

ENCOUNTER BETWEEN THE AGĪKŪYŪ AND CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE IN THE CONTEXT OF HIV AND AIDS IN KENYA¹

Abstract

In this article an attempt is made to examine the encounter between the Agĭkŭyŭ and Christian eschatological hope. With the emergence of HIV and AIDS in Kenya, many communities have confronted reality of the pandemic not as a theoretical principle but as a threatening existential reality. Of concern to the pastoral care givers, is a situation in which some of the People Living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) die with no children of their own. By employing a pastoral hermeneutical approach to interpret theological and cultural concepts, their meanings within the Agĭkŭyŭ spirituality is assessed. It is argued in the article that their deaths sadden the whole community because dying without children of one's own is interpreted as a gesture of exclusion from the communion of ancestors, and realising that they will never be venerated by the next generation now becomes an existential and pathological threat to them. Unlike the Christian understanding of eschatology, Agĭkŭyŭ eschatology sees the universe as that which consists of two aspects, the visible and the invisible (or the physical and the spiritual) and, in their world-view, the duration is seen as continuous with no break in actual events here and now. The community notion of eschatology is that when they die they would be remembered through the visible inheritance that their descendants would receive from them and by naming their children after them. It is suggested that there is need for the pastoral care givers dealing with the PLWHA in their last stage of life to consider exploring both Agĭkŭyŭ eschatology and Christian eschatology. To this end, the understanding of the Christian eschatology can play a decisive role to the PLWHA, who are dying unmarried or young, for it offers them the hope of new life beyond death.

Key words: Ancestor, HIV and AIDS, Pathology, Eschatology, PLWHA, Pandemic

Introduction

For more than two decades since the first Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) case was described in Kenya, the HIV and AIDS pandemic still remains a huge problem for the country in its efforts for social and economic development. The HIV and AIDS pandemic is unique because, the HI virus infects people at the

¹Dr. Josiah Kinyua Murage is a lecturer of Theology, Religion and Philosophy in the School of Education and Social Sciences (SESS) at Karatina University, Kenya. <jkmurage@yahoo.com>

apex of their productive years, when they are healthy; the incubation period is long and the condition without Antiretroviral (ARV) drugs is a catastrophe. Dreadfully, the HI virus infects many people who are skilled and educated consequently reducing their productivity. It is horrifying that the HIV and AIDS pandemic knows no social boundaries although there are socio-economic and political contours which the virus seems to follow as it spread. In fact, it thrives in the background of poverty, rapid urbanisation, violence and destabilisation. For instance, in Kenya those who are vulnerable are those who lack information and resources, and those who lack control over their lives. In other words, these are the poor, the marginalised, the uneducated, women, and those living in rural areas. With the above context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in mind, I will discuss how the PLWHA are stigmatised and discriminated, their phenomenon of suffering, and how the Agikūyū and Christian ritualize their death. The final section reflects on the encounter between Agikūyū and Christian eschatological hope.

Stigmatisation, Discrimination and Isolation

perceived to belong to a particular group. The above is also worsened by the belief that HIV Responses to the pandemic have evolved over time as people became aware of this new disease, as they experienced illness and death among family members, and as services are developed to confront it. Initially, many segments of society expressed denial of the disease while many who were living with the HI virus were stigmatised and discriminated against. Several theologians particularly Musa Dube (2004), Martti Lindqvist (2006), Philippe Denis (2006), John Iliffe (2007) and Daniel Louw (2008) are in agreement that discrimination occurs when a distinction is made against a person that results in his or her being treated unfairly and unjustly on the basis of belonging or their being and AIDS infection is a result of witchcraft and this notion has added stigmatisation and discrimination to the problems of *People Living with HIV and AIDS* (PLWHA) (Ashforth 2001:6).

Additionally, self-stigmatisation or the shame that the PLWHA experience when they internalise the negative responses and reaction of others, is also evident in Kenya. Martti Lindqvist notes that, stigmatisation of the PLWHA arose out of a sense of shame or guilt imposed on them by the community. He further observes that:

AIDS is associated with taboos in combining the images of death and sexuality. After all, it is an illness that is usually transmitted sexually and often leads to the death of the infected person. Given, on the one hand, that sexuality itself is often associated with shame and guilt, and death with fear and incomprehensibility, these experiences converge to form an entity that is highly difficult emotionally to handle. In that case, one is close to the idea that AIDS is a punishment for the person for his or her sexual misdemeanour (Lindqvist 2006:18).

The above is also observed by UNAIDS (2002:9), which acknowledges that stigma, discrimination and silence debilitate the strength of already-weakened individuals and communities, and cause people to blame themselves for their predicament. Indeed, UNAIDS (2002:9) notes that stigma has been linked to what some writers call “felt” as opposed to “enacted stigma,” in that it effects primarily the feelings and sense of pride of an individual or community (UNAIDS 2002:9). As a result, the PLWHA continue to experience the fear of family rejection and loss of job among other things. Sadly, this stigma and discrimination discourage them to seek the needed services because to do so may compel them to reveal their HIV status to their families, colleagues, or community who may stigmatise them. This is in line with Louw’s (2008:401) contention that, “stigmatisation and labelling are synonymous with immediate isolation. HIV (and AIDS), therefore becomes the leprosy of the twenty first century.”

Similarly, the ideas about the lifestyles of the PLWHA contribute to a sense that the HIV and AIDS are problems that affect “others,” which may undermine individuals’ estimation of their own risk and reduce their motivation to take preventive measures.² Therefore, to respond to the injustice of stigma and discrimination, there is a need for the church to analyse the root cause and provide hospitable spiritual and socio-economic support system. Accordingly, *the Population Council's Studies and Activities on Stigma and Discrimination* (PCSASD) indicates that there are a number of practical approaches that can be undertaken to reduce the basis for these fears. These include providing information, counselling, and skills acquisition as well as increasing the opportunities for contact with the PLWHA. In this regard, we need to broadly crush and shatter the above stigma and discrimination. This would require that we re-examine our religious, political and cultural ethics and uphold attitudes, values, customs and mores that are constructive by discarding those, which are destructive and problematic. This argument is supported by Haddad (2005:33), who affirms that we are living in “a critical” and perilous time where our

² Population Council –<http://www.popcouncil.org/hiv/aids/stigma.html>-(22rd May 2014).

lives are jeopardised by HIV and AIDS; therefore, the church needs to take drastic measures to address the situation.

Arguably, the slow pace of the Kenyan government to respond to the challenges posed by HIV and AIDS especially in 1980s and 1990s, and particularly its failure to take political commitment has been bluntly criticized by many NGOs (Ministry of Health 2005:1). They complain that since HIV and AIDS are preventable and manageable, the government could have acted fast but because of its ignorance, neglect and lack of political will the disease turned into a pandemic or national disaster.³ It is also noted that while awareness of HIV and AIDS has been nearly universal for more than a decade, misconceptions still abound and many people have not yet dealt with this disease at a personal or community level (Juma 2001:5). The HIV and AIDS pandemic has become a serious concern for the government and the church for both recognise and acknowledge that the pandemic is on the “threshold of an exponential increase in the country” (Ministry of Health 2005:14).

Phenomenon of Suffering

Sadly, as more and more PLWHA progress to the final stage of AIDS, they are engulfed in what we call suffering in suffering. This is because the financial and material burden of caring for them shifts from hospitals to their families and friends.⁴ Hence, the impact of the disease on household welfare becomes devastating. As the disease progresses towards its final stages, medical expenses rise and household resources and savings are diverted for medical treatment and eventually for funeral costs. In fact, the medical expenses for PLWHA are typically higher than for other patients because of the opportunistic diseases, which may occur. This means that there is an additional burden on already poor households resulting in further impoverishment for families already near or below the poverty line. Until recently, the cost of HIV and AIDS treatment was beyond the reach of most Kenyans. Now the price of these medicines has been reduced and in government hospitals, they are now being given freely (Daily Nation, 18th August, 2007:3).

³ <http://www.mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/952/> - (4th April 2014).

⁴ World Bank country Kenya 2006 at <http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/offrep/af/ke2.htm> - (8th April, 2014).

However, obstacles to overcome include how to handle hidden costs such as cost of transport to health facility, cost of laboratory investigations, cost of care and support services, cost of food and other care-related commodities. These hidden costs still put adequate health care beyond the reach of many Kenyans. Kellerman (2000:201) notes that the poor may even be forced to sell their remaining property, borrow from others, and withdraw everything from their savings; but when at last the person dies, the funeral cost drains them of whatever is left, thus, increasing their burden. Musa Dube (2003: 4) agrees with Kellerman and Gennrich in asserting that HIV and AIDS have indeed devastated the walls of our souls, families, communities, countries and continents, to such a great extent that the theme “come let us rebuild” is more than relevant in our time.⁵ It is widely accepted that the HIV and AIDS pandemic have a major depressing effect on the social and economic life of the individuals, families, communities and society as a whole.⁶

The direct cost and social problems associated with caring for increasing numbers of orphans and displaced families as well as existing high poverty levels place severe burdens on family and societal structures.⁷ Due to the prolonged phases, the PLWHA continue to suffer even though they live within the community and they are breadwinners, fathers, and mothers etc. As such, there is need to engage them in meaningful livelihood support systems. This is because, the PLWHA have skills and gifts that can be used to empower them as they empower others. Besides, the interplay between HIV and AIDS and poverty is evidenced in the society, and this calls for a fight against poverty as well as provision of good support systems. Actually, HIV and AIDS fuel poverty and create an ongoing spiral of disease and poverty that undermines family stability. The household income is reduced and even land and property are lost while medical expenses increase. Malebogo Kgalemang (2004:153) reminds us that poverty and unemployment contribute to the spread of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Furthermore, families also tend to break up while some even live on the streets. These are issues that the Anglican Church of Kenya and other church denominations need to address.

The role of churches in the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic cannot be ignored. Of late, the spotlight is on both the church and the government with regard to response to the pandemic.

⁵ See paper presented by Musa Dube to the General Assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches held in Cameroon, Yaounde on 20th -27th November, 2003.

⁶ The effect of HIV and AIDS in Kenya at <http://www.hbs.edu/research/pdf/> (8th July, 2013).

⁷ <http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0002626/index.php.htm> - (8th July, 2013).

Scholars such as Louw (1991), Ronald Nicolson (1995:7), and Willen Saayman and Jacques Kriel (1992:17), had earlier pointed out that the church is in a better position to respond to the epidemic than the government given that it is trusted by the majority and disadvantaged population and that it has a well established structure in the communities – right from the grassroots. In Kenya, various church denominations have not been left behind in the war against the HIV and AIDS pandemic especially the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) (Juma 2001:24). Many people still believe that the Anglican Church of Kenya is an important institution that can adequately deal with the issue of the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

In Kenya, the HIV pandemic has raised the question of how best the church should provide and engage in pastoral care and counselling to the PLWHA and their families. Certainly, Christians have to develop pastoral care and counselling models that are relevant to their context, that deeply appreciate human dignity and that portray a holistic understanding of human being. It is from this perspective that this study proposes that pastoral care givers need to understand African traditional resource to complement the church resource in their fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Kenya.

Ritualising death in Agikūyū community

One of the challenges posed by the HIV and AIDS pandemic is that it deprives millions of people the right to die “naturally” and meaningfully. Often, the majority of PLWHA are not prepared culturally and spiritually to die of HIV and AIDS. The lack of basic necessities, as well as the fear of death and being HI positive may force them to undergo various stages of emotional reactions such as shock and denial, anger and fear, anxiety and grief. In addition to such existential threats, stigmatization, rejection, and the loss of social status, self-confidence and dignity, may also affect them, causing great psychological, physical, emotional and spiritual pain. Although human beings work so hard to have a quality and dignified life, human life cannot be complete without the reality of death. It is our position that human beings need quality and dignified lives even as they face death.

Therefore, the PLWHA and their families need encouragement, understanding and love, for many of them experience a sense of loss and grief and of undignified life. During the last stages

of AIDS, there is a need for pastoral care givers to help them integrate death and dying into the daily pattern of life as opposed to defying and denying it. By desensitizing death, the PLWHA could be helped to regain control of their lives during the last stages of AIDS. This would enable them to achieve a greater sense of balance and purpose. Accepting death as an inevitable and natural part of the life circle in the context of religious faith reduces the amount of stress and anxiety. Furthermore, understanding death could lead to transformation and help the dying person to assume responsibility for the social dimension of dying. As such, those dying could help their loved ones to prepare for the anticipated loss and enable them to prepare for a healthy grieving process. The pastoral care givers could also help the PLWHA to take charge of the practical aspects of dying by actively getting involved in their own pain management, choosing their appropriate care at the last stage of dying, preparing rituals of transition, as well as learning how to bid farewell to and impart blessings on their loved ones.

The way people think or ritualize death is culturally embedded. The *Agĩkũyũ* culture provides a framework, which enables the community to understand the process of death and dying and, ultimately, what happens afterwards. The existence of rituals relating to death is a fairly universal part of human experience. Rituals are usually public affairs, which are symbolic, in that, the behaviour or action says something about the state of affairs, particularly about the conditions of those taking part in the ritual. According to Rosenblatt (1997:4), a ritual may be understood in many different ways and the key to understanding a ritual seems to be what it defines. In terms of death and dying, the symbol would define the death, the cause of death, the dead person, the bereaved, the relationship between the dead and the bereaved, the meaning of life and major societal values.

As for the *Agĩkũyũ*, the community assumes that, when a person falls sick, the family members, relatives, friends and neighbours would visit the sick and offer support and encouragement both to the sick person and the immediate family members. Likewise, when death is about to occur, the *Agĩkũyũ* culture dictates that family members stay “around the sick, to comfort, to encourage, to bid farewell, and even to hold the body of the dying” (Mbiti 2009:162-163; cf. Kenyatta 1938:14; Mbiti 1969:149, 152). As a symbol of communion, fellowship and remembrance, the *Agĩkũyũ* people use the ritual of blessing (*Kũrathima*) to bid farewell to loved ones when a person has reached the stage of dying (or is close to death). There are four ways of

doing this. The first is the *Kūrathima kwa Horohio* (reconciliatory blessing), the second is the *Kūrathima na mata* (blessing with saliva), while the third is the *Kūrathima na Iria* (blessing with milk), and the fourth is *Kūrathima na Ũũkĩ na Ũgĩmbĩ* (blessing with honey and millet grains).

During the Kūrathima kwa Horohio (reconciliatory blessing), the dying persons would summon the family members for a final dialogue. They would disclose the purpose of calling them by saying, Nĩndakinyĩrwo nĩ gũkua. Ũkai twaranirie (I am about to die; therefore, let us discuss) (cf. Wachege 1992:60). The two elders would be called by the dying persons to act as witnesses to hear their last will and the blessing on the family. The dying would reconcile with their families and beseech them to get rid of any bitterness and enmity. To realise this, they would each take a mouthful of water, *Makabucabucia magatua thĩ* (swill and then spit on the ground) and would say, *Nĩ ndirĩ na ũru na mũndu, kana nĩ inyuĩ ciana ciakwa kana nĩ athoni kana Gĩkũyũ, ndirĩ na ũru naũ kana ũũ. Marakara macio nĩndamatua thĩ na nĩndamũrathima* (I have no ill feelings towards anybody, be it you my children, be it my in-laws, be it anyone else, I have no bitterness against anyone. I have spat all the anger I might have harboured and so, I have blessed you all) (cf. Wachege 1992:60).

If anyone had offended them or they were not in good terms with the person, the expectation is that they would call that person and embrace him/her as a sign of reconciliation. Then the dying persons would lay hands on them to symbolize a bestowal of blessing on them. Another way of doing this is by asking the person that they have issues with to provide a goat. After it is slaughtered and roasted, the dying persons would be given the best part of the meat (Wachege 1992:60; cf. Mbiti 1969:152). As they share the same meat, the dying persons would say, *Kaĩ ndikĩrĩ na ũndu mũrũ nguga. Twakĩrĩanĩra nyama-rĩ, ũrĩa nduagaga ndiaũnina. Nĩndakĩmũrathima inyuothe*” (I will utter nothing unpleasant. Since we have feasted together, in no way can I say anything bad. Whatever curses I used to utter, I have revoked. I have blessed you all. I am departing, at peace with all) (Wachege 1992:60).

During the Kūrathima na mata (blessing with saliva), the dying persons share their properties among their family members. In this case, the Marigithathi (first-born sons) are given the responsibility of taking care of the dying person’s property (Wachege 1992:60; cf. Mbiti

1969:152).⁸ However, if the members of the family are to inherit something from the dying persons, especially a piece of land, then, they would indicate who is to have what, as they bless them spitting on their chest saying, “May you hold tenaciously to the work you are doing and to your properties” (Wachege 1992:60). The dying person would then spit on the chest again and say, may you be rich in fecundity. I, therefore, bless you (cf. Wachege 1992:60).

In the case of the Kūrathima na Iria (blessing with milk), the dying persons would ask for milk, sip a mouthful and then spit it on the family members saying, Indo ciakwa iromwenda na ithereme kūdūguothe. Nīndamūrathima (May my wealth favours you and spread all over. I have blessed you) (Wachege 1992:61). The Agĩkũyũ people believe that when that kind of ritual is performed, properties increase.

During the Kūrathima na Ũũkĩ na Ũgĩmbĩ (blessing with honey and millet grains), the dying persons would take a mouthful of honey and then Makamarathima (spit it on the people) saying, “Mũrociara mũthereme. Mũrogĩa thinwa na ngago. Mũrokirĩa ngaara na kamwe (may you reproduce and increase. May you bear boys and girls. May you be numerous and exceed the mice by one, in giving birth) (Wachege 1992:61). Thereafter, the dying persons would take a mouthful of uncooked millet grains and spit it on the people saying, “Mũroĩgĩha ta ũgĩmbĩ, nīndamūrathima (May you be as numerous as millet grains. I have blessed you) (Wachege 1992:61). The above rituals enabled the dying persons and the family to get ready mentally and spiritually. This enabled them to face the anticipated death meaningfully and with acceptance. Therefore, these rituals are potential resources that could be used by the PLWHA to bid farewell and to bless (Kūrathima) their families.

On account of the above rituals, the majority of the Agĩkũyũ people prefer to die at home in order to be among family members and near the place of their ancestors and not to become a homeless wandering spirit upon death. As such, it is crucial for the pastoral care givers to discuss

⁸ In the Agĩkũyũ traditional custom, dying people have power to choose and elevate their *Marigithathi* (eldest son) on whom they would bestow the authority of stepping into their shepherding role. The other family members are supposed to accept that *Marigithathi*. They would obey him as they did the dying person. Moreover, the last words uttered by the dying person, as their last will is taken seriously and with extreme concern. It is believed that adhering to it is a serious commitment that can bring fortune, and failure to adhere to it could lead to calamities in the families (Wachege 1992:41).

with the PLWHA the rituals they would prefer and to ask them whether they would like to die at home, in the hospice or at the hospital, bearing in mind the abovementioned concerns.

Christian ritual of transformation and Care

While beliefs about death and dying may vary according to church denominations, in the Main Stream Churches, those dying may request a Bible, a crucifix or a prayer book. They may also request for a pastor, a catechist or an evangelist to visit them. The pastor may listen to their last will, just as it was done, by the Agĩkũyũ traditional elders. The pastor or the pastoral care giver may also listen to their confessions and give an absolution. Some may want the vicar to anoint them with oil, give the Holy Communion, lay hands on them, pray, and also sing a hymn. Such liturgical acts enable the pastoral care givers to make God's presence a reality to the PLWHA during their last stage. For instance, when rituals such as the Holy Communion are performed, they communicate support, concern, grace, love, reconciliation and a sense of belonging. The rituals also help the PLWHA to experience forgiveness during the last stage. It is important to note that such rituals could substitute divination and other magical practices that the Agĩkũyũ traditional healers employ in healing. Kinoti (2000:94) is of the view that the Christian prayers, counselling, rite of confession and the use of charismatic gifts (1 Cor 12:4-11) are the best methods of replacing divination and magical practices used by traditional healers in Africa.

Apart from helping the PLWHA to face death meaningfully in their final stage, the pastoral care givers should prepare their families, children, and friends for the anticipated death. As in the *Kũrathima kwa Horohio* (reconciliatory blessing), the *Kũrathima na mata* (blessing with saliva), *Kũrathima na Iria* (blessing with milk) and *Kũrathima na Ũũkĩ na Ũgĩmbĩ* (blessing with honey and millet grains), the pastoral care givers could arrange how both the PLWHA who are facing death and their families could bid farewell to one other. In this respect, the pastoral care givers should also discuss and plan with the PLWHA issues concerning their money, property, or goods so that those things go to the right people when they die. The act includes helping them to write down legally how they wish their property and goods shared among their children and family members when they die.⁹

⁹ It should be noted that majority of Agĩkũyũ people do not write their will because they prefer expressing it verbally. It is supposed to be part of their final words before they die as seen in the rituals of *Kũrathima kwa Horohio* (reconciliatory blessing), *Kũrathima na mata* (blessing with

Besides the above rituals, the pastoral care givers may consider the use of a “memory box” as a tool for helping both the PLWHA and their families to plan and prepare for death in a formal way. In this case, both the PLWHA and their families need to be helped to create a container to store their oral message in a transcribed form and any other items that they consider important to the families in future. The container may be made of plastic or wood and once the box and the transcription of the interview are ready, the box could be filled with items such as a booklet containing the family history, photographs, family trees, audio cassettes capturing singing and messages, the audio tape of the interview, letters from parents, caregivers or children, and children’s drawings.

Another option is for the PLWHA, especially those who are parents, to place information in the memory box, which contain what the children were like when they were younger, letters to each person in the family, the kind of people they hope their children would grow up to be and the values they would hold. Other information may concern the family health history, inheritance information (what the children or the spouses are entitled to when the person dies), and photographs of themselves, their home, and their children. As in the case of the *Kūrathima kwa Horohio* (reconciliatory blessing), the *Kūrathima na mata* (blessing with saliva), the *Kūrathima na Iria* (blessing with milk) and the *Kūrathima na Ũũkĩ na Ũgĩmbĩ* (blessing with honey and millet grains), the memory box could provide the family with a record of the life of the PLWHA, as well as a solid object representing their love (cf. inheritance). It may also facilitate supportive family relationships, which may lead to bonding and attachment. It may eventually foster an appreciation of one another, bringing forth positive aspects of each family member, giving positive statements and appreciating family profiles (i.e., beliefs, values, emotional warmth and support).

The Agĩkũyũ eschatology: Exclusivity

The study of eschatology in African traditional life is a fairly recent one. In his two books, Mbiti (1969) and (1988) opened the gateway for eschatological studies in the African context. Mbiti’s concept of time is the basic intellectual framework through which he interprets African life and eschatology. He comes up with the theory that a society with an indefinite future in its time

saliva), *Kūrathima na Iria* (blessing with milk), and *Kūrathima na Ũũkĩ na Ũgĩmbĩ* (blessing with honey and millet grains) (see Wachege 1992:61ff).

reckoning is bound to have developed eschatological beliefs. According to the Agĩkũyũ, when death occurs, the dead assume the status of the ancestors. As ancestors, they become the protectors of the society as well as its most feared direct critic and source of punishment (cf. Magesa 1997:48). In other words, they become the direct watchdogs of the moral behaviour of the individual, family, clan and entire community (cf. Mbiti 1969:125).

The uniqueness of the Agĩkũyũ ancestors is that no serious misbehaviour or anti-life attitude among their descendants, in thought, word and deed, escapes their gaze. They are “authority figures, who maintain the norms of social action and cause trouble when these are not obeyed” (Magesa 1997:48). Therefore, their roles are considered as relevant and inevitable and there is no end to the interwoven relationships between them and the living, for they make up a continuous process that has no end. The community notion of eschatology is that when they die they would be remembered through the visible inheritance that their descendants would receive from them and by naming their children after them (Wachege 1992:42; cf. Magesa 1997:63). Their living wives or husbands would continuously be linked to their names.

Thus, the community would keep on referring to their wives as “*A tumia a mwendwo nĩ irĩ*” (wives of the beloved) and to their children as “*ciana cia mũtigairĩ*” (children of the late so and so) (Wachege 1992:42). Likewise, their names and their outstanding work (their contribution to their society when they were living) to the community would be transmitted from generation to generation through narratives that praise them or through ceremonies. During these ceremonies, they are remembered by family members who slaughter a goat. As they eat the meat, they would declare that it is done in the memory of their dead (Wachege 1992:42). When the goat is slaughtered, the family would pour some of its blood as libation to the ancestors along with *Njohi* (traditional brew). As they pour the blood on the ground, the family members would mention the name of the departed, offering him/her the drink (Wachege 1992:42). This is regarded as a ritual that should be performed every time there is a feast. The Agĩkũyũ interpret this as extending hospitality of their ancestors (*maguuka*).

Of concern to the pastoral care givers, is a situation in which some of the PLWHA die with no children of their own, for one of the qualifications of becoming an ancestor in the Agĩkũyũ

tradition is having children (Mbiti 1969:108; cf. Mugambi 1989:204). In fact, this becomes an existential threat when they realise that, without children of their own, nobody in the community will remember them after they die. This is a real challenge in the context of HIV and AIDS pandemic because the majority of those infected with the HI virus in Kenya are young people who are not yet married. Therefore, their deaths invade and disrupt the privacy and culture of dying in the Agĩkũyũ culture. Certainly, these deaths affect the whole community in a deeply personal way because of the wide network of kinship relationships within the community (cf. Mbiti 2009:162-163).

Furthermore, the deaths sadden the whole community because dying without children of one's own is interpreted as a gesture of exclusion from the communion of ancestors, and realising that they will never be venerated by the next generation now becomes an existential and pathological threat to them. After the death of an unmarried person, traditionally, he or she is not accorded the final ceremony, which is normally given to those who were married, yet, this ceremony is important because it symbolizes that he or she is victorious over death. Therefore, failing to perform this ceremony for the unmarried person means that he or she has been conquered by death and would never be recalled or ceremoniously invited back into the human family. Mbiti (1988:254) observes that among the Luo of Kenya, when a girl dies before she is married the community would bury her outside the homestead, as it is believed that she has no place within her home. Worse still, if at death she was found to be a virgin, her virginity would be broken by an elderly woman before she is buried. This is because the community believes that her spirit would return to cause trouble in her home if she is buried with her virginity (Mbiti 1988:254). For this reason, there is need for the pastoral care givers to be acquainted with such challenges, which face those dying young in Africa context.

It is also important for the pastoral care givers to be familiar with the African understanding of eschatology. It should be noted that although the PLWHA may fear death, which has sneaked into their lives, in the Agĩkũyũ eschatology, death is regarded as a departure from this life to the world of the living dead (ancestors). In other words, death is not the annihilation of a person (Mbiti 1969:159, 155; cf. Nkurunziza 1989:87; Mugambi 1989c:204 Moila 2002a:68), but an inevitable event that mark the entrance into the realm of ancestors. It is from this perspective that

the Agĩkũyũ people do not talk of “so and so is dead”, for that is termed as speaking disrespectfully or rudely. The Agĩkũyũ see life in death and, as a result, they are reluctant to call death by name. They would say so and so “*nĩarainũkire thayũ*” (calmly returned home); “*nĩaramamire kuraga*” (has slept where the rains never stop); “*nĩarathire kũgaya ng’ũndũ*” (has gone to get his portion of land); or “*nĩarathire gũkora maguuka*” (has gone to join our ancestors) (Wachege 1992:30).

The encounter between Agĩkũyũ and Christian eschatology

It is interesting to note that the Agĩkũyũ do not regard the afterlife in terms of punishment or reward. Rather, the afterlife is seen as only a continuation of life, more or less, as it is in the present form. What this means is that the community sees afterlife as a space and a place where their personalities, sex distinctions, socio-economic and political status would be retained and their human activities reproduced (cf. Mbiti 1969:161; 1988:264). The Agĩkũyũ’s understanding of the afterlife is seen, therefore, as a carbon copy of the present life even though the soul is separated from the body. For them, what is important, in the real sense, is not the afterlife as such but hope in the way they would continue to be involved in the present life of the living after death. That is the reason there is little emphasis on the nature of the afterlife, immortality, final judgement or blessing. The community believes that if there were any judgement, it would come in the course of one’s earthly life (Mbiti 1988:259). Unlike the Christian understanding of eschatology, Agĩkũyũ eschatology sees the universe as that which consists of two aspects, the visible and the invisible (or the physical and the spiritual) and, in their world-view, the duration is seen as continuous with no break in actual events here and now (cf. Mugambi 1989:143). According to the Agĩkũyũ world-view, God and all other ontological entities exist on earth and live without end. Although there may be a shift in the mode of existence, both the visible and the invisible continue to exist on earth. As such, the Christian view of eschatology, which was introduced by missionaries through indoctrination is new. While some people accept the new world-view and have abandoned the old one, many continue to hold on to the old (cf. Mugambi 1989:143).

Agĩkũyũ eschatology does not focus on a distant and transcendent future, but focuses on the “past (*Zamani*) and the present (*Sasa*)” in cyclical way (cf. Mbiti 1969:15-28). This means that the afterlife and the concept of personal immortality have meaning only in relation to the present

life of the living community. As we have seen above, the eschatological hope enables one to enter into a world of ancestors (living dead) and to receive libation from the living relatives routinely (Mbiti 1988:269; cf. Diop 1964:25; Mbiti 1969:125; Moila 2002:68). In return, the ancestors protect the living relatives from adversaries and possible calamities. If the ancestors are forgotten, they may attack the living relatives by sending sicknesses as a way of reminding them of their duties. This means that, hope is experienced when there is harmonious existence between the living community and the dead (ancestors), for both depend on each other. This relationship has powerful moral, religious and psychological dimensions and it plays a decisive role in the everyday life of the Agĩkũyũ people.

From the above, we can draw a number of conclusions concerning Agĩkũyũ eschatology: (i) First is that, the Agĩkũyũ perceive the dead person as joining the company of the departed, and the only major change is the decay of the physical body while the spirit shifts to another state of existence. This means that the human life is not terminated by death since the community regards life as an endless continuum, and as a transition (Diop 1964:25; cf. Mbiti 1969:125; Dickson 1984:193. (ii) Second, they regard the dead person as going ‘home’, for in this life, people are on a pilgrimage to the real “home”, which is the afterlife. This implies that the community members see themselves as in transit from the terrestrial world (physical life) to the celestial world (spiritual life). (iii) Third, the community appreciates that death is an individual affair that also affects the whole community, and nobody can obstruct it nor cure it. Therefore, deaths as rites of passage connote meaningful transformations in the life cycle.

Christian concept of eschatology: Inclusivity

When dealing with the PLWHA in their last stage of life, the pastoral care givers should consider exploring both Agĩkũyũ eschatology and Christian eschatology. However, the Christian eschatology can play a decisive role to the PLWHA, who are dying unmarried or young, for it offers them the hope of new life beyond death.¹⁰ The remembrance of Christ’s journey to death and through death

¹⁰ Richard D. Dobbins understands death and dying in the following terms: **Real**-Life has two terminal points, birth and death, and if we are going to prepare for death and dying realistically, we must acknowledge that just as there was a time when we came into this world, there will be a time when we leave this world. **Inevitable**-somewhere between the morbidity that some people have and being preoccupied with the whole process of death and dying, there is a good, wholesome reality where we realize death and dying are part of living. **Personal**-It is not easy to see death as personal. We know that we will die someday, but we have an uncanny ability of seeing it happening to everyone but us. **Providential**-Death is providential, which simply means that God is in charge of it. (God) was in charge of our birth. Realizing that (God) is in charge of our death lessens the anxiety of dying: “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me*” (Psalm 23:4). **Not Terminal**-Believers are looking forward to the coming of the Lord: “*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the*

to resurrection is at the heart of the Christian faith and it is in line with theology of eschatological hope. A theology of hope addresses those old questions about the purpose of life and the meaning of death; and Christian answers to those questions proceed from Jesus' death and resurrection.

The Christian hope depicts a new state of being, salvation and resurrection. Therefore, if by faith, the PLWHA appreciate the resurrection power of Jesus Christ who guarantees life, which cannot be destroyed by the HI virus, then all those who dies, unmarried or married, old or young could be assured of life. Louw (2008:546) affirms that, "hope in resurrection has no opposite. For life and for death it is connected to the content of faith: the faithfulness of God. The principle in pastoral care for the dying is a theological statement about life and hope: not where there is life there is hope, but where there is hope, life flourishes." Louw (2000:75) sees the Cross of Christ and the cross of the Christian as belonging together, for the Cross of Christ reveals the nature (the how) of the relationship between God and humanity. He claims that Christ's suffering cannot be separated from God's suffering, for it is a discovery of divine identification, which has shed new light on the human quest for meaning in suffering (Louw 2000:76).

Traditionally, the Christian notion of eschatology revolves on the theme of judgement, heaven (life lived freely in the presence of God) and hell (deliberate alienation from God - the eschatological partner of death). While some theologians see it as inappropriate categories of thought for contemporary theology, the issues of heaven and hell have remained a part of the Christian doctrine. Therefore, it is difficult for those Christian dying of AIDS to ignore its place in terms of eschatology. However, in an attempt to re-interpret it, some see the suffering (horrors) witnessed in our world (e.g. HIV and AIDS, August 7, 1998 terrorist bombing in Nairobi by Al-Qaeda, bombing in Mombasa and Nairobi by Al- Shabaab –militant group)¹¹ as the hell that has visited us. Hence, they claim that there is no need of another hell. It is from that background that theologians of the *Kreuztheologie* movement (e.g. Moltmann) have called for a theology that can directly respond to the issues of hell in our time.

voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:16-17) – see <http://www.ninetyandnine.com/Archives/20060626/ephemera.htm>-8th May 2014.

¹¹ Al-Qaeda is an Islamic extremist organisation that claimed responsibility for the bombing of Nairobi in August 1998.

Moltmann (1974:211-214) is of the view that God is most clearly seen as God on the Cross, which is a paradigm for all human suffering and death. Of course, Moltmann's perspective was influenced by Luther's *theologia crucis*. Likewise, Norman Pittenger (1970:23), one of the proponents of *Process Theology* suggests that God cannot turn a blind eye to what is wrong with things, for that would be sentimentalising God's love, whereas it is precisely this "appraisal" that gives humanity the hope of salvation. The above implies that, without God's direct involvement, human life is without hope and without fulfilment. As such, the Cross of Christ creates a vivid understanding of Christian hope, for it identifies God in human suffering; an event that challenges all attempts to spiritualise the meaning of salvation.

From the Christian perspective, the power of resurrection is the central image of hope and the concept of the resurrection of the dead cannot be separated from the quest for the realization of the salvation of God, which brings justice and life. For Louw (1998:59) eschatology links the two concepts of death and life, and fear and hope with the cross and the resurrection. This implies that the relation between the cross and resurrection is complete, when the resurrection message focus to the eschatology of the cross. Therefore the understandings of the Agikūyū and the Christian's worldview from the perspective of soteriological, eschatological hope (*Mwĩhoko*), and ecclesiological is crucial to pastoral care givers and the PLWHA. Concerning hope for life after death and liturgy of life Louw (2008:544) explains that:

[It] depend on one's understanding of eternal life and heaven. Theologically, eternal life implies a unique quality of life guaranteed by God's faithfulness. Eternal life is the infallibility of God's grace as proven in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. Life hereafter is not a projection of our passion for permanence. Eternal life is part of the promises of a living God. How it will be and exactly what it is, we do not know. The shortest formula for life hereafter and eternal life is: communion with God.

From the Christian perspective, life is what conquers death and instigates an eschatological hope. As such, those who die in Christ are able to die peacefully, meaningfully and with dignity, for they perceive their entire lives as complete. For them, death is an entry into eternal life together with Christ who annihilated death. Death becomes life in the fullness of an encounter with the resurrected Christ, and the sting (destructive power and absolute finality) is removed from death (1 Cor 15:55). The understanding of Christ's resurrection will enables PLWHA not to take life so deadly seriously. For with the assurance that the sting of death is removed by Christ they can be able to obtain distance, hence, learn to distinguish between the penultimate and the ultimate. They can live happily in the penultimate, because they cling to God's fulfilled promises

regarding the ultimate doxology: the *parousia* of Christ. Therefore, when dealing with the PLWHA at their last stage of life, the pastoral care givers should explore the unseen dimension of true life or life beyond death, and help them to interpret it as an eschatological event.

Conclusion

This article examined the encounter between the Agĩkũyũ and Christian eschatological hope. By employing a pastoral hermeneutical approach to interpret theological and cultural concepts, the meaning of suffering, death and eschatology within the Christian and Agĩkũyũ spirituality was assessed. It has been noted in the article that the death of young and unmarried PLWHA becomes a pathology and existential threat because dying without children of their own excludes them from the communion of ancestors hence; they will never be venerated by the next generation. It is argued that when dealing with the PLWHA in their last stage of life, the pastoral care givers should consider exploring both Agĩkũyũ eschatology and Christian eschatology. To this end, the Christian eschatology is suggested as that which can play a decisive role to the PLWHA, who are dying unmarried or young, for it offers them the hope of new life beyond death. The Christ's journey to death and through death to resurrection is acknowledged in this article as that which is in line with theology of eschatological hope. With this eschatological view, the work of pastoral care givers, dealing with PLWHA, is seen as that of bringing comfort, companionship in grief, reduction of pain; fight injustice, improvement of social conditions and elimination of every form of discrimination geared towards PLWHA.

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