she put her parents in out of her selfishness desires.

VI. IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The current section deals with the implications of the study's findings, the suggested recommendations and the conclusion of the study.

6.1 Implications

- 1) The study is saturated with a good number of aspects that can lift up the spirituality of Christian families in Kĩambaa Sub-County, Kĩambu County and other communities in the society. Assessment of the essential standards of the Agikūyū community and Ecclesial instructions concerning married and family life is important in enlightening Christian families to appreciate significant community values that impact on their daily lives. Owning these values would give parents the opportunity to pass on family morals to their children and grandchildren. In turn, the existing and yet to come generations would be able to live in a manner that is suitable within the realm of Christian family life.
- 2) In the family, parents are encouraged to raise their children according to the Will of God. Children should be instilled with such virtues as obedience to God's commands. Moreover, parents are regularly reminded to "regard their children as the children of God and respect them as human persons. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfil God's Law" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992: 2222). Additionally, the family as the major educator to its members especially the children, is responsible for educating the children. They should be taught embrace values such as obedience, commitment to family and communal duties, kindness and consideration for others. They should also be warned against wrong doings as engaging in drugs and alcohol, prostitution, pre-marital sex and to seek forgiveness when they sin.
- 3) Examining the challenges of Christian family life among the Agikūyū is meant to challenge Priests, Pastors and Christians. They are encouraged to contemplate the need for striving for an authentic Christian family life in the contemporary society which is overwhelmed by all kinds of evils. Family men and women are responsible for procreation and also raising their offspring in the light of God. The clergy should be in a position to evangelize Christian families using efficient pastoral methods that will assist individuals to handle their family life challenges.

6.2 Recommendations

- 1) Retrieving and apprehending the available community values and also the presence of elders can greatly help in handling family life problems. Such differences arising in a home could be as a result of the issue of ownership and inheritance of property. The present day society should seriously consider making use of the wisdom of elders as peacemakers who are dependable in tackling quarrels instead of seeking legal assistance in Courts of Law. A good number of cases handled legally end up bringing lifetime enmity among family members. Court proceedings and hiring money-hungry lawyers usually cost a fortune and may not end the conflicts in the family. Furthermore, some judges and lawyers hearing the case may be comprised to rule in favour of one party hence giving an unfair ruling.
- 2) The Church should bring families together often so as to realize healthy interpersonal relationships among Christian families. It is during these family days that Christians get together to celebrate the God-given gift of life and share their joys, worries and concerns amongst themselves. Vitality is valued, appreciated and celebrated best in the community and the Church as a community of Christians should show a good example in working for a fulfilling life. Family days also present individuals with the occasion to give their support for the needy people in the society.
- 3) Strengthening Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and encouraging Christians to join these groups. The get-togethers bond people hence enable them to feel attached and open to one another. Additionally, the SCCs should not only be used as prayer groups but also as meetings that allow the members to share their family life problems. That sense of belonging enables people to share freely among themselves. The strength of a SCC is mirrored by its members since it is here that these Christians are able to assist one another emotionally, psychologically and also economically. Staying together enables them to support each other as a "family of God."
- 4) Parents are required to create sufficient time to be with their children even in their busy schedules. Every child should be understood and handled according to their personality. Children should also be watched

closely so that they do not engage in activities that can land them into problems such as imprisonment and death as seen in Kĩambaa Sub-County.

6.3 Conclusion

The paper has examined the problems that today's Christian families among the Agikūyū in Kĩambaa Sub-County, Kĩambu County encounter in their daily lives. From the study, the researchers established that there exists a vast number of disturbing issues faced by families particularly the Christian ones. In turn, the problems impact negatively on their lives hence hindering them from realizing a fruitful Christian family life as God intended for them in His Salvific plan for humanity and specifically family. Uncovering these issues will create awareness among the people hence challenging them to fight for their freedom thus attaining an authentic life. Additionally, the study engaged the African world-view to understand the challenges of families among the Agikūyū of Kĩambaa Sub-County. Focusing on the community and their philosophy of life, one will appreciate the importance of the aspects of African world-view essential for family life. Similarly, selected Church teachings on married and family were adopted to show God's salvific plan for the family. As the domestic Churches, the Christian families are guided by Church doctrines and theologian reflections which assist individuals to appreciate their calling to family life.

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