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## **Paranormal Experiences and Understanding of God for Innovative Community Development: Interrogating the Akurinu Believers in Kenya.**

### **Author**

**Simon Nderitu <sup>(1)</sup>; Esther Kibor<sup>(2)</sup>; William Koros <sup>(3)</sup>**  
**<sup>(1)(2)(3)</sup>Kabarak University, Kenya.**

**Main author Email:** [nderitusimon1982@gmail.com](mailto:nderitusimon1982@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

The study's objective was to examine the relationship between Akurinu Believers' understandings of God and their use of paranormal experiences with an emphasis on innovative community development in Nairobi County, Kenya. The research was guided by Divine Command Theory and Diffusion of Innovations Theory. Descriptive and correlation designs were used. The study was conducted among 2618 Akurinu believers who formed Akurinu congregations registered with the General Conference of Akurinu Churches Assembly in Nairobi County. Data were analysed on Software Package for Social Sciences computer system to generate frequency distributions, and the Chi-square test was used on qualitative data to test agreement between variables. Wald Chi to test for predictive probability in quantitative data. A logistic binary regression model was used to test the hypothesis on quantitative data. Qualitative data were presented in frequency tables, and percentages and inferential data were presented in SPSS software tables. Based on  $\alpha=0.05$  level, the hypothesis is statistically significant with a predictive probability of odds ratio of 0.259 of change on the dependent variable. P-value was less than  $\alpha=0.05$ . The study concluded that sustainable innovations in Akurinu spirituality, education and economics existed. They were understanding God through the Bible and relying on the Holy Spirit. Although Akurinu believers and leaders claimed that they derived their understandings of God through paranormal experiences, the probability was less than 50 per cent (0.259 odds ratio). The study recommended that the Akurinu leaders use theological principles, here called understandings of God, to train Akurinu believers to understand God better.

**Key Terms:** Paranormal Experiences, Innovative Development, Akurinu Believers.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Studies have been done in pure and applied sciences, social sciences and religion. Still, biblical studies is a specific area that focuses on human beings and their relationship with certain God. However, few multidisciplinary studies have been done to investigate the association between people with a biblical worldview and how they innovatively contextualise their doctrines and faith in their community development activities. This paper focuses on the relationship between understandings of God and paranormal experiences among Akurinu believers, which has influenced their innovative participation in Akurinu community development in spiritual, educational and economic activities in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Waigwa (2007) notes that Akurinu believers believe that the Holy Spirit uses dreams and visions and prophecy to reveal the spiritual, theological and social meanings in their daily lives. When used by God as means of His communication to man, dreams, visions and prophecy are called paranormal religious experiences (Paloutzian & Park, 2013). The founding prophets of the denomination taught that God made Himself understood to the Akurinu believers mainly through paranormal experiences, besides few scriptures He gave them to inform their basic theology in 1926 (Macharia, 2012). Ndungu (1994) notes that the first Akurinu denomination was an offshoot of the Holy Ghost Church of East Africa. The denomination was not an invention but an innovation. The concept of innovation is multifaceted. It may refer to the process of change, the change itself or the result of process and change. In this paper, the emphasis is process and change rather than a product since Akurinu believers were part of a dynamic urban culture, which was made of several communities, the Akurinu community included.

Historically, understanding of the first generation of Akurinu believers understood praying to God to get white colonisers out of Kenya. The believers were in the rural setting then and mainly in Meru, Kirinyaga, Nyeri, Muranga and Kiambu Counties. As part of their fight, they hated and reacted against anything from white people, education, missionary churches, clothing, and ways of European life in general in favour of African tradition. Although they accepted the Bible from the missionaries as the word of God, Akurinu believers innovatively interpreted God's meaning from biblical texts, analogies of African culture included (Njeri, 1984). Innovations that took place in the Akurinu community were survival and reaction-oriented since the colonisers were not happy with them. Their religious dressing, gospel music, preaching, and praise and worship were innovatively African. The use of drums from animal skins and rejection of everything from the West, education included, characterised their innovations in the development of the Akurinu community.

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After independence, Akurinu believers expected God to use paranormal experiences (dreams, visions and prophecy) on how to live in a free land since their prayers had been answered. They undertook to pray for the Akurinu community and nation to contribute to community development. The change in their understanding of God included their need to experience economic growth with other Kenyans but according to their doctrines, beliefs and practices. Turban and other religious attire as a symbol of holy living were retained. Ground-breaking review is done by Kossinets and Watts (2001) reviewed literature on elements that keep people together as friends (homophile) include race and ethnicity, sex and gender, age, religion, education which stratifies occupation and social class, network position such as near or periphery, conduct, attitudes, abilities, beliefs and aspirations. Akurinu believers were not different from observations of this review in their innovative practices. Akurinu believers started going to school, especially men.

Since non-Akurinu school-going women dressed indecently, it was feared that Akurinu women would compromise their moral integrity with higher levels of education. As part of innovation for moral protection, most women wore a long dress, got married early and became housewives. They joined husbands who did business or had jobs in Nairobi with time. Sustainable religious, educational and economic innovations existed among Akurinu community development based on their changing understandings of God as revealed through paranormal experiences informed changes in their lifestyles in Nairobi County. Since God's truth is unchanging, objective and universal, biblical principles of hermeneutics were needed for the correct interpretation of dreams based on God's word. Theological principle, here called understandings of God in this paper, was correlated with paranormal experiences in order to find out the predictive probability (in the odds ratio of PT/PF) that change in the dependent variable was associated with the independent variable (understandings of God).

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Rescher (2002) notes that current epistemology has four categories of knowledge: the knowledge that  $1+1=2$ ; adverbial knowledge about what, when, how or where, knowledge by acquaintance with someone, things or place; and performative/skill-based knowledge. Cottrell (2011) defines a vision as a supernatural picture that God brings to a natural mind when one is awake and mostly during prayer sessions, while dreams are streams of images passing through the human mind while asleep. Mazzaferri (2010) defines prophecy as God's channel of communication to man through a human vessel. Cottrell (2011) contends that visions and dreams are gifts of the Holy Spirit to prophets, according to Num. 12:4-8. Kin (2014) raises a call for the church to return to Christian theology in order to theologise on paranormal experiences biblically.

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Research conducted in the United Kingdom by Kim (1998) revealed that most of the African Independent Churches (AICs) used allegorical approaches in pursuit of spiritual meanings in what is plain truth in biblical texts—using paranormal experiences because they thought that getting it from the Bible was not God’s revelation knowledge but intellectual knowledge of European colonisers. In the USA, a theologian and church minister, Stone (2011), defines a dream as a visual screen through which scenes of events pass while one is asleep. He cites a critical incident when he slept briefly at 3 pm during the day in 1996 and saw tornado images with five pillars of smoke in a New York City. He shared with some ministers, and an artist drew what he saw.

Do all dreams come from God? Stone (2011) notes that dirty dreams come from people who house them by the life they live or as spirits ruling over a region (Matt. 12:43), and they can trouble someone as they did to Job as nightmares (Job 7: 13-14). While asleep, demons attack the mind at night if one is not spiritually strong or signs or cravings are stuck in one’s mind. Dreams should be judged by the word of God, conformity with nature and character of God and character of the dreamer.

Innovation has many definitions depending on what is emphasised, change, process or result. Making changes from something established in order to come up with something improved is the definition of innovations in this paper (O’Sullivan & Dooley, 2008). Since their understandings of God was dynamic based on different paranormal experiences assumed to be all from God, new directives in life called for ongoing innovative practices. However, retention of repeated applications of Akurinu doctrines, beliefs and practices gradually became Akurinu tradition. Akurinu prophets had to come with subjective and improved ways of communicating God’s truth to Akurinu believers and applications of the same, notably in their religious, educational and economic aspects of the development of the Akurinu community. Constant adjustment to the city life was inevitable as Christ transformed culture.

Keeley et al. (2013) have identified ten types of innovations used in the business world. They are; profit model (Prov. 14:23), network, structure, process, product, performance product, product system, and service, channel, brand and customer engagement. In the Akurinu community, God is involved in every detail according to the divine command theory advanced by Haris (2008). This theory presents an argument and claims that every believer in any deity has an obligation to obey that deity’s commands. Although each type of innovation was applicable to the Akurinu community, Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DIT), developed by Rogers in 1962, was an appropriate theory. The theory explains how an idea or truth spreads within a social system over time and is eventually applied within four elements for its operation, namely, nature of innovation, communication channels, time and social system. The process of diffusion involves knowledge, persuasion, decision making and

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implementation. The relevance of this theory is that before Bible knowledge is communicated, the prior conditions are previous moral practice, felt needs or problems, innovativeness and cultural norms, which influence biblical hermeneutics. Figure that illustrates how Diffusion of Innovations Theory was developed and ideas adapted by the researcher (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1: Four Phases of Hermeneutical Process as Explained by Diffusion of Innovations Theory**

Figure 1. Four Phases of Hermeneutical Process as Explained by Diffusion of Innovations Theory

According to Rescher (2002), epistemology (theory of knowledge) is in three levels; awareness, how-to knowledge and principles to guide the process. First, interpreted truth is introduced into a decision-making unit (human mind) which has socio-economic, spiritual and theological characteristics. Second, innovation's perceived characteristics at the persuasion stage are relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trial, and observation. Finally, new truths, beliefs, or practices are adopted or rejected at the decision-making stage.

### 3.0 RESULTS

**Table 1: Response Rate for Questionnaire**

S-C	Q-I	Q-R	P-E
Mathare	106	98	32.3
Roysambu	66	61	20.1
Kasarani	60	55	18.3
Dagoretti N.	27	25	8.3
Embakasi S.	24	22	7.3
Dagoretti S.	23	21	7.0
Embakasi N.	22	20	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100</b>

Key: S-C=Sub-County, Q-I=Questionnaires issued, Q-R=Questionnaires returned, P-E=Percentage expected

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The high response rate (90%) was achieved through researcher-supervised administration of the questionnaires. Ideally, a researcher-supervised questionnaire exercise expects a 100% response rate. However, a few believers who were in attendance but in a hurry to leave service requested to carry questionnaires on the grounds that they needed more time to complete the questionnaire. Some questionnaires were not returned. The sampled eighteen (18) Akurinu leaders were asked to identify any three ways they generally used to interpret dreams, visions and prophecy and cite specific incidents, which were called critical incidents. Results of texts from interviews were presented in Table 2

**Table 2: Analysis of Data from Oral Interviews**

Text	Designation code	Emergent themes
<i>Gifted people interpret dreams and visions. We act on prophecies. We prayed to God to resolve the political crisis last elections (2017). God answered our prayer.</i>	Senior Bishop. Clergy C1.	Obedience to God. Gifted believers. Critical incident. Prayer.
<i>According to the scriptures, dreams and visions are given to elders recognised in the congregation as gifted to interpret. Elders pray and provide answers from God.</i>	Archbishop. Clergy C11	Church leaders. Gifts of the Holy Spirit in believers. Prayer.
<i>Those who dream or see visions share with elders who take these messages to the pastor. Pastor prays and relies on personal experience to get meaning. Dreams are compared with teachings in the Bible to guide meaning.</i>	Archbishop. Clergy C12.	Prayer. Clergy experience. Biblical sources. Church leaders.
<i>Dreams are given to the elders for interpretation. Elders compare the dream with experiences and the teachings in the Bible. Prophecies are acted upon. The visions are clear.</i>	Overseer (M). Clergy C13.	Leader's experience. Biblical teachings.
<i>Dreams are recorded by the church secretary, given to leaders to pray for interpretation from God and then take action.</i>	Bishop (M). Clergy C7.	Church leaders. Prayer. Obey God.
<i>Relying on the Holy Spirit, use allegory, through ministry meaning given by the pastor.</i>	Bishop. Clergy C8.	Holy Spirit. Allegory. Church leaders.
<i>They are going to the spirit world of the prophet while he or she is prophesying and interpreting to the people. Dreams come in pictures. Most pictures have conventional meanings in the church; for example, a vehicle represents the church in a dream.</i>	Bishop (F). Clergy C14.	Mystery/allegory. Imagery.
<i>The secretary writes the dream, vision, or prophecy for the church, takes it to the pastor, and pastoral leadership prays and gives direction to the believer.</i>	Senior Pastor (M). Clergy C2.	Church leaders. Prayer.

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<i>Dreams, visions and prophecy are shared with the secretary, given to church leaders for prayer to get direction from God. For example, a cheetah in a dream was recently interpreted by a prophet to indicate witchcraft.</i>	Pastor (M). Clergy C3.	Church leaders. Imagery/allegory.
<i>Share with prophets for revelation from God. In some cases, pray, and God gives you interpretation.</i>	Pastor (M). Clergy C4.	Prophetic ministry. Prayer.
<i>Gifted believers interpret prophecy, dreams and visions that concern several people or congregations.</i>	Pastor (M). Clergy 10.	Gifts of the Holy Spirit in believers.
<i>Use the Bible to check for alignment of meaning. Use experiences of church leaders, pray."</i>	Pastor (M). Clergy C5.	Bible. Church leaders. Prayer to God.
<i>Dreams, visions and prophecy are interpreted through prayer by leaders.</i>	Youth (M). Leader Y6.	Prayer. Church leaders.
<i>A person interprets prophecy, dreams and visions with a special gift from God. Youth Y9.</i>	Youth (M). Leader Y9.	Gifts of the Holy Spirit in believers.
<i>Use of gifted leaders or members of the congregation and pray.</i>	Deacon (M). D15.	Pray. Gifted believers.
<i>There are rules. You pass through the pastors and explain. Prophecy.</i>	Youth (F). Leader Y16	Church leaders. Continuity and change. Critical incident.
<i>Dreams and visions are reported to leaders, recorded and raised to God in prayer, waiting for interpretation and fulfilment.</i>	Pastor's wife. PW 17.	Prayer. Church leaders. Critical incident.
<i>Prophecy, dreams and visions are common in our church. Not everyone interprets. Critical incidents: For dreams. I pray and search on my phone for help.</i>	Overseer's wife. OW 18.	Gifted believers. Critical incident. Social media and theology.

Macharia (2012) notes that the key interpreter of God's truth was a manifestation of the Holy Spirit through prophecy, ministry of Akurinu prophets, the experience of dreams and visions and results affirmed. Biblical critique on divergent ways of contextualisation understandings of God supported the necessity to use selected hermeneutical principles in order to provide theological balance in theological discussion.

This claim from literature was supported by findings that follow. Clergy C3 added that there in 2013, "A young man had claimed to have the gift of prophecy and went ahead to claim that young wife of another man was sexually impure before marriage and the church needed to nullify the marriage". Separation took place immediately after the public announcement by the prophet. Clergy C3 called leaders to pray, counselling with

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separated spouses. They consulted the relevant biblical texts on how God provided guidance towards marriage and reasoned that this God would have shown them during courtship since He would allow sin to destroy the church He loves. The marriage was restored, and measures were put in place on prayerful censorship of all paranormal experiences by the church leadership to get clarity from God and preserve the purity, stability and integrity of the faithful believers in the congregation. This critical incident was one-time evidence that false prophecies were possible and that a reliable means of control of the practice would vary the hermeneutical method. Clergy C4 expressed concern that "lust-driven prophecies had split Akurinu families and led to many splinter groups especially in Kariombangi". These critical incidents and observations justified the importance of the application of a theological principle which states that human experiences that do not conform to God's nature (who God is) and character (what God is doing as a result of who He is) should not be attributed to God as the source or the doer (Mal. 3:6 "For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob").

#### Qualitative data from the questionnaire

The question investigated relative frequencies among the three indicators of paranormal experiences among 302 Akurinu believers. To find out whether God used dreams, visions and prophecies to communicate to males and females were independent between genders. A chi-squared test of independence was used. Findings were analysed using a chi-squared test of independence because each gender received dreams directly from God, and results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Distribution of Occurrence of Dreams, Visions and Prophecy by Gender**

Occurrence of Dreams, Visions and Prophecy					
G	Variance				Total
	MF	F	LF	NU	
F	33	48	24	25	130
	10.93	15.89	7.95	28	43.05
M	42	75	34	21	172
	13.91	24.83	11.26	95	56.95
T	75	123	58	46	302
	24.83	40.73	.23	15	100

Key: most frequent=MF, frequent=F, less frequent =LF, Never used=NU

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Results show that females experienced dreams, visions and prophecy more frequently than men. However, there was a higher percentage (25%) of females who never experienced paranormal than the percentage of males (21%). This difference may be due to chance, although results from interviews indicated that paranormal experience was positively associated with a more profound spirituality. Based on the credibility of the leaders' reports, there were more females who were negatively affected spiritually by urban culture than women. This report might explain why fewer women received God's communication than men. Among the never group, women dominated.

The question investigated whether scriptures, the work of the Holy Spirit and Bible texts the founding prophets said they received from God were considered as a means of understanding God. The objective was to put in to test the hypothesis that there were other ways of understanding God besides the paranormal experiences and the influence of the teachings of the founding prophets in the understanding of God were different between the observed data ( $H_1$ , True) and the expected data ( $H_0$ , False). The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Wadi Chi-squared Test for Independence**

Independent Variable	F	T	C	P>C
I read the Bible as God's most reliable means of knowing who God is	14.24	85.76	154.4901	<0.001
The Holy Spirit helps me to understand God	37.75	62.25	18.1325	<0.0001
I know God through verses God gave to the first Akurinu prophets	48.34	51.66	0.3331	0.56

The participants disagreed (71.85%,  $\chi^2=1.6104$ ,  $P\leq 0.1962$ . P-values < 0.05 for propositions 1-2 (Table 2) were less than alpha 0.05 and therefore statistically significant, meaning results were not due to chance at confidence limit was 95 per cent Akurinu believers believed strongly that reading the Bible was the most reliable way of knowing God. Since the Bible is God-given truth about Himself and other truths He intended readers to receive through the inspired writers, understanding of God is accessible through reading the Bible, with the underlying assumption that the reader considers the Bible inspired by God (2Timothy 3:16-17) and God speaks as he or she reads the scriptures. Akurinu believers fit this assumption, as results and literature review indicate. Therefore, reading the Bible was an independent variable, a predictor of contextualisation of Akurinu theology. In response 3, the p-value of 0.56 was greater than alpha level 0.05, and therefore this variable (knowing God through what

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He had spoken through the founding prophets) was statistically insignificant, meaning it might have happened by chance. It also meant that participants were no longer dependent on a few verses given to their founding prophets.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Conclusions:** Based on findings, the study concluded that sustainable innovations in Akurinu spirituality, education and economics existed. They were understanding God through the Bible and relying on the Holy Spirit. Although Akurinu believers and leaders claimed that they derived their understandings of God through paranormal experiences, the probability was less than 50% (0.259 odds ratio).

**Recommendations:** Therefore, it was recommended that the Akurinu leaders use theological principles, here called understandings of God, to train Akurinu believers to understand God better so that their sustainable innovations in the Akurinu community will be in conformity with divine command theory.

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