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Determining the Inculturation of Baptism in African Perspective.

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Abstract

The study sought to investigate the inculturation of Baptism in African Perspective. The study is theoretically informed by inculturation theory that is well propounded by John Mbiti and Kwame Bediako. The researcher used qualitative methods of data presentation, descriptive and analytical research. Random and cluster selection design was used to sample hundred women of different age groups. He also targeted 50 men of the age between 30-60 years. The study also targeted 50 clergy of the two genders. Extensive reading of relevant literature was done to investigate efficacy of infant baptism. Interview and questionnaire was the method of data collection used in the study, prominent Church leaders and theologians were interviewed. The researcher then examined all data obtained from questionnaires and interview guides. It was coded appropriately and organised for analysis. Various correction tests were run using the SPSS (statistical packages for social sciences). The data was converted into mean, frequencies and percentages. The study established that the contestations regarding paedobaptism will remain until they are addressed from an African theological perspective, and in particular, through the motif of inculturation. The study recommended that it is worthwhile also to note that the theory of inculturation, a phenomenon where Gospel and culture are in dialogue of purpose, cannot be ignored in our theological discourses in Africa. Indeed, addressing paedobaptism from the framework of inculturation will unveil the contestations thereof.

Key Terms: Baptism, African Perspective, paedobaptism, inculturation

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In considering paedobaptism (infant) baptism in African theological perspective, the study acknowledges the contextual nature of Christian theology. Considering that African theology is kerygmatically universal but theologically provincial (Gathogo, 2015), it is significant that we assess paedobaptism from our respective situations and contexts. Further, Mugambi offers a classic definition of theology as the “systematic articulation of human response to revelation within a particular situation and context” (Mugambi, 1995: 19). In light of this, Kurewa (1975:36) defines African theology as “the study that seeks to reflect upon and express the Christian faith in African thought forms and idioms as it is experienced in African Christian communities and always in dialogue with the rest of the Christendom.” In this study, the researcher builds his theological argument by theologizing some observable practice in his context of the See of Embu, which indeed enriches the study as a contemporary theological work.

In this study, the phrase “African theology” will be used to refer to that theological reflection and expression by African Christians that arises out of the philosophy of the African people and speaks to their relevant needs. The study considers the meanings of “African theology” and “African Christian theology” as congruent. As Gitau describes:

African Christian theology [read African theology] should therefore be considered as a theology of selfhood. This position is grounded on two grounds. Firstly, it is in the recognition of the changed status of much of Africa, from colonial to the post-colonial era, and secondly, as a symbol of the desire of the church, in Africa to be in a position to present Christ as one who knows and understands the hopes, fears and aspirations of Africans (Gitau, 2000:142).

Certainly, there is a need to review the policy of baptism in the Anglican church of Kenya ACK-Embu Diocese. This is because the Diocese of Embu has been denying baptism to the infants and children of single-parents, non-communicants and for families whose holy matrimony was not initially conducted in the Anglican Church. In particular, the study sought to unveil the doctrinal inculturation of baptismal sacrament, which has been controversial in the ACK-Diocese of Embu for a long time. In this study, the ACK-Embu Diocese and the Anglican See of Embu are used interchangeably and carry the same meaning.

Certainly, baptism is an initiation rite which predates Christianity and has been practiced by Christians throughout the centuries, particularly after the 16th Century reformation. Dodged by controversies particularly with regard to paedobaptism and credo baptisms, the need to focus on it has become critically significant. Indeed, the post-colonial era of reconstruction, a phenomenon where we rewrite our histories, theologies and revise all forms of our survival in order to genuinely move forward, drives the motive of this research. Indeed, the need to seek to reconstruct our Biblical hermeneutics, theology and historiography is necessary for a society that is in dire need of doctrinal direction and cannot be gainsaid. Certainly, there is need to revise the traditional understanding of credo or paedobaptisms in order to make it at par or in tandem with the vision and mission of the modern

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church, namely, to serve Christ with all faithfulness possible. As things stand, the contestations regarding paedobaptism and or credo baptism obtains even in the 21st century Africa. In essence, adherents in my specific See of Embu have been served with all manners of teachings, doctrines and diverse traditions regarding baptismal theologies.

This study sought to make the single parents, non-communicants and those not married in the church and their children feel accepted and liberated from the church's policies and ecclesiastical rules. The study also showed that the affected group of people could have found identity and felt being counted as part of the body of Christ. The study also showed that those who seek baptism do it as way of acknowledging that human existence is not in order so it needs to be reoriented and reconstructed. Therefore, denying the same implies that human beings have no sins. This has called for reviewing of the policies, regulations and ecclesiastical laws of the modern church.

In Embu Diocese the children of single parents, non-communicants and of parents whose holy matrimony were not conducted in the church are not baptised. However, parents and guardians who accept to undergo the prescribed church rules and regulations normally have their children permitted for baptism. In spite of this, not many parents and guardians are ready to go for the catechism classes. This prompts one to pose the same question that Jesus' Disciples asked in the Gospel of Saint Mark chapter nine: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" In other words, the same question applies in the case of the single parents, non-communicants and those whose holy matrimony were not conducted in the church. Similarly, guardians to the orphans have found themselves sailing in the same boat.

In view of this contestation, the study has endeavoured to show that the cry of the affected children sounds the loudest. It is like the children are deprived off their rights in the church where they are expected to have solace. This eludes a scenario similar to when the parents brought little children to Jesus in their bid to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked those who were bringing them. But when Jesus saw it, he was moved with indignation, and said to them: "Allow the little children to come to me! Don't forbid them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (Mark 10:14). As a result, the study shows that there is need to review and inculcate the manner, the meaning and the efficacy of the sacrament of baptism in the ACK-Embu Diocese, in order to sort out the confusion regarding the sacrament of baptism, so that it may rhyme with the cultural naming of Aembu community where children were all accepted as "full" members of the community. This in turn agrees with John Mbiti's aphorism, that: 'I am because we are and since we are therefore I am' (Mbiti, 1969:108). This communalistic approach builds the case for reassessing the nature of contestation regarding the sacrament of baptism for children in general. In a nutshell, how can the children of single parents, non-communicants and those whose holy matrimony have not been solemnized in the church be incorporated in the rite of baptism in the **Church** of the 21st century Africa?

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2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The Roman Catholic Teaching on Infant Baptism

The reformation centred upon this issue for example, Martin Luther's great concern was to teach that salvation depends on faith alone, not on faith plus works. Even, The New Testament message is that Justification is by faith alone. "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Moreover, the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23). Actually, the Roman Catholic argument that baptism is necessary for salvation is very similar to the argument of Paul's opponents in Galatia who said that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Paul's response is that those who require circumcision are preaching "a different gospel" (Gal. 1:6). Therefore, the Diocese of Embu failure to baptize the children of single parents non-communicants and those not married in the church is like pegging baptism to the ecclesiastical functions of the church for example marriage which is not a necessity for salvation. It must be stated that no work is necessary for salvation.

Therefore, baptism is not necessary for salvation. Even 1st Peter 3:21 certainly does not teach that baptism saves people automatically or confers grace, *ex opera operato*. It does not even teach that the act of baptism itself has saving power, but rather that salvation comes about through the inward exercise of faith that is represented by baptism (Col 2:12) (Grudem, 1994:974). In fact, Protestants who advocate believer's baptism might well see in 1 Peter 3:21 some support for their position. Thus, it might be argued that baptism is appropriately administered to anyone who is old enough personally to make "an appeal to God for a clear conscience" 2 Col. 2:12 can be used in the same manner. Paul says that in baptism Christians were "raised with (Christ) through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead". This presupposes that those who were baptized were exercising faith when they were baptized – that is, they were old enough to believe. Nevertheless since the ACK church believes in infant baptism, and not believers' baptism, the issue of denying the infants/children of single-parents, non-communicants and those not married in the church should not be there.

The New Testament Argument on Baptism

There is a lot of misunderstanding on who should be baptized. For instance after Peter's sermon at Pentecost we read "those who received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:42). The text specifies that baptism was administered to those who received his word "and therefore trusted in Christ for salvation". Similarly, when Philip preached the gospel in Samaria, we read "when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). Likewise, when Peter preaches to the Gentiles in Cornelius, household, he allowed baptism for those who had heard the word and received the Holy Spirit. While Peter was preaching "the Holy spirit fell on all who heard the word" Peter and his companions "heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God" (Acts 10:44-46). Peter's response was that baptism is appropriate for those who have received the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit: "can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" Then Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:47 – 48). The point of these three passages is that baptism is appropriately given to those who have received the gospel and trusted in Christ for salvation. This

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means that baptism is not just water on its own, but it is water used according to God's command and linked with God's words (McGrath, 1999:240).

Infant Baptism and the Reformers

All the protestant reformers of the 16th century Europe, from where we in Africa have taken from, including Martin Luther (1483-1546), Huldrych Zwingli (also called *Huldrychor Ulrich/Ulrich Zwingli* and (1484–1531) and John Calvin (1509-1564), were in agreement with paedobaptism. Since baptism strengthens faith as the instrument of justification. The Protestants belief that baptism is so closely related to the gospel, and that through it, Christians receive eternal life and without baptism there can be no assurance of salvation (article 9 of the Augsburg confession, 1530). Therefore, both the children of believers and unbaptized adult or non-communicants parents should be baptized. Since through baptism, the children are received into God's grace. In Corinthians 7:14, Paul said that children of believers are "holy" Paul used old covenant ceremonial language to teach the Corinthians that the children should not be considered outside of the visible people of God, including baptism. Jesus made the same argument in Mark 10:14. He says that the kingdom of God "belongs" to children of believers in Acts 2:39. Peter specifically includes children in the fulfilment of the promise.

In Ephesians 6:1 Paul addresses children as if they were in the covenant people of God (Ephesians 6:1; colosians 3:20-21) From this perspective, Matt 28:19 and 2:38-39 are direct commands to baptize an infant. It is considered true that there is no explicit command to baptize infants. Neither is there an explicit verse which states God is one in three persons, but God's word teaches the existence of the trinity throughout the bible from Geneses to Revelation.

Does the New Testament Teach Infant Baptism?

Since there is no explicit command to baptize children then we should stop admitting women to the Lord's Table since there is no direct command to allow women to come to the table. Every faithful Jew understood circumcision to be a visible reminder that he was a part of the people of God. To fail to circumcise one's sons would be to declare them to be cut off from God's people, grace and promises, the same way the children of the single parents, non-communicants and those not married in church are cut off from the church.

The Perception of Baptism in the Church Today

In the A.C.K Diocese of Embu, baptism curriculum of those seeking baptism of children, who normally would not have been admitted for baptism (2013:1), states that the provincial constitution leaves each bishop to determine the circumstances under which such children can be baptized. It goes further to say that, the parish council is to assess the spirituality and capability of the parent in determining whether a child would be baptized or not. They would then make a recommendation to the bishop (2013:1). This indicates that if the head of the church (for example, bishop) gives authority to the infants/children of single parents, non-communicants and those not married in the church could be baptized. Furthermore, each Christian received the baptism of the Holy spirit at Pentecost, and the term is now more commonly used to refer to that event recorded in (Acts 2:1-13). Pentecost is

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the Greek name for the Jewish feast of weeks, derived from its occurrence fifty days after Passover. This means that there is a connection between baptism and the Holy Spirit; so, when the child is not baptized it is assumed that, the child does not have the Holy Spirit.

Validity of Infant Baptism

In the Aembu tradition, an individual child was part of the community. His/her achievement or even failure was seen as the achievement or the failure of the community, thus John Mbiti says, “I am because we are and since we are therefore I am” (Mbiti 1969:109). This is a cardinal point in understanding the African view of an individual in a community. Furthermore, a child was held to be the property of the community and it was the community who were going to see to it that the individual child became a significant and productive member of the community, an asset to all. Today, things have changed and it is an everyman for him/herself and “God for us all” attitude. Hence, nobody seems to bother whether the children of single-parents, non-communicants and those not married in church are baptized or not. This individualistic kind of life in the community has further spread into the A.C.K-Diocese of Embu. And indeed, it is nothing but westernization of sorts; or is it globalization gone awry? Certainly, the era of globalization does not mean we demonize all African cultures; rather, we respect them and instead employ cultural relativism as opposed to ethnocentrism. Seen in this way globalization in the afro-Anglican context does not mean that we gun down our children spiritually or/and their guardian parents. It means, respecting and adapting rich cultural elements of all peoples in the world, particularly those that enrich the global society, such as respect and care for the vulnerable in society. Such should instead be bequeathed to the global village for mutual sharing. According to Okullu:

The problem with missionaries is rejection of every indigenous religious concept thinking that the whole African religious background is one with a lot of superstitious, taboo and magic (Okullu, 1974:55).

Actually, missionaries should not be blamed wholesomely for the indifferences noted in the See of Embu and the Anglican Communion as a whole, but the great problem is with the African church leaders who thought that they were taught too well by the missionaries and as such are determined to keep the Christian faith “pure”. Certainly, a god who does not change or allow room for reconstruction of society from time to time is an idol and is not the biblical God. Historically, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) came to Embu in the ACK-Embu Diocese around 1910 and established a mission centre at Kigari. Can we logically say that history of the Kigari Anglican church remains intact or ought to remain so? Has the techno-computer age affected it in any way hundred years down the line? Has the western education that is constantly in dialogue with the African form of education affected the locality? Certainly, yes – and God oversees this positive change. In the early part of the 21st century, the Anglican See of Embu has started the new practice of initiation rites called “clean jando” or circumcision by words to girls and boys. In this new mode of circumcision, they are both taught in a classroom during the five days of seclusion. They are taught how to be responsible in the society after which boys are circumcised in such “circumcision colleges” of sorts. Indeed, this is a positive approach to the psychological growth of our children. Since baptism is parallel to circumcision, in the New Testament then, the outward sign of entrance into the

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“covenant community” is baptism. It follows that baptism should be administered to all infant children of believing parents (Gruden, 1994:975).

As much as the church would like to keep discipline, order and tradition, if the children of the single parents, non-communicants and those not married in Church are not baptized, the church will continue to have “nominal Christian” who do not participate in the church activities and since their children are not recognized for baptism. The church will lose both the children and their parents. Tradition regarding who should receive full membership status has been a bone of contention in the ACK-Embu Diocese for a long time. This scenario has created a conflict within and outside the church because of their inconsistencies. Similarly, parishes differ with one another in matters related to baptism. In the recent past a lot of cultural transformation has taken place in the ACK-Embu Diocese while very little has changed in matters related to religious rules and regulations. For example, the local church constitution draft revised in 1996 defines the church committee members as regular communicant members who are over the age of eighteen (Embu Diocese synod book 1990). Further the Mothers union constitution of the Anglican Church of Kenya plainly says that it is concerned with women who have met the church requirements as far as marriage is concerned. This shows that the un-married parents had no proper place in the church. This is a phenomenon witnessed in the ACK-Embu Diocese to date.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors Leading to Single-Parenthood

Money economy came with the West almost the same time with Christianity and has done great harm not only to the community but to the See of Embu as well. Although it cannot be condemned wholesomely, it has changed and deteriorated the moral values both in the Aembu community and in the ACK-Embu Diocese. As a result, many men and women are leaving their matrimonial homes to go out in search of money. In the final analysis, separations are noted in many homes. These single parents are not allowed to participate in the church activities neither are they elected as committee members. Moreover, their children are not baptized in church. The second type of single parents are the women who are not married and they raise their children alone without the husband and the father figure is absent and plays no role in the household economy. These types of single parenthood also bear the responsibility of the family on their own and also their children are not allowed to be baptized in the ACK-Embu Diocese.

The third category are the widows or widowers who are in the church before the death of the husband or wife, even these ones, their children are not accepted in the ACK-Embu Diocese for baptism. Consequently, bad behaviour of the children is often associated with bad conduct of the mother. This leads some of them to live a secluded lonely life which results to low self-esteem and rejection since the society as well as the church has no proper place for children born outside marriage. Further, in the light of cultural social and religious background of the Aembu community, a family without a father is considered incomplete. Therefore, children born in these households are considered illegitimate and more often are subjected to ridicule and rejection both in the community and in the ACK-Embu Diocese. Mostly, the genesis of the problems in the church is brought by men who chase away their wives or divorce them. Women become the victims of the circumstances with their

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children, for instance in the researcher's church, in which the diocese is under this review, quite a number of young married men are chasing away their un-schooled wives, just to marry old rich women. In such cases, these marriages are also short lived due to age-gap between the spouses and also the influence of middle life crisis, on young men and women. Moreover, commercial sex workers are on the increase, which is causing men to leave their non-performing wives in search of "greener pastures", for example, about a quarter of the men who work in town and their wives are in the rural areas have separated due to the unbecoming behaviour of their husbands. Many of these couples have not solemnized their marriages in the Church; hence their children are not baptized. Finally, nowadays, the marriage dowry is paid in form of money unlike before the coming of the missionaries when the blood of a goat or sheep had to be shed and sprinkled as a symbol of uniting the two families and as a seal and a sign of becoming one as Christian is baptized to become one in Christ. The problem is that no matter how much one pays, the spouses do not have respect for each other since the seal of the covenant is not there. Hence, Michael Howard says in Ndeti (1972:80) that:

In many parts of Africa, cattle are used as money in the payment of bride price, money economy may have very beneficial effects by expanding individual freedom, but it can also disrupt existing social relationships, increase peoples dependency and lead to their impoverishment.

On the same Laurenti Magesa observed that:

Marriage solemnized with bride wealth becomes a profoundly sacred reality. Solemn prayers, sacrifices and blessings are always offered over the marriage by the clan. However physical separation may occur in certain situations, such as cruelty, lack of care for the wife or evidence of witchcraft in either spouse, but this separation does not necessarily imply that the marriage bond is broken (Magesa 1998:127).

It may be observed that Christianity is not a problem if it was acculturated to the African way of doing things like incorporating infants and children in the community of ACK-Diocese Embu. This would rhyme with the cultural components which had diverse values, rites, symbols and patterns of incorporating infants and children into the traditional community of the Aembu. These groups of people are already socially excluded from day to day activities.

Pre-circumcision Training Equated to Catechism Classes

Aembu community boys and girls were given thorough counselling on adulthood and especially home management. They were taught how to solve family conflicts, without necessarily involving other people. The boys and girls learnt at this stage that listening to one another and giving fair comments and understanding someone's mind could solve a lot of problems. This teaching took place in the evenings, mornings, during herding and during communal work. At times, boys and girls were taught separately especially in the evenings by fathers and mothers respectively. There was no set time for educating the youth. Boys and girls were reminded that there would be a great day of circumcision and they would cross the bridge of childhood to adulthood where they would become full members of the community, so they grew up expecting to face the day of circumcision. At this time they would become adults and eventually face life as men and women. They were

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allowed to marry after circumcision, could do counselling, look after cattle, women would take care of children and cook but both men and women tilled the land. On the hand, in the ACK-Embu diocese, those not married in church, non-communicants are not allowed to participate in some activities like church elections, Holy Communion or be best couple to couples intending marriage therefore there is a contrast between the traditional initiation and the church.

The Interaction between the Missionaries and the African Culture

When the Christian missionaries came to Embu at the beginning of the 20th century, they met an organized community that carried on their activities in an orderly manner and in fear of the living God. The missionaries did not take into account that religion surrounds everything a Muembu does. Since they had missed the point there was a crash between them and the Aembu. This is the crash realized in the ACK-Embu diocese where children of single parent, non-communicants and parents not married in church are not baptized. Similarly these children are considered as unfortunate and are seen as sinners not worthy before God. They are held in contempt, are rejected in the church and discriminated. The missionaries had concluded that the traditions of the Embu people were heathenry and satanic and that they contradicted Christian principles. Moreover, the missionaries termed female circumcision as sin and vowed to fight the custom and wipe it out completely. Due to their negative attitude on female circumcision they did not take time to study its value. The same way the ACK-Embu diocese has not recognized the value of single parents, non-communicants and parents not married in church as they are created in the image of God. Mwaniki (1995:10) observes:

The early missionaries mixed Christianity with Western traditions so much that it was too difficult to separate the two. Therefore, as they planted Christianity they were at the same time westernizing people, so they could not understand the values of traditions and customs of the Aembu.

The Embu Christians were confused and continued with both Christianity and female circumcision. Further Mwaniki notes that between 1930 and 1933, the missionaries took a measure of persuading people who were to be baptized to first of all sign that they would never circumcise their daughters. Several people refused to sign and as a result they were refused the sacrament of baptism (1995:11). The church was so young to start taking such stern steps of ex-communicating circumcised girls together with their parents or guardians. On the same Henry Ayot says that, the Church of Scotland believed that the African must receive Christianity coupled with Western culture to the exclusion of traditional custom. Ignorance of the importance of the African traditional values and adherence to a rigid code of morality brought a major conflict concerning female circumcision between kikuyu and the missionary in 1929 and 1930 (Ayot, 1979:203). This meant that the Church of Scotland known as the Presbyterian Church followed the same trend as the Anglican Church in condemning the practice and not teaching or educating people effectively. As such, female circumcision controversy caused wide spread recession from Anglican and protestant missionaries in Kikuyu, Embu and Meru. This resulted with ‘muthirigu’ a dance-song mocking missionaries and Christians opposing female circumcision which was banned by the government in 1930 (1979:203).

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At the same time a pastorate council met at Kigari and resolved that Christians will not circumcise girls. Similar meetings were held at C.S.M. Kahuhia in Murang'a District in 1922 (Mwaniki 1995:12). Some African preachers who were on the missionary's side made people run away from the church because every time they went to the pulpit they told the people that, "whoever will circumcise does not belong to Jesus". This is the similar position found in the ACK-Embu diocese where single parents, those not married in church and non-communicants are considered not of Jesus and their children are not baptized. However, the Christians who favoured the practice vowed to continue with it. This was because instead of teaching the disadvantages of the practice the Presbyterian and Anglican churches continued blowing the horn louder, saying that the practice was a sin. The Roman Catholic did not condemn the practice wholesomely. They were more tolerant with the African customs. They did not forbid their converts to take alcohol, smoke or participate in tribal ceremonies (Mwaniki 1995:14).

The Catholic Church does not mind whether girls are circumcised or not even to date. However, they are strict on the ecclesiastical discipline like marrying in the church and being a committed member of the church. This are the issues adopted from the Catholic Church to the Anglican Church and are already outdated because instead of teaching the importance of baptism, that is, baptism strengthens faith after knowing that an outward regeneration has occurred and that sins have been forgiven, this would become a source of reconciliation that a person and a title to the covenant of God and that one had become a full member of the visible church and the kingdom of God. Further, it makes one be born again which depicts death, burial and resurrection with Christ. This is a cardinal meaning of the sacrament of baptism. When those who favoured female circumcision heard that the council in collaboration with the church had passed a law forbidding the practice, they circumcised more girls than ever before. The same case with the single parents, non-communicants and those married in church as long as their children are not being baptized and they themselves are not accepted as full members of the church the number of the children not baptized is superseding the number of the baptized which is the alarming and contentious issue in the See of Embu. However, when the council found out that the law was not effective, they changed it and resolved to educate female circumcisers on how to do the procedure less severely.

Responsible church elders were given the task of supervising the procedure. Demonstration lessons were given, for instance, two girls were circumcised in broad daylight at Runyenjes (Mwaniki 1995:15). This gesture encouraged the community to acquire a permit from the county council and medical officers of health. The need to revive the issuing of permits to circumcisers reveals that African Christians were unable to draw a line between Christian's beliefs and the Aembu traditions. According to Ayot (1979), some Africans recanted the creeds they represented, some readily accepted them and some mixed their new faith with traditional beliefs (Ayot 1979: 204). Cultures and customs change with time but this deep rooted custom will take some time to be eradicated or abandoned because people have continued to hold fast the tradition and have left the commandment of God, contradicting what Jesus taught people to be selective among cultures (Mark 7:8).

Circumcision in the Bible

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The meaning and objectives of male circumcision in the bible were very different from the meaning and objectives of African circumcision even though the physical procedure was similar. In the Israelite culture, boys were circumcised as infants eight days old. It was a sign of the covenant which God had made with the Israelites. It symbolized God's grace and call into a covenant relationship. It did not symbolize the acquiring of particular rights, duties or status in the society in the way that African circumcision does. Therefore, the Israelite male circumcision cannot help us to understand circumcision in African cultures such as the Aembu custom, but when we read that, "any uncircumcised male... shall be cut off from his people" (Gen 17:14), we may think that this looks similar to the African circumcision. Moreover, the bible does not have a direct reference to the circumcision of girls, neither in the Old Testament nor in the New Testament. Inference could be drawn with what Jesus said in Mark 9:43-48, but we have never heard of anyone trying to conquer envy by removing someone's eye, to conquer theft by chopping somebody's hand or conquering slander by cutting off the tongue. Consequently, when Jesus met a woman who had been caught committing adultery, he said to her, "Go and do not sin again" (John 8:11). Similarly, being single or not marrying in church is not an individual's choice but it is caused by unavoidable circumstances which could be tackled through teaching, pastoral care and counselling in the church.

3.0 RESULTS

The Inculturation Model of Baptism

In order to have a baptism that is participatory, there is a need for inculturation, as a theological theory that informs this study, to be taken into account. Considering that inculturation in its simplest definition is appreciating the importance of dialogue between gospel, culture and the context in general in order to make Christian theology authentic to the various groups of people to whom it is propagated, the study has therefore cited, above, the case of childlessness and the importance of children, the Christian ethical dilemma facing African theological context, the street children plight, the ritual of circumcision, and indeed, the African cultures of inclusivity in our endeavours to usher in the inculturated theology of paedobaptism that is context-sensitive, hence relevant. Put it differently, the study has endeavoured to demonstrate that the exclusivity that is demonstrated by some practitioners of African Christian theology contradicts the African concepts of inclusivity, careful considerations, theo-ethical considerations, hospitality and care for children, who are indeed the future of any nations under the sun.

In view of the foregoing, the study has strived to demonstrate that gone are the days when the unbaptized and infants were seen as destined to hell even when Christ promises more rooms (John 14) to both young and old. If baptism is said to be universal dynamic which embraces the whole of life, extends to all nations and anticipates the day when every tongue will confess that Christ is lord to the glory of God the Father, therefore, it should be an inclusive sacrament. As Paul said "for many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. This is a community forming dynamic. There is neither a slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3: 27). Further, the gospel message clearly calls for an option in favour of the poor, single parent, not married in church and the oppressed. Baptism like the good news is a word of promise and hope. Christians cannot, without betraying their baptism, accept passively the fact of racism, sexism, oppression and

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other social injustices therefore, baptism can only be important from a world view of cultural perspective. For this to use Professor Galgalo's words, Christianity as well as baptism remain a stranger of sort because Africans have neither fully owned nor appropriately appropriated it as their spiritual home (Galgalo, 2012:35). This is where we have people having Christian names such as James, John and Mary among others filling prisons today.

This being the case therefore, we propose that the inculturation of baptism will strengthen the foundation of African Christianity and if it is not administered to an individual, he/she cannot inherit the kingdom of God (Jn 3:1-10), it has to be fully rooted and understood in the African perspective. As Zablon Nthamburi argues in the book *Anatomy of Inculturation* edited by Laurent Magesa, faith mission in the African context like Baptism must bring hope, freedom and reconciliation where apathy, frustrations, repression and oppression dominate (Magesa 2004:190). Therefore, there is dire need to inculturate baptism by re-expressing, re-interpreting and reapplying the baptismal truths using the right cultural codes, meaning, thoughts, forms and relevant images. The inculturational model of baptism inspires inculturation and following the example of Jesus Christ, makes the cultural rebirth of baptism and gospel message imperative for African churches. Since theologians' task is to provide the answers of human existence, a theology of infant baptism will emphasize the initiatory function of the rite within the community whatever the age of the baptized, baptism signifies grace and the call for lifelong growth in Christ with a view to the resurrection at the last day (Ferguson, 1978, 70-71)

According to Richard Burridge baptism is a rite of initiation, the process by which converts to Christianity acknowledge their faith in Jesus and come to be accepted into full membership of the Christian community (Burridge, 2004:, 139). From the study findings, it is clear that baptism can be used to include all the children regardless of them having been born by single-parents, non-communicants and parents not married in the church. Additionally, it has come out clearly that the contestations regarding paedobaptism are largely fuelled by ignorance. Clearly, a critical study of baptism from the early church, Old Testament Times through the Reformation times to the present will show that contestations regarding paedobaptism are indeed unnecessary. The church has to learn to end these contestations, partly through theological education that is credible.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions: Through exploring various theological trajectories such as baptism and circumcision, African heritage versus Jewish heritage, Biblical theology versus African religious heritage and so on, the study was able to establish that the contestations regarding paedobaptism will remain until they are addressed from an African theological perspective, and in particular, through the motif of inculturation. In turn, inculturation assumes that the Gospel of Christ can be best understood as it relates with other cultures to which it encounters. In this dialogue of culture and the gospel, it takes St. Paul's model as a proto-type of inculturation and contextualization when he says in 1st Corinthians 9:21-24 when he says thus "To those without the Law I became like one without the Law (though I am not outside the law of God, but am under the law of Christ), to win those without the Law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some of them. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings."

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This means that the contestations of paedobaptism can only be understood in the light of inculturation theoretical framework.

Recommendations: It is worthwhile also to note that the theory of inculturation, a phenomenon where Gospel and culture are in dialogue of purpose, cannot be ignored in our theological discourses in Africa. Indeed, addressing paedobaptism from the framework of inculturation will unveil the contestations thereof.

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