NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

A Study of the Traditional Perception of Sin Among The Abakuria People of Kenya, with View to Presenting A Holistic Christian Witness That will Meet The Felt Needs Among This Community

BY
THOMAS GITUGU NCHAMA

A Thesis Submitted To The Graduate School in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Divinity in Missions

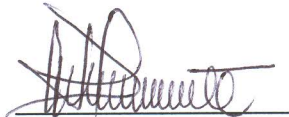*JULY, 2003*

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July, 2008

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

A STUDY OF THE TRADITIONAL PERCEPTION OF SIN AMONG THE ABAKURIA PEOPLE OF KENYA, WITH VIEW TO PRESENTING A HOLISTIC CHRISTIAN WITNESS THAT WILL MEET THE FELT NEEDS AMONG THIS COMMUNITY

I declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other College or University for academic credit

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology or the Examiners

(Signed)_____

Thomas Gitugu Nchama

July, 2008

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study was to examine the traditional perception of sin among the Abakuria people of Kenya, with the objective of presenting a holistic Christian witness that will meet the spiritual needs of these people. In order to achieve this goal, research was carried out in this community by focusing on the Abakuria traditional views of sin, the causes of sin as perceived by the Abakuria, and the traditional methods used to deal with sin whenever it occurs.

The research was a qualitative study, and data was collected primarily through ethnographic interviews with selected participants among the Abakuria people. Questionnaires were also used to capture the general understanding of sin in this community.

A keen analysis of the Abakuria cultural worldview regarding sin revealed the following observations:

To begin with, the Abakuria like most African societies acknowledge the existence of sin. This acknowledgement is demonstrated by the terms and local phrases they use to describe sin/an offensive act. The research revealed that two terms *iriraga* and *umugiro* are used to describe sin. An examination of the two words revealed that sin has two dimensions at least according to Abakuria. While sin on one hand offends the divinity (ancestral spirits, spirits and ghosts), it also hurts and spoils relationships.

Secondly, the Abakuria people categorize sins. There are those termed as the most horrible sins, there are terrible sins but can be put aright and there are also minor offences. The most horrible sins include murder, witchcraft and incest. The second category has sins like adultery, physically assaulting one's parent, and rape. The third category consists of sins such as lying, stealing foodstuffs, bitterness and greedy.

Thirdly, this research discovered that the Abakuria people believe sin is caused by three forces; angry ancestors, influence from witchcraft and inheritance from parents.

Fourthly, it was discovered that Abakuria deal with sin promptly whenever it occurs. The major means of dealing with sin in this community is through animal sacrifices. Sacrifices are meant to appease angry ancestors and other deities so that curses and other forms of punishment will not befall the living. Another form of dealing with sin in this community is by publicly shaming the wrongdoer and making him/her compensate the offended party. However, the first category, the most horrible sins do not have a solution except by killing the victim or totally excommunicating him/her from the society.

The findings of this study raised several implications for missions in the continent of Africa and more so among the Abakuria community, for which appropriate recommendations have been made. The recommendations are intended to provide both theoretical and practical platform for the development of sound mission strategies. These mission strategies will go a long way in helping Christian witnesses to present a relevant and holistic gospel among the abakuria people.

TO

The late George Mudiay Odie
my brother, my friend, who due to his passion for God's mission left DRC to train in
Kenya for ministry, but fell sick and went to be with the Lord in 2007. His love and
passion for God's mission inspires me

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The modern missionary movement has made it clear that a comprehensible understanding of the cultural set up of people is of necessity, if Christian witnesses will impact different cultures positively with the message of the gospel. The cultural set up of people includes their beliefs, values, customs and social behavior. Therefore, any authentic and effective Christian ministry ought to learn and understand people within their cultural beliefs and practices as it seeks to mold and transform them for the good (Hiebert 1985, 14-5). African societies in general seem to have religious beliefs and practices, which are woven and integrated within their cultural context; these religious beliefs explain the traditional understanding of deities, ancestral spirits and ghosts as well as how the humans are supposed to relate with them in harmony.

The Abakuria people of Kenya, who are situated in the southern part of western province, are not devoid of these religious beliefs and practices. This community has traditional religious beliefs, which are basically used to help people understand the spiritual world and how to relate with it. Their religious beliefs include what ought to be done and not to be done by humans so as to avoid curses and calamities from the spiritual world. As it regards to those acts that should not be done, Abakuria people refer to them as *iriraga* or *umugiro*, which when equivalently translated would mean sin or transgression. Based on this, then, the existence of sin is a reality among the Abakuria community, and thus, it cannot be discarded or ignored. However, this reality of sin and how Abakuria culturally perceive it may be different from the way westerners and Christianity generally conceptualizes sin. Given this

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situation, the question remains, as how can Christian witnesses use what this people already understand regarding sin, so as to let the gospel speak to them in their cultural context. To answer this question, it seems that a clear understanding of the Abakuria perception of sin must be grasped.

Considering that generally the African perception and specifically the Abakuria community's perception of sin is a neglected area of study, this study seeks to understand the Abakuria traditional perception of sin and how sin is traditionally dealt with whenever it occurs among these people. Once this traditional perception is ably understood within the cultural context of these people, then Christian witnesses will stand a better chance of doing evangelism and discipleship that is relevant and effective.

History of the Abakuria People

Location

The Abakuria, who inhabit Bukuria, are a Bantu-speaking community who straddles between Kenya and Tanzania. In Kenya, they live in the South of Western province, while in Tanzania; they live both in Northern Mara and Musoma regions. Today, they are divided mainly into two blocks, those in Kenya and those on the Tanzanian side. According to the census done in 1994, the total Abakuria population was estimated to number 348,000, with 213,000 living in Tanzania and 135,000 in Kenya (Sim 1979, 45).

Linguistically, the difference between the two blocks is negligible. As mentioned earlier, this is a Bantu-speaking community and their closest linguistic neighbors include the Kisii (Kenya), Zanaki (Tanzania), Nguruimi (Tanzania), Ikoma (Tanzania), Maragoli and Kikuyu (Kenya).

Origin

This community has various oral traditions, which attempt to explain their origin and settlement to the current location. One of these states that they came from a place much further north called Misri or Misiri. This history finds parallelism in the one given by Luhya and Meru elders, who claim their ancestors, migrated from Misri. Another oral tradition on the origin of Abakuria states that Abakuria with their Bantu-speaking counterparts in Africa migrated from Congo (DRC).

The Abakuria migration and settlement in Bukuria area appears to have occurred in different phases. As Finke observes, the first phase begun with the journey from Misiri in the 15th century and the last phase got settled in the area early in the 18th century (2003,4).

Culture

Abakuria society, do not have written records that explain their lives and activities, however, they use relative chronology to explain who they were and how they came to be. Their chronology is mainly based on social systems of age-sets and generation-sets.

The Abakuria practice both circumcision and clitoridectomy at regular intervals; this initiation practices are the ones used to determine age-sets, and several age-sets form generation-sets. To strengthen their chronology further, the Abakuria also have what are known as generation-set system *Amakora*. All Abakuria people are divided into two families namely: - *Abasai* and *Abachuma*.

Abakuria men are reputed to be very good and strong warriors. In an open fight with any of their neighbors Maasai, Luo, and Kipsigis, they were often the victors. Their weapons consisted of a wooden club, machete and a spear or bow and arrow (Finke 2003, 5).

In their initial stages, Abakuria are said to have lived only by hunting wild animals and gathering edible roots and fruits. They were therefore a hunter-gatherer community as well as magicians.

At present Abakuria can be described as an agro-pastoralist community, which enjoys the best of both agriculture and pastoralism. In agriculture, the major cash crop is tobacco, coffee and maize. Other crops grown include finger millet and cassava. Cattle is kept to provide milk, meat and farming power, as well as used to pay bride dowry.

As it regards to religion, the Abakuria spiritual world appears to be composed of spiritual beings, spirits, and the ancestors; who are culturally described as intermediaries to a higher power. Any act or behavior that destroys harmony between these spiritual beings or spoils their relationship with the living is evil and thus termed as *iriraga* sin. Given this, it is clear that the Abakuria like all African communities have their traditional perception of sin. This traditional perception of sin is woven and integrated in the cultural worldview of this community. Therefore, any attempt to understand how this people perceive sin must be carried out in the context of their cultural beliefs and practices.

With this information, the research was motivated by the need to examine the traditional perception of sin among the Abakuria, with the intention of forming a strategic and holistic Christian witness, which will meet the felt needs among the Abakuria people in their day-to-day lives. This kind of witness will lead to a formation of a valid and enthusiastic Church, which is well integrated into the culture of the Abakuria people of Kenya, while at the same time being faithful to the biblical text.

Problem Statement

This study was carried out to examine the traditional perception of sin among the Abakuria people of Kenya; with view to presenting a holistic Christian witness that will meet the spiritual felt needs among this community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to discover the Abakuria traditional understanding of sin, its causes and how it is dealt with, whenever it occurs.

Significance of the Study

Though numerous evangelistic campaigns have been made in the past to reach Abakuria with the gospel, little academic research if any, has been carried out to understand how Abakuria perceive and deal with sin traditionally. Thus, findings in this research will help Christian ministers in general and missionary practitioners in particular to formulate an authentic approach, which can be used to present the gospel effectively among this people.

Secondly, the church among the Kuria community for a long time has struggled to gain grounds among the natives; in most cases commitment to Christian beliefs and values seems to be shelved by the natives whenever dealing with real life issues. This study will be helpful for pastors and church ministers within this community on how to communicate a holistic gospel message, which addresses the real life issues that face Abakuria in their daily lives.

Thirdly, the study will also be helpful to missionaries and sociologists, especially those from outside Africa, who may be interested in leaning the Abakuria worldview of sin and how they deal with it traditionally. In a nutshell, the premise

behind the study is that once the Abakuria traditional perception of sin is clearly understood it will provide a basis for relevant and effective evangelism as well as discipleship ministries among the Abakuria community.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives derived from this study include: -

1. Gaining of insight and understanding of the Abakuria traditional concept of sin

2. Discovering the causes of sin as they are traditionally perceived by the Abakuria

3. Understanding the means and methods used to handle the occurrence of sin

Research Questions

The present study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the Abakuria's views of sin?

2. What are the causes of sin as perceived by Abakuria?

3. In what ways is sin dealt with among the Abakuria?

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was confined to one of the four clans of Abakuria people of Kenya. Similarly, the interviews and questionnaires will be administered to a number of selected elders- men and women (elders are chosen here so as to get the original traditional beliefs that are not influenced by contemporary views or Christian teachings). Therefore, the findings will only be applied directly to members of Bugumbe clan of the Abakuria community here in Kenya.

Definition of terms

This study employed the following operational terms, which are hereby defined:

Concept – refers to an abstract idea or basic understanding that determines how someone behaves or reacts to something.

Sin – an act that offends a moral or ethical principle, it could also be a behavior against the teaching of moral laws.

Sacrifice - refers to an act of worship whereby the animal is killed in honor of the deity.

Atonement – the reconciliation between God and people brought about by the death of Jesus Christ.

Traditional – refers to the customary way of reacting and handling issues.

A Christian – refers to someone who professes and believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who died to save humanity from sin.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews and discusses related literature on how sin is perceived by African societies and how Christianity understands sin. To begin with, this section has discussed how African traditional societies perceive sin and how they categorize sin. The means used by these societies to deal with sin have also been discussed in this section of the study.

Similarly, the general Christian view of sin, and how Christians understand the death of Jesus Christ in relation to human sin has also been discussed in this section. Having looked at how African societies culturally perceive sin, and how the Christian message present sin, it became important for the study to review literature on contextualization. Contextualization has been described as the attempt to understand the cultural and socio-economic context of the people, with the intention of presenting a relevant gospel message without compromising the absolutes of the gospel message (Parshall 1980, 32). This approach is necessary for this study bearing in mind that the Abakuria people have a their own cultural perception of sin, which ought to be understood clearly by Christian witnesses, as they seek to do evangelism and discipleship in this community.

African Traditional View of Sin

African societies acknowledge the reality of sin in this world. And as matter of fact African people have various ways of handling sin or stopping it from

happening (Mbiti1969, 04). While the Christian community has its own way of perceiving sin, which is basically patterned after the biblical concept of sin, African traditional societies on the other hand have their own traditional perception of sin, which is entirely woven in the tapestry of their cultural structures.

Generally, most African societies perceive sin as any anti-social act that disrupts the harmony of society and relationship. Along this line of thought, taking the example of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, Adeyemo points out that this community recognizes sin as an evil, upsetting the equilibrium of society or of personal relationship (1979, 52). In this description, sin then, seems to be perceived as an action or state that disrupts, disorients relationships or state of being in the society.

In this context of communal relationships, sin then, appears to be concerned with matters of virtue and the character of an individual. Along this line of thought, any character or behavior that contravenes the norms that guard communal relationship is an offence. In illustrating this further, Dau notes that conforming to the norms of behavior in the family and the community among Africans is paramount. Failure to adhere to these is serious offence that may bring evil consequences such as a curse or death (2002, 161). Going with this observation it seems that among African societies, one may not necessarily be termed as inherently evil/sinful; it largely depends on what a person does in relation to the norms of the society. The inability to conform to the norms makes one sinful, while conformity to these norms earns one the status of a good person. This form of describing persons seems to have roots in the general African believe that good always follows right conduct and ills follows bad conduct, i.e. the consequences of ones actions, good or bad, always catch up with one sooner or later (Dau 2002, 161). Sin may be described as existing both in its nature and its consequences, however in most African societies; sin is defined by its

consequences and not by its nature (Gehman 1989, 174). Thus, in describing sin these societies tend to look at the outcome and how they affect the equilibrium of society and relationship; therefore that which produces evil as its consequences is the one to be termed as sin in African thinking (Adeyemo 1979, 52). In using a witch as an example of a sinner, Bosch correctly observes that a witch is a sinner par excellence, not primarily because of his/her deeds, but because of the evil consequences of those deeds: illness, barrenness, catastrophe, misfortune, disruption of relationship in the community and so on (Bosch 1987, 50).

On the other hand, there are those African societies that stretch their understanding of sin beyond its consequences. They tend to perceive sin as incarnated in persons, who are then termed as evil or bad. Following this argument, sin is then perceived, as rooted in personal ontology. Magesa's description becomes helpful in explaining this perception, he says:

> In African Religion, sin is always attached to a wrongdoer and, ultimately, the wrongdoer is human person. The sense here, then, is that sin and evil do not and cannot exist in human experience except as perceived in people. It is people who are evil or sinful, whether or not they are aided by invisible forces. For, even when invisible forces intervene in human life to cause harm, it is more often than not because they are 'used' by evil people or are manipulated by forces on earth.... It is people or personalized beings who are evil, precisely because they actually entertain bad intentions, utter bad words, or engage in wrong deeds. In other words, they are incarnations of evil powers, at least for the time they behave in ant-life manner, which frustrate the flowering of life and life energies. (1997, 150)

This quote illustrates the notion that is commonly held by most African societies, which looks at sin and in that matter evil as being personified to people who are sinful and not the devil. Using the Sukuma society in Tanzania, Healey and Sybertz, observes that the Sukuma believe the witch or sorcerer, and not the devil, is the personification of evil (Healey & Sybertz 2000, 218). Witchcraft has been used here since it is termed as the most potent symbol of evil in African traditional societies.

It is important to recognize that African societies use various words to conceptualize or explain sin, the terms and words used, tend to lean on the results of sin in the context of the idea of relationship and community as a whole. Magesa observes that what is elsewhere conceptualized and explained as sin or evil, may be better expressed in African Religion by the concept of 'wrong-doing', 'badness' or 'destruction of life" (1997, 149). Following up with the idea of sin being destructive, Healey and Sybertz defines sin as "the insect that sticks on to our skin and sucks our blood" (2000, 218). The assumption behind this description is that sin spoils and destroys life by bringing either a curse or death it also spoils relationships. The perception that sin spoils interrelationships in the community is very strong in African societies; Dau aptly observes that the word used for sin in several African languages means to "spoil", especially to spoil or harm human relationships (2003, 160).

Another word that is used to refer to sin in African societies is taboo. This word, could literary mean "things forbidden, or "things not done." Adeyemo observes that the word taboo carries the negative idea of a "thou shall not," bearing relationship to that, which is customarily not done. In its original sense, taboo was connected with the breach of ritual laws (1979, 52). A number of African scholars seem to suggest that sin in African societies is perceived within the boundaries of taboos, in the sense that once a particular taboo is broken, sin has been committed. Anguandia observes that sin in the African cosmology has a lot to do with the breaking of the community taboos, and the disturbance of the harmony of the spirit world through misbehavior and misconduct (Anguandia 2005, 23).

An analysis of African description of sin reveals that some African societies use the words sin and evil interchangeably to refer to an act of wrongdoing. For example, Mbiti has frequently used evil in place of sin; in one of his writings, he says,

"Theft is considered evil and it is generally dealt with very severely even to death ... Adultery is also considered to be evil in one prayer, a diviner-priest prays that he does not become a slave to his sexual urge"(Mbiti 1975, 20). However, in other tribes the term evil is used to refer to general wickedness or state of iniquity, while sin is used in reference to an offence, misdeed or transgression.

Categorization of Sins among African Societies

African societies do not look at all sins as being the same; they classify sins into categories, some communities have two categories, others three and others even five categories. The classification of sins among Africans seems to be based on the nature of the wrongdoing and the extent of harm the offense brings to the community. In pondering over how many categories of sins can be there, at least from an African perspective, our interest is drawn to the Lugbara people of DRC, whom Anguandia correctly observes that they have five different categories of sins (Anguandia 2005, 90). It seems that categories of sins differ in regard to each society, and basically the nature and extent of harm the sin brings, determines the number of categories and which category a particular sin falls under.

Though the number of categories differs in proportion to each community, there seems to be a general understanding that there are major and minor sins from an African worldview. The major category includes sins like murder, incest, witchcraft, and stealing. These acts of disobedience to the tribal taboos warrant for severe discipline varying from restitution to capital punishment, either through poisoning or starvation to death. Once involved in this category of major sins, one is perceived as a social outcast and his/her salvation lies in the willingness of the people to accept the person back to fellowship in the community (Adeyemo 1979, 54-5).

On the other hand, minor sins among African societies refer to daily failures of individuals like cheating, bitterness, selfishness, lying and other small mistakes. While being warned as well as exhorted to abandon such behaviors, most African societies still look at these behaviors as acts as unavoidable. Some communities refer to sins in this category as less offending and are sometimes used while joking with others, for example a lie from an elder to a child, and insults among adult peers are sometimes traded in a spirit of jetting (Anguandia 2005, 94).

It is worthy noting at this level that in some African communities the concept of sin is closely associated with the conception of authority and respect. Given this, the juniors are supposed to obey and respect the senior members in the society. Middleton adequately observes that failure by the juniors to obey and respect the seniors constitutes a sin and is punishable (Middleton 1987, 21). To illustrate the point further, Middleton goes on to state:

> Obvious breaches of respect by overt aggressive behavior are more serious than the mere non-observance of the rules of respect. To kill or strike a senior kinsman, or to shout or quarrel with him, are the worst offences against individual kin … (1987, 21)

From this observation it is clear that African view of sin is culturally sensitive, Africans have cultural norms which guide and direct interrelationships behaviors. One of these norms is respect for the elderly; any breach on this is an offence and deserves punishment. From this perspective, Africans, then look at sin as that act which contravenes norms either by challenging authority or showing disrespect for the elderly.

Origin of Sin from an African Perspective

Africans acknowledge the existence of sin in the world. With this acknowledgement, several views are in place concerning the origin of sin. According

to traditional myths most African societies do not associate the origin of sin with God, but with other evil forces. These myths emphasize the fact that when God originally created people, there was harmony and the first people enjoyed only what was good (Ojacor 2002, 96-7). Along this line of thought, there is the firm conviction that God was and is never the origin of sin.

Some societies perceive sin as originating from other spiritual beings other than God, on this Mbiti points out that the Vugusu people believe there is an evil divinity that God created good, but later turned against him. This evil divinity is assisted with other evil spirits, which include spirits of the dead if not properly handled and obeyed by the living. Theses spirits have power to influence mankind into sinning (Mbiti 1969, 204).

Sin is also seen as originating from magic and witchcraft. The perpetrators of these vices, who are termed as enemies of society are the most hated people in African communities (Mbiti 1991, 165). These people (witches and sorcerers) are believed to have mystical powers, which they use to bring evil to others or cause others to do offensive acts. Their behavior is basically seen as motivated by malice and jealousy (Ojacor 2002, 97).

How Sin is dealt with among African Societies

Since sin is perceived as destructive and spoiling human relations as well as making the higher powers frown at people (Arinze 1970, 34), African societies have specified means of how to deal with/remove sin; these means are procedurally carried out in the occurrence of sin in order to avoid curses from higher spirits, as well as restore harmony and tranquility within the people.

Anguandia observes that only sacrifices can restore the destroyed harmony and resume broken ties; these sacrifices are mostly bloody, involving immolation of animals (2005, 30). There are a number of categories of sacrifices among the African people. However, for the sake of this study two of these categories will be dealt with. These are appeasement sacrifice and substitutionary sacrifices.

Appeasement sacrifice is usually prescribed by a priest in response to an inquiry as to what can be done to save the situation during a crisis like an epidemic, famine, drought, or serious illness (Adeyemo 1979, 34).

On the other hand, substitutionary sacrifices are offered when a person is believed to be under the wrath of the divinities or some malignant spirits as a result of an offense/wrongdoing. The wrath of the divinities resulting from the offense can lead to death; however, if a substitutionary sacrifice is offered according to prescription, then it would save the culprit from the wrath of the divinities and even death.

In most cases the animals sacrificed are cows, sheep, and goats, all without spots. There is a general understanding among all African people that the animal to be sacrificed had to meet certain qualities, and a particular process had to be followed on the material day.

As it regards to the qualities and process of sacrificing, every step and procedure ought to be followed keenly, lest the sacrifice loose meaning and effect. The sacrifice may be a totally black goat or sheep without any spots. The sacrificial animals are strangled to death, and blood from the slaughtered animal is collected and poured as a libation from a half guard at the foot of the tree, which were then roasted over the fire (Gehman 1989, 337).

Christian View of Sin

Grudem writing from a Christian point of view defines sin as any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature (1994, 490). In this definition sin is explained as done to/against God and His moral law. Failure to conform to God's law here is not limited to only acts that contradict God's law, but it also includes attitudes and the moral nature of humanity. Any wrong attitude conceived in the heart of man should not be entertained for it goes against the will of God for man. This is clearly demonstrated in the teachings of Jesus, which prohibits attitudes like anger or lust (Matt.5: 22, 28). Along this line of thought, there is a strong submission that a good Christian life is the one that embraces moral purity not only in actions but also in the attitude.

Grudem's definition of sin includes the moral nature of mankind, the internal character, which is the very nature, the essence of personhood; this also can be sinful. Before redemption by Christ Jesus, mankind not only engages in sinful acts and has sinful attitude; mankind is sinful by nature. Based on this, Paul in Eph.2: 3, writes and says, previously "we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Grudem 1994, 490-1).

From the above analysis, Christianity seems to perceive sin as any lack of conformity to the will of God by action, attitude and moral nature; or a willful disregard for the norms revealed by God in the Bible. Therefore the Christian view of sin is built on both the Old and New Testament concept of Sin.

McClanaham observes that the Old Testament word translated sin comes from a Hebrew stem which means "to miss," or "to fail;" other Hebrew words used to refer to sin would be "iniquity and transgression" (1987, 57). The terminology for sin is prominent and it has been extensively dealt with in the New Testament. The Hebrew

words for sin as used in the Old Testament finds parallelism in the Greek words used for sin in the New Testament.

The Greek word in the New Testament that is translated in English as "sin" is *hamartia*, which literally means *missing the target*. McClanaham aptly explains that in classical Greek, this word indicates the missing of a target, or the missing of a road. It thus could refer to taking a wrong turn (1987, 60).

In Wikipedia (online encyclopedia) sin is explained as a term used mainly in a religious context to describe an act that violates a moral rule, or the state of having committed such a violation. In this encyclopedia, the authors observe that the English word sin was originally an archery term. The distance from the center of the bull's eye to the point where an arrow struck is known as the "sin of the arrow". Sin is often used to mean an action thought of as being wrong or prohibited; however in some religions (most notably Christianity), sin or sinning is something that is an action or a state of mind (Wikipedia 2007).

From the above word study of sin, as used in the Hebrew and Greek languages, one can infer that sin is man's failure to live up to God's will and purpose. It is being in a state that is wrong and not right with God. Linking the meaning of sin as understood in Old Testament and New Testament, it seems that the general sense in both cases is to "miss the mark." Both words are mostly used in ethical contexts in the meaning of doing evil, and in the Bible they often mean doing evil to Yahweh (1975, 1580).

To sum up this section, we can say that the Bible depicts sin as not following God's moral guidance. This is based on the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis. They went against God and disobeyed His command, by eating the forbidden fruit; an action that is termed as the original sin among the Christian circles. The effects of this

sin were passed on to all descendants of Adam and Eve. Therefore the original sin is a primary reason why all people must be born again and gain salvation, as Anguandia argues (2005, 33).

The Death of Jesus in Relation to Sin

The Bible presents the death of Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Based on the righteousness and the justice of God, man ought to pay for his/her sins as it is taught both in the Old and the New Testament. God is holy and does not ignore sin, but He judges all sins. However, beginning with the Old Testament, God introduced the sacrificial system among His people, whereby an animal was sacrificed to die in place of a wrongdoer, once the animal died and the blood sprinkled on the altar, it was seen as covering- atoning the victim from the wrath of God (Lev.16:30-35).

The New Testament teaching on sacrifice is that Christ, the son of God, has been made the final sacrifice for sin, once for all. In this teaching, there is a firm conviction that all sacrifices as introduced in the Old Testament sacrificial system, were only a foreshadowing of the complete and perfect sacrifice, which Christ made on the cross once for all (Heb.10:11-15).

Therefore the death of Christ at the cross of Calvary is a sacrifice that removes the guilt of man and reconciles man with God, by providing the inward cleansing (Heb.5:8; Rom.5:19; Php.2:8). This is what is termed as atonement, the blood of Christ atones for sin; this is so because Christ was himself without sin.

In his book, *Systematic Theology* Grudem describes atonement as the work Christ did in his life and death to earn the salvation of mankind (1994, 569). Therefore, within Christianity, atonement is used to refer to the redemption achieved

by Jesus Christ by his crucifixion and resurrection. It is a general understanding among Christians that the death of Jesus Christ was a sacrifice that relieves believers of the burden of their sins

The New Bible Dictionary (3rd Ed.) describes atonement as a word used to mean 'a making at one,' and points to a process of bringing those who are estranged into a unity (1996, 102). Angeles stretches this concept by explaining it as bringing together in reconciliation, or to remove obstacles preventing a union or acceptance. He adds that it could mean the act of making reparation of expiation (1985, 24).

The New Hunger's Bible dictionary sheds more light into this precept, when it states, "The atonement wrought by Christ is a fundamental fact in human salvation, a real covering of sin, the divinely appointed measure for 'reconciliation' between God and man" (Gonzalez 1985, 45-8).

Therefore, Christians understand atonement as a fundamental means by which sins of humanity are dealt with through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. This sacrifice of Christ is substitutionary; Jesus becomes the perfect and complete substitution for man's punishment. He takes on those evils on Himself in the place of and on behalf of mankind cf. Matt.20: 28; Mark 10:45 (Olowola 1991:4-5).

Contextualization

The modern missionary movement has been popularly characterized by the concept of contextualization. Both scholars and missionary practitioners have ably argued that it is only a contextualized theology that is able to reach and transform people at the deepest level of their culture.

Contextualization as a term is said to have been born in the early 1970s within the framework of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Theological Education

Fund, its coining has been ascribed to S. Coe and Sharon Sapseziah (Ngewa &Shaw 1989, 12). In spite of its popular use, contextualization seems to be vaguely understood by most people and hardly put into practice by missionaries, who minister in cross-cultural settings.

Following the footsteps of Tabor, Parshall defines Contextualization as:

> The effort to understand and take seriously the specific context of each human group and person, on its own terms and in all its dimensions-cultural, religious, social, political, economic- and discern what the gospel says to people in that context. This requires a profound empirical analysis of the context in place of flip or a prior judgment… contextualization therefore tries to discover in the scripture what God is saying to these people. Contextualization thus, emulates the example of Jesus as he offered each person a gospel tailored to his/her own context. (1980, 32)

The above definition brings two important elements to our attention, 'context' and 'text', these two appears to be the basic foundation on which the whole concept of contextualization is based. While context refers to the total matrix of society, which includes the socio-economic and other areas of life in a given community; the text denotes the gospel of Jesus Christ that is presented to a given people. With this in mind, contextualization thus seeks to be faithful as much as possible to the text, while at the same time being relevant and meaningful to the cultural context of the people.

The study of contextualization is vital for this paper in the sense that it equips one with skills to study a particular culture critically and thus come up with appropriate methods of approaching African traditional worldviews with the gospel.

This is in attempt to address the challenge of making the gospel message relevant in cross-cultural settings. Genuine Christian ministers and missiologists cannot help but identify with the cry of the great missiologist Allan Tippet, who once said:

> …The greatest methodological issue faced by Christian mission in our day is how to carry out the Great Commission in a multi-cultural world, with a

gospel that is both truly Christian in content and culturally significant in form. (Buswell III 1978, 13)

In the above quote, Tippet demonstrates a challenge that missionaries and Christian witnesses within cross-cultural settings need to face and solve. They need to carry a valid message that acknowledges the absolutes of God, while at the same time adapted to different cultures.

Contextualization of the gospel message is based on the principle of incarnation, through which the mission of God to the whole world is fulfilled. God so identified himself with mankind by taking on the human nature. Jesus Christ, the incarnate word, lived and did ministry as a Jew among the historical Jews. In the same way, the Church as an agent of God's mission is commissioned to be involved in an incarnational ministry to the whole world. It is through incarnational ministry that missionaries everywhere are able to penetrate and minister effectively to the receiving culture.

Ross Kinsler notes that God's word, His love, His message of salvation is to be extended to people of every tongue and tribe in the language and in living demonstrations that they can understand and receive without stepping out of their cultural clothing (1978,24).

Contextualization Vs Indigenization

There has been a heated debate among scholars as to whether contextualization and indigenization are different or they mean the same thing. There are those who have strongly argued that there is no difference between the two terms and thus, they refer to the same concept.

In insisting that these terms mean the same thing, Buswell, III argues that contextualization has nothing different from indigenization, which suggests that it

expresses a deeper concept than indigenization; neither does it promise the long-awaited end of a paternalistic relation between the old and the young churches.

According to Buswell, the etymology of indigenization involves a Latin morpheme meaning "to bear or produce within. Thus, its English meaning becomes what we may refer to as native, born, growing or produced naturally in a country or region. Being confident of his position, Buswell challenges the proponents of contextualization to reconsider their position and think twice before rejecting indigenization. This reconsideration, he says should be based on the ground that indigeneity and indigenization as a nature metaphor depicts the idea of the soil, or taking root in the soil. He observes that the static nature that many have ascribed to indigenization results from the static nature of the metaphor itself and not the process of indigenization, and because of the static nature of the metaphor there is danger of looking at it as past-oriented (1978,15-16).

In a way that seems as leaning on Buswell's convictions, Cole in his article *Africanizing the Faith,* asserts that he does not see any distinction between indigenization and contextualization. According to him, many attempts at indigenization are regarded as attempts to contextualize theology (Ngewa & Shaw 1989, 12).

On the other hand, many scholars have convincingly argued that contextualization goes beyond indigenization, and it is the one that is ought to be done and not indigenization. Their arguments are based on the conviction that the gospel message needs to go beyond the clothing of appropriate linguistic and cultural frames of reference, which has been judged as being superficial. In their argument, lies the conviction that contextualization takes a critical stance and endeavors to transform cultural frames of references. Through this process the gospel does not overlook

social and cultural issues, as it were, but it remains free to speak prophetically to a

culture from within (Gilliland 1989, 32-33).

In illustrating further the dynamism of contextualization unlike indigenization,

I find the statement of Ross Kinsler very expedient in deepening our understanding of

contextualization; he writes:

> The spokesmen for contextualization point out the need to explore not only the anthropological and religious aspects, but also the social and economic dimensions of each situation in order to discover the full significance of the gospel in that situation. (Ross 1978, 25)

A keen analysis of the two positions (Contextualization and indigenization), reveals

that there are some differences of ideas embraced by each position and thus, a

sweeping conclusion on similarity cannot be publicized without a clear examination

of the philosophies behind each terminology.

Scholars arguing for similarity and effectiveness of indigenization provide

plausible information that needs our acknowledgement; however, their information on

indigenization fails to create a platform within the culture, in which the gospel can

stand and evaluate the cultural beliefs and practices. Though culture in itself is not

entirely evil (Kraft 1996, 34-37), there is need to understand that people can use some

cultural structures empowered by evil forces to oppress others; the gospel therefore,

must have a critical stance from where it can evaluate cultural structures. This

evaluation will be geared at accepting, that which is good, and rejecting that which

contradicts the biblical teaching based on the supra-cultural nature of God.

Based on this analysis, it appears that though contextualization may not seem

different from indigenization at the phase value, a closer examination reveals

otherwise. Contextualization is actually different from indigenization; it expresses a

deeper concept than indigenization ever does (Douglas 1975, 1217). The critical

element in contextualization makes Christianity rise up to the occasion of and saving

African traditional religions. Mbiti observes that African traditional religions need a lot of pruning if their best values are to be preserved and taken up in Christianity. He goes on to note that unless Christianity does this in Africa, it will find itself wrapped up in a lot of religiosity not unlike the type Jesus pronounced 'dead' in Phariseeism and Judaism (McGavran 1972, 153).

Because of the ability of contextualization to take on the forms and the expressions of different cultures while maintaining a critical stance that seeks to change and transform cultures, this study opts for contextualization as the best methodology in cross-cultural ministry. This concept seems appropriate in presenting the gospel message in different cultural settings, more so in reaching out to those who practice African traditional beliefs and practices.

Contextualization and the Bible

A keen analysis of the Bible, the OT and NT, reveals that contextualization is part and parcel of God's mission. In the Old Testament God used a contextualizing process in His progressive self-disclosure of Himself to His people. His self-disclosure was well integrated in the pattern and forms of the Hebrew culture. This contextualization seems not to have been done blindly, for it consistently called attention to the abiding validity of those non-negotiables that constitute normative truths for all peoples in all situations (Gilliland 1989, 33).

The New Testament is not devoid of contextualization; it is the process the apostles used to present the gospel that was received in a Hebrew culture to the culture of the Greeks. It is clear, especially within the epistles that indigenous words and concepts of the receptor culture were highly used to handle crucial matters among them the concept of God, sin and conversion.

Kraft observes that the early Greek churches were in danger of being dominated by Hebrew theology, just as many non-western churches today are in danger of dominated by western theologies. God, however, led Paul and others to struggle against the Hebrew Christian to develop a contextualized Christian theology for those who spoke Greek (1978, 32-33).

The Issue of Syncretism

Though contextualization is a concept that its time has come and cannot be ignored anymore, there are however, some risks that accompany it, which may require caution from those involved in it. One of the risks is the issue of syncretism. Syncretism in this study basically refers to the mixing of the Christian faith with other religious (or even secular) beliefs and practices. In a classical way syncretism has been defined as:

> …The fusion/ adoption of beliefs and practices that are incompatible with beliefs that are logically basic to a belief system. Due to syncretism basic beliefs are reinterpreted in such a way that they (a) are radically modified in their meaning and (b) are no longer basic to the configuration of the belief system. The original identity of such a configuration is thereby changed. (Gort 1989, 33)

In the interest of adapting and making the Christian message relevant, there is a danger of incorporating traditional practices that are detrimental to the Christian faith; and thus what is formed is not authentic Christianity, but a mixture of faiths.

Syncretism emerges when the receptor's culture is received wholly without a critical examination of the traditional religious practices of that particular culture. Bradshaw observes that syncretism might be said to occur when critical and basic elements of the gospel are lost in the process of contextualization and are replaced by religious elements from the receiving culture. He goes on to note that in some cases syncretism goes so high in that a totally new 'gospel' appears (Douglas 1975, 1227).

With this analysis, it is very important that the church in whatever culture be careful while contextualizing the gospel message, so as to avoid this mistake.

Kraft has taken the issue of syncretism to a higher notch by stating that it can also result from those missionaries who are unwilling to adapt the gospel to the culture of the of the receiving community. He likens this kind of missionaries to the Pharisees and Judaisers of Jesus' time, who try to preserve the foreign expression of God's message. He goes on to note that when foreign forms of Christianity are kept, the meanings change, and often become unchristian (1978, 35-6).

This observation illuminates our understanding further by realizing that syncretism does not only occur when African pagan practices are mixed with Christianity, but also when western philosophies and secular concepts are mixed with the Christian message and termed as the gospel message. In illustrating this point Parshall states:

> Missionaries out of fear of syncretism often become overly denunciatory of local culture. Nationals are encouraged to become like the missionary. But this in itself creates syncretism; beliefs and practices flow from the missionary and his own cultural background to the receptor. (1980, 44)

The issue of syncretism is complex; it ought to be approached with humility (the communicator and the receiver) in recognition that no one's theology is perfect. Our theologies and interpretation of God's word are fallible, and since we cannot see the clear picture as God does (1 Cor.13: 12) there is need to humbly learn from other people's perspective.

To recapitulate, contextualization happens when the message of Christ is interpreted in ways that are relevant and meaningful to the cultural context of the people, while at the same time being faithful to the text- the word of God. To maintain the Christian nature, contextualization must be based on the Bible. Though it seems to be risk on both sides the communicator and the receiving community need to examine

their cultural practices and beliefs in order to uphold the truth and eliminate those elements that are not supported by God's word.

Summary of the Findings from Literature Review

From the literature review it has emerged that African societies in general are aware of the existence of sin in this world. With this awareness, these societies have guidelines that help people not to be involved sin or any acts that are offensive. They also have various ways that are used to handle sin whenever it occurs.

The African perception of sin is highly embedded in the cultural set up of the people. Therefore their understanding of sin is rooted in their values, beliefs and customs. Generally African societies perceive sin as any anti-social act that disrupts the harmony of society and relationship or any behavior, character that contravenes the norms of the community. A keen examination of African scholars on this topic revealed that sin in an African perspective has two dimensions, relationship with the deities and the humans. Therefore, a sinful act can be against the laws of the divinity, given by intermediaries (spirits and other gods) as well as against the community laws, which are there to maintain harmony and unity. In this context then, sin is seen as destructive and spoiling because it interferes and destroys relationships.

Literature review has also shown that African societies classify sins into different categories; sins are never viewed as being on the same level. Some societies have two categories, some three and others go up to five categories. The assumption behind these classification remains that some sins are major than others and thus, they cannot be on the same level. The differences in these categories are determined by the nature of sin and the amount of damage it causes to the community in terms of relationship.

The origin of sin according to African perspective is never associated with God, but other evil spiritual forces. There are a number of myths, which tell of how God created everything good but some spiritual being turned against Him, and thus became evil. These spirits are responsible for all the evil; they use people to do evil. Angry and bad ancestral spirits also fall in this category and can influence human beings to do evil. Another cause of evil is mystical powers from witches and sorcerers.

Whenever sin occurs, African people have ways and methods in place, which are employed to handle it. While the perpetrators of minor sins are publicly shamed and made to pay for their misconduct, the culprits of major sins can only be accepted for fellowship and sharing after sacrificing an animal and its blood used as an agent to cleanse them from the evil act.

From a Christian perspective, sin is seen as the failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude and moral nature. This perception is built on both the Old and the New Testament concepts of sin. The Hebrew and Greek words used to describe sin refer to the idea of missing, going astray or disregarding the norms of God as revealed in His word.

As a solution for sin, the Bible presents the death of Jesus Christ as the ultimate sacrifice for the forgiveness (atonement) for the sins of humanity. Given this, Christianity looks at the death of Christ at the cross of Calvary as a sacrifice that removes the guilt of man and reconciles man with God, by providing the inward cleansing (Heb.5:8; Rom.5:19; Php.2:8). This is what is termed as atonement, the blood of Christ atones for sin; this is so because Christ was himself without sin.

As part of literature review, the concept of contextualization was explored; this became important because there is need to understand the cultural context of the

Abakuria people, so as to present a relevant and effective Christian message that will positively impact the lives of these people group. As noted earlier contextualization is the efforts to understand and take seriously the specific context of each human group and discern what the gospel says these people in their own context (Parshall 1980, 32).

Contextualization was chosen as the best model for doing ministry among the Abakuria over indigenization, because its ability to take on the forms and the expressions of different cultures while maintaining a critical stance that seeks to change and transform cultures. This model seems appropriate in presenting the gospel message in different cultural settings, more so in reaching out to those who practice African traditional beliefs and practices.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research is a qualitative study concerning the traditional concept of Sin among the Abakuria people. Creswell points out that a qualitative study "is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of respondents and conducted in natural setting" (Creswell 1994, 1-2). Qualitative research has been used to explore and deepen the understanding of the perception of sin among the Abakuria people.

Various reasons have been given as to why one would choose to do a qualitative study. Qualitative research is often chosen when an area of study is immature due to lack of prior research (Creswell 1994, 146). Secondly, Patton points out that a qualitative study is chosen when a researcher is seeking to understand people's experiences (2002, 33). With this in mind, the researcher chose a qualitative research design because he could not find any previous studies that were done on this topic. Secondly, the researcher was motivated by the need to understand the views of the people as they see sin and experience its effects in their day-to-day life situations. Therefore, a qualitative approach seemed the most appropriate for this research.

The major methodology used was ethnographic interview. Spradley describes this method as a friendly conversation, whereby the interviewer engages in conversation with the informants, in order to learn from them and to attempt to understand their view points (1979, 58). Thus, the researcher chose to use

ethnographic interviews in order to hear the views of the informants directly. Questionnaires were also used in order to obtain the general perception about sin in this community. The research design included developing interview questions for elderly people from this community, developing questionnaire for other community members who were born and raised in this community, selecting the study sample, collecting data, and analyzing the data collected.

Research Approach

In this study, data was collected by two means; questionnaires and ethnographic interviews. Questionnaires were given to ten community members in order to acquire the general perception of sin in this community. Each questionnaire was accompanied by an ethnographic interview. Interview questions were designed and administered to five elders (three men and two women) of ages 70-85, with the intention of getting in-depth information on the Abakuria concept of sin. The interview questions were designed to be parallel with the ethnographic questions so as to compare and contrast the information. The researcher conducted all the interviews.

The Researcher's Role

Creswell observes that the role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases at the outset of the study (1994, 163). The researcher being a native of this community has a very close relationship with the people; therefore he has an understanding of the cultural views the Abakuria people exhibit regarding sin. The researcher has also served as an associate pastor in this community for five years and thus, has been exposed to various issues that community members raise regarding sin.

The researcher's experience with the Abakuria at different levels i.e. having been born and raised in this community, worked as an associate pastor for five years, as well as serving as a youth leader within Maranatha Faith Church in this region, has enhanced his awareness and knowledge regarding the Abakuria cultural perception of sin. The researcher began this study with the conviction that a clear understanding of the Abakuria cultural perception of sin is essential in presenting an effective and relevant gospel in this community.

Ethical Considerations

Ethnographic research requires the researcher to safeguard the rights, interests and sensitivity of the informants (Spradley 1979, 36). With this in mind, the researcher introduced himself and described the nature and purpose of the research to all the interviewees. Their consent was sought before any interview was carried out. All the interviewees participated willingly; none of them was coerced or manipulated. The names of the respondents have not been used in this report for the sake of protecting them.

Population of Study

A population is a group of individuals who share common characteristics that are of interest to the researcher. On illustrating further on population, Mugenda and Mugenda refer to population as "the aggregate of all that conforms to a given specification" (1999, 9). The population of this study comprises of the Abakuria people of Kenya, who inhabit Kurialand, which is situated in the southern part of the western province of Kenya. Having identified the population of study, the researcher

sampled the informants for the study. Their number and descriptions are given in the study sample section.

Study Sample

Sampling was necessary for this study since not all the Abakuria people could be possibly interviewed. This study therefore, used a sampling procedure that would lead to the adequate information. Creswell observes that purposeful sampling is the kind of research strategy used in qualitative designs. He goes ahead to note that purposeful sampling involves the researcher intentionally selecting individuals and site to learn or understand the central phenomenon (2002, 194). According to Creswell, there are various types of purposeful sampling. This research chose to employ theory or concept sampling (2002, 195). This method best suits this research because the researcher was interested in understanding the Abakuria traditional perception of sin.

There were fifteen informants in total; these included two leaders from the Abakuria local council of elders locally referred as *abagaka bi inchama*, who were classified as (LCL1 and LCL2); three village elders (VE1, VE2, and VE3); four elderly women, who are leaders in the local women group (CWL1, CWL2, CWL3, and CWL4); and six elderly men and women, who are considered old *abanto bakuro*, after their first born children have given birth (GTR1, GTR2, GTR3, GTR4, GTR5, and GTR6). The researcher chose this study sample in order to gather a broader variety of experiences. Elderly women were also included in the study sample so as to get their views. Considering that this is a patriarchal society, their view here balances the findings in this research.

Entry

As it regards to the entry into the research field; Patton states, "Where the field researcher expects cooperation, gaining entry may be largely a matter of establishing trust and rapport" (Patton 2002, 310). Being a native of this community, the researcher expected cooperation from the participants. Having been raised in this area, the researcher has developed trust and rapport with the community members. Thus, he had free and open access to the families and homesteads while collecting data. Through this, he was able to capture beliefs and assumptions while conducting the interviews.

Pilot Testing

Patton stresses the importance of a researcher being clear in his questions, he says; "The interviewer bears the responsibility to pose questions that make it clear to the interviewee what is asked…unclear questions can make the person being interviewed feel uncomfortable, ignorant, confused or hostile," (2002, 361). With this in mind, the researcher conducted a test of the ethnographic interviews with three community members who stay in the city- Nairobi, to ensure that the questions and the language used was clear; following the test; the researcher adjusted the interview questions to enhance clarity.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted among the study sample. The questionnaires were completed and collected while the researcher was holding interviews with the sampled elders. The researcher conducted all the interviews to the selected elders as one-on-one interviews.

Analyzing Data

Creswell observes that the process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. He goes on to explain that it involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analysis, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the large meaning of the data (2003, 190).

To analyze the data, the researcher read through the data collected in order to develop an understanding of sin among the Abakuria people of Kenya within their context, with the intention of dealing with issues arising from the findings. This is in line with the focus of qualitative research, which seeks to give summaries, interpretations and recommendations. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses in giving conclusions and stating "what it ought to be"; qualitative researchers do well by offering summaries of the findings, implications and recommendations (Wolcott 2001, 120-27).

Creswell notes that coding the data is a very important step in analyzing the collected data. He says, it is clear, however, that one forms categories of information and attaches codes to these categories. These categories and codes form the basis for the emerging story to be told by the qualitative researcher, (1994, 154). After reading through the data, the researcher coded responses that addressed the following three categories:

- What are the views of Abakuria regarding sin?
- What are the causes of sin as perceived by Abakuria?
- In what ways is sin dealt with among the Abakuria?

Having organized the responses into the above three categories, the researcher carried out a pattern, theme, and content analysis. This method of analysis involves

making sense of qualitative data by looking for themes, patterns, and concepts which emerge from the data (Patton 2002, 452-53). Once the data had been grouped into these categories, the researcher looked for patterns and themes in the data by examining the frequency of responses as well as agreement or disagreement among the respondents. The researcher also considered whether the data collected on the Abakuria traditional perception of sin was in agreement with the perceptions of sin as discussed in the literature review. The findings of the data analysis are presented in chapter four.

Validity

In efforts to test the validity of the findings in this research, the researcher arranged for a meeting with two elders from among the respondents and presented the finding to them; this was in efforts to ensure that their views regarding the understanding and means of dealing with sin among the Abakuria was accurately represented. Having gone through the findings, these elders confirmed its accuracy.

Weakness

One weakness of this study is that some of the respondents had prior information that the researcher is a Christian, therefore there was a probability of them not giving the whole information, especially on the traditional means of dealing with sin, and thus gave what they thought would please the "Christian researcher."

A second weakness is that the researcher was born and raised in this region of Kurialand; some of the respondents have had prior acquaintances with the researcher. With this in mind, some of the respondents might have not given the whole information assuming that the researcher already knows what he was asking.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The aim of this research was to understand the Abakuria traditional perception of sin. Along with this premise, is the conviction that this kind of understanding will be useful in presenting a holistic Christian witness that meets the spiritual needs of the Abakuria people. By means of ethnographic interviews and questionnaires the researcher was able to procure relevant data. The data collected was analyzed in accordance with the following research questions,

- What are the Abakuria's views of sin?

- What are the causes of sin as perceived by Abakuria?

- In what ways is sin dealt with among the Abakuria?

In the following section, a summary of the respondents was given, and then the data was analyzed in respect to each of the three research questions.

Respondents

There were fifteen respondents in total in regard to this data collection. A description of and general information about them is summarized in table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary description of respondents

Code	Gender	Age
LCL1	Male	80 years old
LCL2	Male	78 years old
CWL1	Female	73 years old
VE1	Male	63 years old
VE2	Male	60 years old
CLW2	Female	54 years old
GTR1	Female	48 years old
GTR2	Male	45 years old
GTR3	Female	38 years old
GTR4	Male	56 years old
GTR5	Male	39 years old
GTR6	Female	42 years old
CWL3	Female	67 years old
VE3	Male	73 years old
CWL4	Female	64 years old

As shown in Table 1 above, eight out of the fifteen respondents are male and seven are female. The position and role of each of the informants from this community are as given above in relation to their codes.

Data Analysis

As described in chapter three, the researcher read through the data collected and coded the information based on the three research questions. Once the

information had been coded, the researcher looked for patterns of agreement and disagreements in regard to the research questions, and analyzed the data in regard to specific responses.

After the analysis, several views emerged from the respondents. The researcher then, considered whether the views that emerged from the respondents were in agreement with the views on the perception of sin among African communities as discussed in the literature review. The views regarding sin among the Abakuria, which emerged from respondent's response to research questions are described in the following section.

The Abakuria Views of Sin

The concept of sin among the Abakuria people seems very complex and informative in relation to the understanding of how African societies perceive and deal with sin. From the interviews and personal observation in this community, the terms they use to describe sin and the way they categorize sins becomes significant in understanding their cultural perception of sin.

Abakuria Terms for Sin

This community has two terms that they use in reference to the phenomenon of sin. The analysis of these terms is expedient in understanding their worldview regarding sin.

Iriraga

This term is used to describe an act that makes an individual dirty. The verbal root *raga* means "dirty" or "unclean", which in essence pollutes or dirtifies a person, who is involved in a certain act. Thus, in most cases you would hear the person

described as "one with dirty or unclean hands." In this state, an individual is termed as *umunyairaga*, the one who carries/walks with dirty hands.

Umugiro

Another Kuria term for sin is *umugiro*. *Umugiro* is used to mean that which "spoils" or "hurts" and thus should not be done. This term is primarily used in reference to one's prosperity, harmony and unity in the community. It is important to recognize at this stage that communal values take a central point in this community just like all other African communities, thus any behavioral pattern that may disrupt or interfere with communal life is highly abhorred. In this context, *Umugiro* can spoil; destroy ones success/prosperity and can also hurt relationship.

In order to assess how sin is described in this community, the informants were asked to mention the local terms used for sin. Their responses are summarized in the following table.

Table 2. The Abakuria terms used in reference to sin

Term used to refer to sin	Number of informants interviewed	Percentage of the informants interviewed
Iriraga	8	57%
Umugiro	6	42%
Total	14	100%

As demonstrated in the table above, 57% of the interviewees agreed that *iriraga* is the term used to describe sin in this community, while 42% of those interviewed respondent that *umugiro* is the term used to describe sin.

The Dimensions of sin as Perceived by Abakuria

A keen examination of these two terms reveals that there are two different dimensions of sin as perceived by this community. It appears that as sin on one hand

offends the divinity[1], it also hurts and spoils relationships. Similarly, as it pollutes an individual it also destroys unity among people. This observation agrees with Anguandia's remarks regarding the Lugbara community's view about sin. He says the Lugbara community view sin horizontally as an act that impairs relationship with human beings, and vertically as impairing relationship with the deity (2005, 90).

Abakuria Definitions of Sin

Along with the terms that this community uses to refer to sin, they also have several descriptions that they use to define sin. These definitions are basically attached to the results or the outcome of sin in human life. This form of defining sin finds parallelism with what was discussed in the literature review, whereby Gehman observes that in most African societies; sin is defined by its consequences and not by its nature (Gehman 1989, 174). Therefore, in defining sin, Abakuria will first look at it as offending the divinity, breaking of community taboos and lastly that which hurts/spoils.

Offending the Divinity

Sin as offending the divinity is based on this community's religious belief that there is a deity in existence and this deity has laws and rules to be obeyed. These laws are given and guarded by the ancestors. In this community, ancestors are seen as representatives as well as mediators between the living and the Supreme Being *Enokwe/irioba*.[2] Thus, breaking these laws is offending the ancestors, who represent

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[1] In this case it is ancestral spirits, because traditionally, Abakuria do not relate with the Supreme Being directly. They go through intermediaries, who include ancestors and other spirits; the mediators. Thus, sins against divinity are purely defined in relation to ancestral spirits.
[2] Abakuria use two names (*Enokwe* and *Irioba*) interchangeably to refer to the Supreme Being. However, *Enokwe* is the name given to God in Abakuria Bible translation. *Irioba*, which can mean the sky or the sun, is used traditionally in most cases to describe one's good luck or favor and it is associated with the deities. For example if a man is wealthy, they would say *irioba ree remoha obome* literary "His sky has given him wealth"

Enokwe/irioba. Therefore, all community members are expected to obey and follow these laws; any deviation from these laws is sin, because it can lead to a curse and suffering to both the individual who broke the law and the whole clan. In efforts to illustrate this point further, one elder said offending *Abakoro* ancestors is a great sin because it can bring a curse to a number of generations of the culprit if good sacrifices to appease the ancestors are not offered. From this description, sin then in this community appears to be a transgression against the divine laws.

Sin as Breaking Taboos

The Abakuria people have community rules and laws, which are put in place to guide and direct the behavior of individuals. These laws include prohibition against stealing, physically assaulting one's parents and sleeping with someone's wife. These taboos also stretch further to include the responsibility of the living to the dead. Thus, actions against these laws as well as the neglect of the dead by the living are described as sin because they can cause evil in form of a curse, famine and even death. In the literature review, it emerged that in most African societies sin is defined within the boundaries of taboos; once a taboo has been broken, then sin has been committed. This observation concurs with the views expressed by the Abakuria in relation to sin. According to their view, taboos are to be respected and obeyed fully for the welfare of an individual and the community at large. Violating community taboos calls for a penalty and restitution must be made. To illustrate the impact of breaking a taboo, an informant from this community said that violating a taboo is very grievous because it can bring a curse into a family, therefore, whoever is involved needs to consult with elders on what to do, so as to avoid a curse after violating a taboo.

Sin as that which Spoils/Destroys

Community members also defined *iriraga* sin as that which spoils or destroys. In this category the kinds of sins mentioned include witchcraft, stealing, fighting, sexual abuse and slandering. In efforts to get the reason why these acts are termed this way, the responses suggested that these sins are in this category because they spoil and destroy relationship in the community. With special reference to witchcraft, an elderly woman in this community succinctly explained that when her child dies and she discovers that someone was responsible for its death, there is no way she would relate with that person without suspicion. Again, there is nothing they can do about it, because her child cannot come back to life. An examination of these sins reveals that they are evils directed to fellow human beings and since they are evil, they spoil, hurt and destroy relationship in the community (horizontal relationship).

The table below indicates the phrases this community uses to define sin. As noted above, apart from their local terms, there are short phrases, which members in this community use to define sin. In efforts to capture these phrases, the informants were asked to define sin as each one of then understood it. Their definitions are summarized in this table.

Table 3. Phrases Abakuria use to define sin

Definition of sin	Number of interviewees	Percentage of informants
Offending the divinity	5	42%
Breaking taboos	4	33%
That which spoils/destroys	3	25%
Total	12	100%

As demonstrated in the table above, 42% of the respondents' defined sin as an offence against the divinity, 33% looked at sin as the breaking of community taboos, while sin as that which spoils or destroys got 25% out of the respondents. It is clear from the figures in the table that sin is ascribed to the breaking of the laws of the divinity and the moral laws (taboos) set by the community leaders. The significance of interrelationship also emerged as some members defined sin as that which spoils relationship.

To sum up this section, it is important to recognize that the Abakuria use two terms to describe sin, these terms are *Iriraga* and *umugiro*. This community perceives sin as having two dimensions, as on one dimension sin offends the divinities; it also hurts and destroys relationships. Typically, Abakuria define sin using several phrases such as an offense against the divinity, breaking taboos and that which spoils/hurts/destroys.

The definition of sin in this community involves the area of the divine, tribal taboos and community life. Therefore, any act that contravenes the accepted behavior in relation to these three areas is termed as sin and must be dealt with accordingly to avoid its evil consequences.

Abakuria Categorization of Sin

The Abakuria people do not view *iriraga* sin in the same level. Sin in this community is graded basing on the nature and the extent of harm it causes to other members of the community. According to the interviews conducted, there are about three different categories/levels of sin in Abakuria worldview; these are most horrible sins, terrible sins but can be put aright and minor offences. This observation is in agreement with what we discussed in the literature review regarding categorization of

sin among African societies. Though Adeyemo notes that sin in African societies is classified into two categories, major and minor sins (1979, 54); the Abakuria people grade sin into three levels. What is significant here is not necessary how many levels are there, but rather the idea that in most African societies sins are categorized, they are never viewed to be the same.

The Most Horrible Sins

Among the Abakuria society, murder *uguita omonto*, witchcraft *okoroga*, incest *okogaka*, are categorized as the most horrible sins. These sins are so terrible because apart from bringing curses and suffering in the community, they also destroy harmony in the community and they lead to separation of families and even clans on higher level. A village elder (V1) in this community mentioned that once a person has killed/murdered another person it is impossible for the killer/murderer to share food or have fellowship of any kind with the family of the deceased. Abakuria have so much value attached to life and any act that threatens one's existence is extremely detested. This seems to be the reason why murder and witchcraft are put in the same category as most horrible sins, because in both cases life is lost and cannot be recovered. There are no solutions offered by this society in cases of murder or incest, in an incident where these acts are committed, the victim is either killed or thrown away from the community and thus considered an outcast. This form of punishment among the Abakuria concurs with what was discussed in the literature review as a means used to deal with victims of major sins.

Table 4. The most horrible sins according to four informants among the Abakuria

Sin	VE1	CWL3	LCL2	GTR4
Murder	X	X	X	X
Witchcraft	X		X	X
Incest	X	X	X	X
Total	3	2	3	3

Table 4 above illustrates what each of the respondents considers the most horrible sin. All the four are in agreement that murder and witchcraft are in the category of most horrible sins. A keen analysis of the table reveals that apart from informant (CWL3), the rest of the informants agreed that witchcraft is a horrible sin. The discrepancy may be based on ones background and one's family's view regarding witchcraft; though highly abhorred, witchcraft is sometimes viewed as being inherited parents or giving by ancestral spirits. Thus, views on its impact are subjected to differences.

Terrible Sins But Can Be Put Right

The second category consists of sins (*amaraga plural for iriraga*) that are terrible but can be forgiven; these sins include theft, adultery, rape and assaulting one's parents. Though serious and the victims are highly scolded, this society has way and means of settling them and restoring harmony in the community. In most cases to amend for these kinds of sins, blood sacrifices are offered. Animal blood in this community is used in eliminating evil or a curse. This goes in line with what Anguandia notes regarding the Lugbara community in DRC. He says, "Animal blood is considered by the Lugbara as an important element in eradicating evil within the community and restoring destroyed harmony" (2005, 93).

In accentuating the seriousness of this category of sins; one old man (GTR4) said that in this community physically assaulting one's parents is very terrible, because it bring curses from the ancestors, which may leave you just as a dry tree[3] in the community.

Minor offences

This community has a category of sins, which they term as minor offenses. Sins in this category include lying, selfishness, stealing less important commodities like foodstuffs from neighbors, insulting one another and neglecting family responsibilities. Respondents indicated that when one is discovered as having been involved in any of the above offences, the punishment implemented is not as severe as the one given for the sins in the second category.

To amend for their shortcomings, the culprits in this category of sins are either given an assignment by the elders to do for the community/public shaming or asked to compensate the offended party by paying for the damage created by their behavior. In cases of payment, the victim pays back what he/she stole and also takes some portion to the village elders.

To illustrate further on the solution of sins in this category, one respondent (VE1) said that the community discourages wrongdoing of all kinds, even that of stealing foodstuffs, because from it one develops into stealing other bigger things like cattle. Therefore, whenever one is caught stealing, say a chicken, that person will be made to pay two chickens or pay money that is equivalent to two chickens. The person will also take another chicken to the elders to ask for forgiveness, because his/her behavior is an insult/disobedience to the elders, who always teach against stealing. From this explanation, we can infer that there are sins in this community,

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[3] A dry tree is a euphemism used in this community to refer to a couple that is barren, the inability to bring forth children. It can be used to refer to either the man or the woman.

which are termed as minor offenses. However, the fact that they are minor does not mean they are condoned.

The table below summarizes the responses given in regard to the categories of sin as perceived by Abakuria. In each category the kinds of sins have also been highlighted.

Table 5. Summary of the categories of sins as perceived by Abakuria

Number of Categories of sins	Descriptions and examples of sins in each category	Number of informants interviewed	Percentage of informants interviewed
3	1st category: most horrible sins i.e. murder and incest 2nd category: terrible but forgivable sins i.e. adultery, assaulting a parent 3rd category: minor offences i.e. greedy	8	53%
2	1st category: horrible sins i.e. murder and incest 2nd category: forgivable sins i.e. adultery and rape	7	46%
Total		15	100%

From the table above, 53% percent of the respondents' classified sins into three categories, and 46% of them grouped sins into two major categories. The difference in the number of categories may be attributed to how much each of the respondents is informed. However, what is clear and significant to the study is that sins in this community are never put in one level; they are categorized into different categories.

Summary

This section has dealt with the issue of the Abakuria's views about sin. To discover this, there was need to know the kind of terms this community uses to

describe sin, the definitions they give to sin and how they categorize sin. Research indicated that sin is a reality among the Abakuria and it is defined both on how it affects relationship with the divinity (vertical) and with other community members (horizontal). Thus, sin is seen and interpreted in terms of its consequences- the damage it causes to relationship both at the vertical and horizontal level.

It has emerged that there are three categories of sins in this community: the most horrible sins, terrible sins but can be forgiven and minor offences. While the most horrible sins and the terrible ones are handled seriously and punishment due given immediately, the minor offences, on the other hand, are treated to some extent with serious reprimanding given to the perpetrators.

Causes of Sin as Perceived by Abakuria

This community believes that some people are evil and others are good people. Thus, sin originates with those who are evil. In response to my inquiry of what actually causes one to sin, informants in this community gave several answers. Among the causes of sin mentioned include, inheritance of sinful behavior from parents, angry ancestral spirits and influence from witchcraft.

The table below summarizes the information given by informants in regard to what is seen as the cause of sin among the Abakuria.

Table 6. Abakuria understanding of the causes of sin

Causes of sin as perceived by Abakuria	Number of informants interviewed	Percentage of the informants interviewed
Inheritance from parents	2	22%
Angry spirits	4	44%
Witchcraft	3	33%
Total	9	100%

The table above indicates that a higher percentage, 44% is ascribed to angry spirits as the cause of sin in this community. Closely following angry spirits is witchcraft,

which has 33% percent. Other respondents think that inheritance of sinful character traits from parents can lead an individual to do sinful acts, this had 22% of the responses.

Hereditary

The informants revealed that certain sins are transmitted from parents to their children. This seems to be in agreement with a common Swahili saying, which is very popular in this community "*Mtoto wa nyoka ni nyoka*", a wooden translation of this would be "the offspring of a snake is a snake too." Along this line of thought, it is believed that if a father was a thief at least one from his male children will be a thief. Secondly, if a woman is a witch, I was told, she would hand over/transfer her evil powers to her daughters. It is surprising to see how gender plays a great role in transferring some of these sins; baffled by this phenomenon, Anguandia can only describe it as a gender selective heredity of sins (2005, 112).

Anger of Ancestral Spirits

The Abakuria believe that angry ancestors *abakoro* can cause one to do an evil thing/sin, say like kill another person, rape or beat a parent. Ancestors can be angered if they are ignored by not sacrificing to them or not naming children after them. Their anger can only be demonstrated in a way that is so profound, which will cause the living to seek a solution either through consulting with mediums or the elders in the clan. Secondly, if community taboos are not keenly followed and obeyed by the living, ancestors can be angered and as a result influence a person to be involved in sinful acts. Whenever such kinds of acts occur, Abakuria people believe that ancestors have been angered and they have respondent to punish the living. The belief is in agreement with the discussion in the literature review, where African scholars

observed that evil divinity (which sometimes include bad ancestral spirits) have the ability to influence an individual to do an evil act (1969, 204).

Influence from Witchcraft

Besides inheriting sinful behavior and angry ancestors causing one to sin, informants from Nyankore village noted that a traditional witch *omorogi* could also cause one to sin. By way of using mystical powers *ukuhumbiria/ogokonera*, a witch is able to influence and cause an individual to do that which should not be done (sin). This form of influence seems to rise from an attitude of jealousy and being malicious to others. In illustrating this point further, one respondent (GTR2), noted that if there is a person who is very prosperous and is respected in the society, others might not be happy about him. Therefore, in a way to destroy his/her reputation and fortune, a witch *omorogi* may cast a spell that will cause the person to do an abominable thing in the society; through this act, the person's life and fortune is completely lost. In an interesting way this conviction finds parallelism in the literature review. It was noted that sorcerers and witches, who are termed as enemies of society can cause others to do sinful acts by using their mystical powers.

Summary

This section dealt with the issue of what causes people to sin from Abakuria perspective. It has emerged from the informants that this society believes that some people are good and others are bad. Though some may be born as good people, somewhere they can be influenced to sin and thus become bad in the society.

The respondents revealed that Abakuria believe sin is caused by three forces. Children can inherit sinful behavior from their parents and thus, do sin when they grow up. Secondly, angry ancestors can cause a person to do sinful acts that are

detrimental to the society. Thirdly, some people sin as a result of being influenced by mystical powers from witches. Malicious spirits of wicked people in this society mainly motivates this.   Having seen what causes sin from this society's worldview, the following section will handle the issue of how sin is dealt with whenever it occurred in this community.

How Sin is dealt with among the Abakuria People

This section handled the issue of how the Abakuria dealt with sin traditionally whenever it occurred. The attitude carried and the measures put in place to handle sins especially those in category two (terrible sins but can be put aright) are extensively handled in this section of the study. Elders in this community revealed that sins like rape, beating one's parents and adultery were dealt with immediately so as to bring reconciliation and healing among the people involved. However, sins in category one (most horrible sins) such as murder and incest seems to have had no remedy except killing the victim straight away or totally excommunicating them from the clan, and thus considering them as social outcasts.

In order to get clear information regarding the ways of dealing with sins in different categories, the researcher picked samples from each category and asked fifteen respondents what method is used to deal with that particular sin. Their responses have been summarized in the tables below.

Table 7. Ways of dealing with the sin of murdering from Abakuria perspective

Type of sin	Ways of solving murder	Number of respondents interviewed	Percentage of the respondents interviewed
Murder	Killing the culprit or excommunication from the community	8	53%
	Sacrificing an animal	4	26%
	Public shaming & compensation	3	20%
Total		15	100%

The table above indicates that the majority, 53% out of the respondents agreed that murder has no solution except by killing the murderer or excommunicating him/her. 26% said a sacrifice can be carried out to cleanse the victim; this was so especially when the issue of witchcraft is brought in, because people cannot be 100% sure that the victim actually committed the act. Therefore, when this arises, leniency can somehow be demonstrated. Twenty percent of the respondents suggested that public shaming and compensation could be used to solve murder.

In the second category of sins, assaulting one's parent was picked as an example because in this community, this behavior is extremely abhorred. The following are responses on the same regarding ways of dealing with it.

Table 8. Ways of dealing with the sin of assaulting a parent from Abakuria perspective

Type of sin	Ways of solving the sin of assaulting a parent	Number of respondents interviewed	Percentage of the respondents interviewed
Assaulting a parent	Killing the culprit or excommunicating the culprit	4	26%
	Sacrificing an animal	6	40%
	Public shaming & compensation	5	33%
Total		15	100%

The table indicates that 26% of the respondents stated that killing or excommunicating one from the society is the solution for physically assaulting parents. 40%, which are the majority affirmed that by sacrificing an animal the offender can receive forgiveness. While 5% suggested that public shaming and some kind of compensation could be done to such offenders; their suggestions seemed to lean on the assumptions that some parents are by nature provoking, and they can easily provoke their children into picking a fight with them. When this happens, then, the victim can be made to pay the parent.

In the category of minor sins, stealing foodstuffs, especially from the vineyard *shamba* was picked as an example and the following table illustrates the responses gotten from the respondents.

Table 9. Ways of dealing with the sin of stealing foodstuffs from Abakuria perspective

Type of sin	Ways of solving the sin of stealing foodstuffs	Number of respondents interviewed	Percentage of the respondents interviewed
Stealing foodstuffs	Killing the culprit or excommunicating the culprit	3	21%
	Sacrificing an animal	5	35%
	Public shaming & compensation	6	42%
Total		14	100%

In the table above 21% of the respondents said that thieves of minor items ought to be removed from the society; the idea of excommunicating them from the society came out strongly. They based their argument on the basis that stealing of small things can lead into stealing bigger things. 35% suggested sacrifices of animals as a solution to this kind of sin. A higher percentage 42% said that such a minor offense can be solved by making the wrongdoer pay for the wrong committed and shame him/her in the public.

Assaulting a Parent

Assaulting one's parent is a terrible sin in Kuria society. This kind of evil is perceived to be having the potential to bring a curse and other negative supernatural consequences on the individual and the whole family, which can only be removed by sacrificing an animal *egesonsoro.* Once one is involved in this sin, he/she is summoned and cross-examined by the council of elders, with the intention of understanding the reason and how the act was committed.

Having gotten a clear picture of what transpired, the elders would tell the victim (in this case the child who assaulted the parent) what kind of animal to bring for the sacrifice *egesonsoro* ceremony. In most cases, it was a black sheep that was

sacrificed. The sacrifice is meant to avert a curse from the divinities (due to an offence against the parents) and restore fellowship within the family. Before a sheep is sacrificed, the victim was considered as an incarnation of wickedness and a rebel, and thus denied communion and fellowship with the rest of family members. Elders in Nyankore village described a person in this state as *ikinyambi*, literary a weed/wild plant.

The sheep had to be acquired by the victim himself/herself and in this case it had to be black in color. It was also not supposed to have any defect either natural or acquired, an animal with a defect was regarded as a reproach to the ancestors and it would cause displeasure, which could lead to another curse.

Having acquired the sheep, the victim takes it to the elders, who in turn set a day for the cleansing ceremony. On the material day, the sheep was killed as per the instructions of the elders. The sheep was to be thrown to the ground, having been bound in the legs. The mouth and nose were held shut and the throat was squeezed causing it to die by suffocation. After killing the sheep, it is skinned by slitting the hide from the underside from end to end. Blood is collected into a container and used later for cleansing the victim. Two elements from the sheep are significant for the cleansing ritual; these are *ubuhu* contents of the sheep's stomach and *amanyinga* blood.

For the victim to be cleansed and his/her sin forgiven, he/she is made to touch *ubuhu* contents of the stomach of the slaughtered sheep with the parent that was assaulted. Secondly, blood is sprinkled on the face of the victim and the rest is put in a calabash, then, the two are made to wash their hands therein. In efforts to understand the significance of the two elements, blood and stomach contents in this ritual, one elder (LCL1) elaborated that blood is used as a cleansing agent for the victim; while

the touching of the stomach contents *ubuhu* by the two parties, signifies fellowship and sharing. After the ritual, the victim is considered clean and they are free to share and commune with the parent.

Rape

Forcing a woman into sexual intercourse is a terrible sin in Kuria society. This is so because this act destroys relationship by causing hostility between families. Measures taken against this act vary depending on the status of the woman, single or married. If the woman is single, the village elders summon the rapist and once proven guilty, he is subjected to a public shame by being made to stand and confess before all the elders. After this, the culprit would be made to pay six cows to the parents of the girl and one cow to the council of elders' *inchama*. If the act led into a pregnancy, the victim is also forced to pay for the child's welfare for a certain time of period. After the payments were made, then the victim was termed as being free.

In an incident whereby a married woman was raped, the rapist is made to pay the husband of the woman after going through the public shaming before the elders. In this case, it is the husband paid and not the parents because it is his reputation that has been marred in the society.

Adultery

Having sexual intercourse with someone's wife is another terrible sin that is highly discouraged in this community. This is an absurd act, considering the effects it brings to the community. On occurrence, measures are taken so as harmony is restored. Having been proven guilty, the woman is sent back to her parent's home. While at her parents place she is put in seclusion and old women are called in to instruct her on moral issues and show her the gravity of her immoral behavior in destroying her husband's reputation and that of her parents. After a certain period of

time she is supposed to return to her husbands place with two cows as a compensation for the husband's reputation that her actions had marred. Interestingly enough, no charges are brought against the man involved in adultery; apart from the caution other married men develop towards him.

To sum up, this section has revealed that Abakuria people traditionally deal with sin through animal sacrifice; in this case it is the sheep. The significant elements in the sacrifices are blood and stomach contents; this society uses these elements to cleanse the victim and restore broken relationship resulting from sin. The premise behind the elements is that blood cleanses the polluted one, while the touching of stomach contents signifies fellowship or sharing again of the parties involved.

Along with blood sacrifice, there are other sins that require the offended party to be compensated for the damage done; this can be termed as restitution. Compensation also was made to the elders, an animal is given to elders so as they would speak well of the victim and thus, bless him/her.

Summary of the Findings

Having keenly analyzed the data, the following observations have been made. The analysis has indicated that sin is a reality among the Abakuria and it is defined both on how it affects relationship with the divinity and community members. It emerged that Abakuria use two terms to describe sin, *iriraga* and *umugiro*. According to this community's perspective sin has two dimensions i.e. while sin on one hand offends the divinities, it also hurts and destroys relationships on the other hand; as it pollutes one it also spoils the concept of community life.

The analysis also showed that the Abakuria people of Kenya classify sins into three categories. These categories include the most horrible sins, the terrible but

repairable sins, and minor offenses. The most horrible sins have no solution in this community except by killing or excommunicating the victim. Sacrificing an animal solves sins in the second category, and the perpetrators of minor offenses are publicly shamed as well as being made to compensate the offended party.

As it regards to the issue of what actually causes people to sin, this community beliefs there are three causes of sin, parents can transfer sinful behavior to their children- inheritance of sins, secondly, evil/angry spirits can cause one to do a sinful act and thirdly, witches can use their mystical powers to influence one into a sinful act.

Finally, the analysis revealed that Abakuria people traditionally deal with sin in three different ways. Those who commit the horrible (unforgivable) sins like murder and incest are either killed or cast out of the community immediately. Secondly, those who find themselves as having committed the terrible but repairable sins must sacrifice an animal, in most cases a sheep, of which its blood and stomach contents are used to cleanse then culprit. On the other hand, Minor offenders are shamed publicly and made to compensate the offended party.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research was to discover the Abakuria traditional

perception of sin. In order to respond to the three research questions listed therein, the

researcher interviewed and administered questionnaires among the members from this

community so as to obtain the relevant information.

The premise behind the understanding of the Abakuria perception of sin is

that, the people's worldview is an important medium through which a society is able

to understand anything, including the gospel message and anything else that the

church may wish to communicate (Luzbetak 1970:284). Therefore, it became

apparent that an understanding of this community's worldview is of necessity if a

meaningful and relevant gospel has to be presented to them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research established that Abakuria people of Kenya like

most African societies have their own traditional understanding of sin. Their

perception of sin is woven and deeply integrated within their cultural context. The

following are the observations made by this research in regard to the research

questions:

The Abakuria's Views about Sin

The worldview of the Abakuria regarding sin can be understood by examining

the terms they use to describe and define sin. There are two terms used in this society

to describe sin: *iriraga* and *umugiro.* A keen analysis of these terms revealed

that *iriraga* portrays the idea of uncleanness or sate of being polluted; *umugiro* denotes an act that spoils or destroys. An analysis of these terms reveals that Abakuria look at sin as having two dimensions, as sin on one hand offends the divinity and thus pollutes one; it also hurts other people, and thus, destroy/spoil relationships. Other Kuria definitions of sin depict sin as offending the divinity, breaking the taboos or that which hurts. In these definitions, there are aspects of vertical and horizontal relationships; this then means that sin hurts both the deity and human beings.

The Causes of Sin as Perceived by Abakuria

The respondents revealed that Abakuria believe sin is caused by three forces. Children can inherit sinful behavior from their parents and thus, be involved in sinful acts when they grow up. Secondly, angry/evil spirits can cause a person to do sinful acts that are detrimental to the society. Thirdly, some people sin as a result of being influenced by mystical powers from witches; malicious spirits of wicked people in this society mainly motivates these actions.

Ways of Dealing with Sin from Abakuria Perspective

The research revealed that Abakuria people traditionally deal with sin through animal sacrifice; in this case it is the sheep that is sacrificed. The significant elements in the sacrifice are blood and stomach contents; this society uses these elements to cleanse the victim and restore broken relationship resulting from sin. The premise behind the elements is that blood cleanses the polluted one, while the touching of stomach contents signifies fellowship or sharing again of the parties involved.

Along with blood sacrifice, there are other sins that require the offended party to be compensated for the damage done; this can be termed as restitution.

Compensation also was made to the elders, an animal was given to elders so as they would speak well of the victim and thus, bless him/her.

Missiological Implications

Taking into consideration of what was found in this research; several implications have arisen in relation to the role of the Church and mission agencies in doing evangelism and discipleship among the Abakuria people.

Firstly, there is need to understand the Abakuria's worldview. This understanding will enable the church and Christian witnesses in this community to rethink and come up with new approaches to do evangelism and discipleship that is effective and relevant to the people of Kurialand. It seems that true contextualization ought to be based on a clear understanding of other people's worldview; once their culture is fully understood, then, the Christian message can be adapted to the cultural forms (context) effectively, while holding to the essence of the gospel (text).

Secondly, there is need to build bridges between the gospel message and Abakuria traditional practices and beliefs. The Abakuria concept of sin has some things that seem familiar with the Christian message, which can be used to prepare these people for the hearing of the gospel. The belief in this community that there is a deity/supreme being somewhere is a significant aspect that can be used by Christians to communicate and share about the existence of the one true God. The conviction that sin must be dealt with, and that blood must be used to cleanse one from defilement, ought to be taken into consideration by Christian witnesses while doing ministry in this community. This community seems to have a base on which the true gospel can built on, as it seeks to correct errors and bring the truth. It is important to understand that in communication, especially communicating the gospel, one ought to

begin from the known moving towards the unknown, as he/she walks along with the recipients/audiences. On illustrating this point further, Bishop Ojai Crowther, the first African bishop in West Africa, attractively said;

> When we first introduce the gospel to any people we should take advantage of any principles, which they themselves admit. Thus, though the heathens in this part of Africa posses no written legends, yet wherever we turn our eyes, we find among them, and their animal sacrifices, a text which is the mainspring of Christian faith: (Without shedding of blood there is no remission). (Jesse quoted in Adeyemo 1979, 40)

From the quote above, it is clear that Bishop Crowther realized the vital need to understand the principle behind certain traditional practices and use them for communicating the gospel. Thus, among the Abakuria beliefs about sin and practices to atone for sin, there are elements that can be used as redemptive analogies in communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, it was discovered that fear of witchcraft and ancestral spirits are prominent issues among the Abakuria; many people are captives of these forms of fears. The gospel message therefore, must aim at freeing people from the spiritual bondage of fear of witchcraft and evil spirits. This can be accomplished by presenting the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as having achieved victory over demonic power and evil forces.

Fourthly, there is need for the church in this community to emphasize the power of Jesus' blood to cleanse one from sin and His death as atonement for sin once and for all (Heb.7: 27). This community must be made to realize that animal sacrifices cannot atone for their sins.

An analysis of the belief of this community regarding the causes of sin showed that they focus on the external causes, which an individual may not have control over it; forces like witchcraft, influence from ancestral spirits etc. However, the Bible looks at sin as having its roots in the heart of man (Prov.18:12); thus, people in this

community must not look at themselves as victims of fate, but rather should take responsibility for their behavior, come to the Lord and receive forgiveness as Bible exhorts them.

Recommendation for Further Studies

This research was primarily concerned with the perception of sin among the Abakuria people. This topic is very large to be adequately handled in a single study; the same topic ought to be researched, especially by focusing on the Abakuria of Tanzania so as to get a whole picture, since the present one was done among the Abakuria in Kenya. Secondly, a research on the concept of salvation among the Abakuria would be a relevant vital concept to complement this study. Thirdly, it would be helpful to research on the concept of God among the Abakuria, a study that will show how they see God, relate and interpret God's reaction in relation to their behavior and actions.

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APPENDIX A

ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Elderly Men

Background questions:

How old are you/ at what period of time were you born?

Were your both parents Abakuria?

Have you been living in Kuria land since your childhood?

Main interview questions:

Where did the Abakuria people come from?

What is sin according to Abakuria?

Describe the actions/deeds in this community that are considered to be sin?

Do the Kuria people classify sin according to level e.g. big and small sins?

Describe what you think causes one to sin?

Explain how sin is dealt with when it occurs?

Why would people want to deal with sin?

Elderly Women

Background questions:

How old are you?

Before marriage what was your clan?

Were your both parents Abakuria?

Have you been living in Kuria land since your childhood?

Main interview questions:

What is sin according to Abakuria?

Describe the actions/deeds in this community that are considered to be sin?

Do the Kuria people classify sin according to level e.g. big and small sins?

Describe what you think causes one to sin?

Explain how sin is dealt with when it occurs?

Why would people want to deal with sin?

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire for Community Members

How old are you? Tick where applicable

21-30 ( ) 31-40 ( ) 41-50 ( ) 51 and above ( )

Gender:

Male _____

Female _____

Marital status:

Married _____

Single _____

Widow_____

Widower _____

Were you born and raised in Kuria land? Yes_____ No_____

What is the Kuria word for sin _____

Do people in this community sin? Yes_____ No_____

How can one remove sin from his/her life _____

Do you think it is important to remove sin _____

Explain _____

APPENDIX C

Two Blocks of the Abakuria community, those in Kenya and Tanzania

Kenyan Kuria	Tanzanian Kuria
* The Abairegi	* The Abatimbaru
* The Abagumbe	* The Abakira
* The Abanyabasi	* The Abairegi
* The Abakira	* The Abanyamongo
	* The Abamera
	* The Abakenya
	* The Abatimbaru
	* The Ababwasi

APPENDIX D

The Abakuria Chronological Chart

Journeys from "Misiri"	1410 to 1438
The beginning of Abakuria society	1522 to 1510
From Chepalungu direction	1606 to 1632
First group arrives in Bukuria	1634 to 1662
Renchoka Hills	1718 to 1746
Settlement of Gwasi, Gutora & Hmeta	1748 to 1774
Abakuria settle in Musoma district	1774 to 1802
The arrival of the Luo and Maasai	1802 to 1830
"Ebaga"	1858 to 1886
The last phase: The Abakuria resettle	1886 to 1914

CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

2005-2008   Nairobi Evangelical Graduate
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2001-2004   East Africa School of Theology

1996-1999   Kubweye Secondary School

MINISTRY EXPERIENCE

1997-1999   Chairman Christian Union, Kubweye Secondary School

1999-2000   Youth Leader Maranatha Church

2001-2002   Evangelist Nyabohanse Maranatha Church

2002-2008   Associate Pastor Kawangware Maranatha Church

MINISTRY INTEREST

Missionary/pastor

Bible teacher