NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

An Investigation of the Role of the Family Head in Household Conversion Among the Akamba and Its Missiological Implications for the Church

BY

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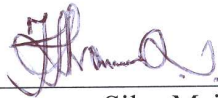
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STUDENTS DECLARATION

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY HEAD IN HOUSEHOLD CONVERSION AMONG THE AKAMBA AND ITS MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH

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)_____

Silas Mailu Kakui

July, 2008

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to study the husband-wife conversion dynamics specifically examining the role of the family head in household conversion among the Akamba and its missiological implications for the church. In order to achieve this, research was carried out in Makueni district.

The research was a qualitative study and data was collected primarily through ethnographic open-ended, structured and unstructured interviews as well as modest observation participation. This was done with three categories of people: Saved women whose husbands are not saved, unsaved husbands whose wives are saved and wives who converted after their husbands converted. Questioners were used to get background information from three pastors who have run churches in the district.

The findings revealed that among the Akamba the reasons that make women convert almost immediately after their husbands convert to Christianity while on the other hand men hardly get converted when their wives convert first are mostly social-cultural. In the whole sphere of the Akamba traditional stratification, man as the head of the family was bestowed the honour and authority of making the major decisions in the family. Conversion then seems to be so major a decision with so many implications that if made by a woman, a man feels that his authority has been usurped and this makes the man most unwilling to follow the wife to church.

Based on these findings, recommendations were made that in order to have households converting to faith in Jesus Christ, the significant role that a man plays can not be overemphasized. There is real need for the church to formulate a missiological approach that puts into consideration all these socio-cultural dynamics.

TO

My wife, Joyce Kaveni (Ma Mue) and our three children; Belinda Mueni (*Belo*),
Bevelyne Mutheu (*Bevo*) and Brayneson Mumo (*Brayno*)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIC - Africa Inland Church

ABC - African Brotherhood Church

PEFA - Pentecostal Evangelistic Church of Africa

RGC - Redeemed Gospel Church

GC - Gospel Tabernacle

RCC - Royal Christian Church

SA - Salvation Army

SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION

It has been generally observed that when men convert to Christianity, in most cases their wives follow suit and are soon converted too. "It's very seldom you have a man in church whose wife is staying home," said Erik Thoennes, a theology professor at Biola and the teaching elder at Grace Evangelical Free Church in California (Pivec 2006). This is unlike the opposite when the woman is the first to be converted. In most cases the husband never gets converted or takes very long before they are converted. A spot check in numerous churches has shown that most of the members are women and on further scrutiny, it is observed that their husbands are not saved and thus do not go to church. Another observation that is made is that there are a very insignificant, almost negligible number of husbands who are converted and go to church yet their wives are neither converted nor go to church. There are usually more women than men at Sunday service, and there are far more women than men at devotions, retreats, and prayer groups.

There seems to be underlying cultural or social issues at play here. Some authors have argued that the reason why we have more women in church than men and men refusing to become Christians even when their wives have converted is more of a social than a theological issue (McGavran and Weld, 1971, 13-2). They observe that it is likely that great growth in the future will probably occur through family evangelization. The writers note that such kinds of congregations have a complete social structure with leadership and family loyalty (1971, 13-2 to 13-3). In essence the

authors are suggesting that the socio-cultural set up is very important for effective evangelism and stable church grow. In his book on religious conversion, Rambo points out that kinship and friendship networks are fundamental to most conversions, just as they influence in resistance and rejection (1993, 108). This implies that a wife getting converted before the husband has ramifications on whether he converts or altogether rejects the gospel.

Paul's admonition to the Corinthian church that women should not speak in church but should ask their husbands any questions that they have seems to presuppose that all the women in this church had their husbands in the church (I Cor. 14.34-35). Otherwise Paul would have made an alternative suggestion about where these women would have sought assistance. If Paul were to visit a church in Ukambani today, he would be at pains to offer such an admonition. It seems to me that the early church either employed a strategy that meant sure that husband's presence in church was the norm rather than the exception.

Background of the Study

In 1993 this researcher, with a group of evangelists held a successful evangelist campaign in Kauti market near Kathiani town, Machakos district where over forty people came to the Lord. There being no other Pentecostal church in the area, one (Pentecostal Evangelistic Fellowship of Africa-PEFA) was established and the researcher was requested to be a part time pastor of the church. Among those who had converted were about seven couples, ten married men whose wives did not convert and around fifteen married women whose husbands did not convert at that time. Within three weeks it was observed that all the wives of the ten men converted and joined the church. Within the same period of time, two of the husbands to the

women also got converted. For the three years that the researcher was the pastor of the church, the church membership prayed for the ten husbands whose wives were in the church but they were not. The researcher also visited them personally and shared the gospel with them but all this was to no avail as none of them converted or joined the church. Over the years the researcher has also been involved with the Royal Christian Church both in Ongata Rongai and in Nunguni in Makueni district where he has also witnessed the same trend. Some women have been saved for twenty years but their husbands are yet to give their lives to Christ. Early this year a young man came to church and gave his life to the Lord. Two weeks later his wife came to church and also got converted. This made the researcher wonder if the man would have so easily got converted if the wife was the first to get saved. On sharing this kind of a scenario with a number of preachers from the city of Nairobi, the researcher was shocked to find that this trend is not as rampant in the cities or major towns as it is in rural areas. In fact a pastor in one of the city churches informed that whenever a lady gives her life to the Lord, they are almost assured that within at least two months the husband would follow suit. This kind of discrepancy is what has led to this research so the underlying reasons which make women more receptive to the gospel when their husbands convert but the vise versa is not the case in Ukambani can be discovered. The researcher believes that this is a crucial study because once the conversion dynamics are understood, then it will become easy for the people involved in missions to know how to approach the whole issue of evangelism

Problem Statement

This study seeks to discover why women convert almost immediately after their husbands convert to Christianity while on the other hand men hardly get

converted when their wives convert first. Specifically, this research will explore the role of the family head in household salvation among the Akamba. This is for the purpose of exploring ways in which such knowledge can influence our missiological approach to the whole idea of household conversion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to investigate the husband-wife-family conversion dynamics with a view to advising church workers and missioners on the methods that need to be employed in order to effectively evangelize not only individual members in a family but the whole family or household through the family head.

Goals

The goal of this research is to help the researcher and the church at large understand how social-cultural dynamics influence the process of conversion among the Akamba people and provide an appropriate approach for gospel outreach based on their worldview. This knowledge will help in formulating Missiological strategies for Christian witness to the entire family or household.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study are very significant in a number of ways. Firstly, the findings will be an answer to the researcher's perennial question in his mind: why are there more women in our churches than men? As an itinerant evangelist it has become apparent that when preaching in market places or even from house to house, it is mostly women who respond to the gospel and since most times the preachers are

looking for figures, they concentrate on the women but not the men who are more difficulty to deal with. Secondly, it is assumed that this study will come up with appropriate missiological strategies which will be used by church workers to correct the men-women population disparities in our churches.

Thesis Statement

In this research, the researcher attempted to show how social/ cultural systems and kinship patterns influence the process conversion to Christianity among the Akamba.

Research Questions

RQ1. What reasons make it easy for a woman to convert to Christianity sooner if her husband converts and not vice versa?

RQ2. What are the reasons that make it difficult for men to convert to Christianity if their wives convert first?

RQ3. What are the social/cultural beliefs and practices that influence the decision to convert to Christianity among the Akamba people?

Limitations

Substantive Limitations

Since most husbands whose wives are converted and go to church are skeptical about any religious discussions, they found it difficult to disclose information especially since most of them were not very well known to the researcher. On the other hand, most men thought that the researcher was out to evangelise to them or beseech them to join a church and since most of them were not willing to, it was at

times difficult to break through. In an attempt to overcome this limitation, the researcher used assistants who were well known to the interviewees to collect data. Secondly because of financial limitations, the researcher only concentrated his study among the Akamba of Makueni district of Eastern province and made a generalized assumption that the findings are true of other communities in Kenya and may be in Africa.

Methodological Limitations

This research is only the beginning of potential in-depth study that can be done in the area of household conversion. In particular, the methods used for collecting data for this research were limited to library research, ethnographic interview, unstructured and semi-structured interviews as well as participant observation. The library research was used to develop assumptions through literature review.

Delimitations

This research was based in Makueni district of Eastern province and was only directed to those people who have either converted to Christianity and their spouses followed later or have not done so up to date. Three pastors were also interviewed. It is in worthwhile to note that this study is phenomenological in nature and so as Creswell writes, it will focuses on phenomenon rather than the life of individuals. It will seek to understand the meanings and experiences of individuals about the phenomenon under study (1998, 38).

Assumptions

The researcher holds the assumptions that understanding people's way of living is essential in reaching them for Christ. He also holds the view that if we are able to get the husband converted, it is easy to have the whole family get converted. It is also the assumption of the researcher that as long as missiologists overlook the role of man or husband in the Akamba traditional set up, churches in the area will continue to be flocked by women whose husbands have apparently refused to convert and go to church. Here again the assumption is that regular attendance to and active participation in church is an indication of conversion to Christianity.

Finally, this research was undertaken with a clear understanding that there is no African culture or community that has not been affected in some way by the European contact. William Bascom and Melville Herskovits states that, "the cultures of Africa have been adapted and modified by contacts from Europe and the Near East which long antedate the events that have made headlines in the recent years" (1959, 3). In regard to this reality, the author assumes that the Akamba have also experienced and continue to experience change of some sort in terms of their culture.

Definitions of Terms

- Conversion:

The word conversion will be used here in a broad way to mean to turn to God by acceptance of Christian belief system, which basically includes accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and savior.

- Household:

In this study, household refers to a unit family which includes husband, wife, children and any other persons who may be staying with and are

under the authority of that particular family. This may be members of the extended family.

- Church:

Church refers to an assembly of believers or Christians who meet regularly for worship in a designated place. The researcher looks at regular church attendance as an indication of conversion although it is possible to do so without being converted.

SECTION TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Background of the Research

This section is an evaluative analysis of information found in literature related to this selected area of study. The review will describe, summarise, evaluate and clarify this literature. It will give a theoretical base for the research and help determine the nature of my research. In this researcher I will look at what conversion is, whether it is individual or can be communal and seek to analyse the New Testament examples of household conversion.

What Conversion Is

It would be very difficult, almost impossible to give one distinct definition of what conversion is and somewhat assume that it suffices. From the biblical and historical accounts of conversion, it might seem to be an easy task explaining what conversion is until one cursory glance reveals a plethora of quite different experiences. Some people for example come to the faith in a moment, without much discernible preparation and there lives are radically changed. Others, however, struggle for years coming to coming finally to the hope of finding salvation, only to discover that out of their despair and without any seeming connection to their past struggles experience conversion and the despair vanishes. Still others come to conversion through leaps while others come to conversion with little cognitive understanding of what they are doing, much less any theological understanding of

what has happened. Still others can not ever remember ever being converted but by all criterion we put for genuine Christian, they meet it. Ultimately then we can say that the essence of conversion is not found in the experience itself but in the content of that experience (Peace 1999, 6).

Conn asserts that conversion means a radical turning or redirection. Turning here is taken to be two-fold; turning away from sin and turning toward God. The word *conversion*, as we use it in religious circles today, usually implies the acceptance of religious belief system. But the fundamental biblical meaning is "to turn" …usually to turn to God. This he says is not simply repenting ones sins but being totally transformed (1986, 5). Johnson and Malony blame the western Evangelical Christianity which sees conversion as private, static, and a once for all event which is divorced from cultural context. A full understanding of the process of conversion should be based on the realization that, first, conversion is a dynamic sequence of events-from the convert's growing awareness of his/her incorporation into the "new" community. Secondly, conversion is influenced by culture; that is, by social phenomenon, and thirdly conversion is defined directionally rather than crossing set boundaries (1982, 22).

Individual/ Communal Conversion

The question of whether conversion is an individual (personal) or can be communal (group) decision is a Missiological one. There are passages of scripture in the bible which seem to advocate for both individual and communal conversion. Kasdorf wonders whether it is possible that a group of people-a family, a clan, a homogeneous unit in society, or an entire social subsystem to make as valid a decision and arrive at as high a degree of commitment to the saviorhood and Lordship of Jesus

Christ as an individual. He further questions whether mass or communal conversions impair quality (Kasdorf 1980, 99). This is a very profound Missiological question whose answer would depend on a society's understanding of individualism and communalism and their relationship to conversion within the individualistic and communalistic society. The western culture seems to be a very individualistic one where decisions are very personalized and people's freedom to choose what they want to do is highly respected. This is not the case in Africa where the community seems to be more important than the individual. Community decisions are regarded more highly than individual ones.

According to Johnson and Malony, socio-cultural descriptions of Christian conversion focus on the fact that the experience does not occur in a vacuum, so that the strong social influences on the person must be taken into account. The authors, quoting Tippet, who is a very strong proponent of this approach recount that conversion is never an experience in individual isolation, although each individual must himself be an actor. Conversion is a sociopsychological phenomenon in which the individual gives to and draws from other individuals and groups and activates his individualism within the limits of prescribed patterns (1982, 21). This thus would be taken to mean that even that which we call personal or individual conversion has some kind of communal bearing. The individual has to consider the implications of their decision for the larger community.

Commenting on social structures, Dayton and Fraser note that naturally, people are ordered into various groups; social classes, tribal, communal, and others. People relate to one another on the basis of their position in the social structure. The church almost invariably grows in relationship to the known characteristics of the social structure of the people being evangelized. They add that an understanding of

the structure not only suggests reasons why some people seem responsive and others resistant to the gospel, but also suggests some of the people to approach if the gospel is to be given a respectful hearing by the people. The authors suggest that there is need for cultural sensitivity in the presentation of the gospel for a great deal of the resistance among many people is witnessed when individuals are asked to give up parts of their identity or position in order to become Christians (1980, 176-179).

McGavran and Weld Commenting on social factors in church growth, rightly note that Church growth takes place within the societies in which men live. Therefore, it is necessary for those involved in mission's work to understand the cultural structures in order to grasp how the church grows. Men do not exist as isolated individuals, but rather as members of some society. They continue to note that each society has a power structure or aristocracy. Even urchins who roam in the city streets have such a social structure. Some members of a given social-culture have more prestige than others. Some are leaders. When someone who is at the fringe of the group makes a suggestion, no one pays any attention to him. But if one of those who form the opinions and norms of the group makes the same suggestion, all the members consider the possibility of accepting it to stay with the leaders of the group. When one of these individuals who is important in his own little circle is converted, the faith has a good chance of being extended among relatives, neighbors and friends (1971, 9-1 to 9-4)).

In a conversation about church growth between Win Arm and Donald McGavran, Arm asks McGavran about and whether there are any New Testament family unit patterns for winning families. McGavran answers that as you read the Book of Acts and the Epistles, again and again you find whole families accepting Christ. As the church grew, it grew by accession of families-sometimes several

families acting together, sometimes one family acting alone. He concludes that the pattern in the New Testament is not that of individuals one by one accepting the Lord; it is rather that of family by family, a pattern which he implores the church to appropriate (1973, 32-33).

In an Article featured in Smalley's book, Delbert Rice agues that one possible reason why the church is not growing is the fact that most of those involved in missions work do not care to learn the decision making processes of the people they purport to be reaching with the gospel. He gives an example of the decision making processes of the Ilocano people of Philippines. Among these people, the author says that there is no person who can make a decision individually. "The family as a unit takes part in the making of most of the decisions". Such decisions as which doctor to consult in the event of a sickness or even which candidate to vote for in an election are arrived at communally. But even in such a set up, he argues that there are those members of the community who are held in esteem (and here age, education and of course gender come into play) and would, under normal circumstances be the ones to announce the decision that has been arrived at. At the family level, this would be the father (1978, 530-534). From the aforesaid, one could conclude that to effectively reach these people with the gospel, there is need for proper understanding of this cultural process as it would be very difficult for an individual to go against a decision that has been arrived at by the family or the larger community. Here, there would be the need to have people discuss make a communal decision about accepting Jesus Christ.

Biblical Examples of Household Conversion

There is great debate today over whether there is communal or family or cooperate conversion where a group decides corporately to give their lives to Christ. While preaching in Kuria district with the University of Nairobi Christian Union, the researcher went to a home and found a man who had around six wives and over sixty people in the homestead. The head of the house –the father summoned all the people in the homestead to listen to the gospel. After preaching the gospel, the alter call was made and they were asked if there were any among them who wanted to give their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. They all kept quiet for a while and the question was repeated several times without any success. Eventually the father raised his head and pronounced that they would all get saved. It was explained to him that salvation is a personal affair and that each person had to choose for themselves. He replied that as the head of the family he was the one who made decisions and that he was the one who knew what was best for his family and so he had pondered over our message and felt that this was good for the family and so could he be told how people get saved.

The early church evangelistic strategy seems to have had household conversion as key. This is possibly borrowed from Jesus who in an account reported in Luke 10 sent out seventy two disciples and directs them to preach or evangelize various houses. Matson points out that:

> The importance of the household conversions for the growth and spread of the messianic communities can not be underestimated. In acts, the church of the Diaspora grows quite literally from house to house. Similarly, the disciples in Jerusalem find the house a convenient source of converts: 'And every day, in the temple and from house to house they kept on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ' (Acts 5:42). If the house represents a rich source of evangelistic opportunity in Acts, then stories of household conversion proper play a positive role in Luke's overall scheme of universal salvation. As John S. Elliot observes: 'The church which grows through household conversions become at the same time a worldwide household of salvation' (1996, 11-12)

When Paul talked to the jailer in Acts 16:32 and promised him that he would be saved together with his household seems to be the basis for the argument for household salvation. There are other passages where the same is reflected as seen below.

The House of Zaccheus

Luke 19:9 (NIV) says, "Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house." This seems to suggest that Jesus was convinced that as long as Zaccheus who is the family head got saved, the rest of the family would automatically follow suit. Christ went to his home to give Zaccheus lessons of truth, and to instruct his household in the things of the kingdom. This then seems to suggest that Jesus going to the house of Zaccheus is important because the entire family was thus able to interact with the savior and thus receive salvation. The New Testament declares the same principle. I am afraid that many people have been preaching for over twenty years about personal salvation only. However, the Lord tells us that "salvation has come to this *house*."

The Household of Lydia

Acts 16:15 says that Lydia was baptized, as well as her household. The apostle preached the gospel to Lydia's household, and the whole household believed and was baptized. This seems to be one rare occasion in the New Testament where a woman is converted and the rest of the household follows.

The Household of Cornelius

Acts 10:2 (KJV) says that Cornelius was "devout and one who feared God with all his household, giving many alms to the people and beseeching God continually," and 11:14 says, "...who will speak words to you by which you shall be

saved, you and all your house." Cornelius's entire household was saved; it was not just one person who was saved. Evidently, Cornelius invited his relatives and close friends to hear the words of Peter. While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were in Cornelius's house, and all of them received salvation.

The Household of the Jailer

Acts 16:31 (NIV) says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." This is one of the most outstanding verses in the apostolic age Christianity where the jailer is simply told to take the initiative, believe on the Lord Jesus, and he would be saved, him and his household. The church in Philippi started with this jailer. Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." Verse 34 says, "And he brought them up into his house and set a table before them; and he exulted because he had believed in God with all his household." Here we see a wonderful picture. In the beginning the promise was given to the jailer; no one else heard it. Later, the jailer brought his household to Paul. After Paul spoke to them, they were baptized. Then the jailer brought them into his house and set a table before them; and he exulted, having believed in God. "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household' …this is not something difficult to achieve. The apostle gave the jailer a promise, and his whole household was saved. Everyone listened, everyone was baptized, and everyone exulted.

The Household of Crispus

Acts 18:8 (NIV) says, "Crispus, the synagogue ruler believed in the Lord and his entire household...and were baptized." In the Bible there are individuals who believed in the Lord and there are households which believed in the Lord. Notice how easy it is for God's grace to come to a household. The whole household of Crispus believed and was baptized.

According to Guzik (Article on line), *"you and your household"* in Acts 16:31 seems to be a specific promise for that Philippian jailer. He suggests that Paul was, under inspiration by the Holy Spirit, telling the keeper of the prison that his household would trust Jesus just as he did. This was a promise made specifically to the keeper of the prison. But it is a promise that the Holy Spirit may well make alive to us, helping us to trust Him for the salvation of our families. He concludes by saying that the jailer's household was not saved merely because he was; Paul came spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. They were all saved because they all trust the word of God and the Jesus revealed to us through the word. Marsh (Article on line) asserts that some have taken this to mean that if the jailer were saved the rest of his family would automatically be saved. This is not true since the salvation experience is an individual matter. However, in those days it was common for a family to believe and practice what the head of the household did. Thus, if the jailer became a Christian, it was very likely that his family would also become Christians.

Nee points out that household salvation is one of the greatest principles in the Bible: Once you are saved, your whole household should be saved. As an individual one must first stand firm for the Lord, and then ones household will change. This is a great blessing. Nee urges the head of each family to take a strong stand for his family to be a family that believes in the Lord and serves Him:

> "The head of a family has the special responsibility before God for bringing his whole household to the Lord and to His service. You need to take your stand as the head of your family to declare that your household will believe in the Lord....The head of the household can decide for his entire household. Even if the little children do not believe, you can still say that your household will believe in the Lord, because this household is yours and not your children's. You are responsible for your household, not your children....Always lay hold of this fact: I am the head of my family, and my family will believe in God. My household will not believe in the devil. I have decided that this family will be a family that worships God. I have decided that this family will be a family that believes in the Lord. If you declare this

with faith, and if you exercise your authority to take the lead, your children will go along." (1997, 317-320).

This seems to suggest that the saving of the entire household depends on the exercise of faith on the part of the believing father and husband. The father's standing is not a matter of imposing his own will upon that of his wife or family but rather, it is the issue of a believing heart that takes the promises of God as a firm foundation for his beliefs and actions. He stands by faith. We should not try to be promise keepers to do something for God. We rather are the promise believers relying on His faithfulness to keep His own Word.

Household Structure /Stratification in the Greco-Roman World

Role of the Father

In the family, the legal and social power of the father over the wife, children, slaves, and property was extensive in all the ancient Mediterranean societies known to us. Under Greek law, it was possible for a father to relinquish his paternal authority in favor of a son. In Roman families, this was unheard of except in the rare cases in which the children could legally prove their father to be incompetent. Even in the event of death, in both Greek and Roman systems, theoretically women could not administer their own property without male guardianship called in Roman law, *tutela* ......all women were expected to be under the legal guardianship of male relative, the Greek *kyrios* or Latin *tutor*, whether father, husband or next of kin. Without his consent a woman could not make major decisions about her own property. (Osiek and Margaret 2006, 56-57)

Family Religion

Among the many forms that religion took in the Greco-Roman city, family religion, which we could rightly call household religion, played an important role.

This importance household and family religion would translate easily into household assemblies for Christians. If the principle holds that every group was also a religious association, then every kinship group was a worshipping group. Of significance to note is that the *oikos/domus* was a centre of worship with its male head (*kyrios/paterfamilia*) as head of the cult, the wife (*kyria/materfamilia*) also playing an important role. "No matter what gods a bride previously worshipped, at marriage she should cease to worship any but those of her husband" (Osiek and Margaret, 2006 82-83).The authors also assert that every one in the familia belonged to the family cult, including children and slaves and in Roman religion, the whole household gathered daily to invoke the protection of its special deities and ancestors. In this way, the present family was connected with its past members. Family festivities include celebration of all special occasions like weddings, births and funerals and regular yearly festivals like birthdays and commemoration of dead. (2006, 83)

Gender Disparities in the Church

There has definitely been an upsurge of the number of women in church with a commensurate drop in the number of men attending church. It seems that the church is being feminized and sooner the number of men in church may decrease further. Podles (Journal Article on line) asserts that

> "The feminization of Western Christianity can be dated rather exactly. Suddenly, in the thirteenth century, during the lifetimes of St. Dominic and St. Francis, women began to get involved in the Church to such an extent that both Francis and Dominic warned their followers not to spend all their time preaching to women and ignoring men. St. Francis of Assisi, in a somewhat uncharacteristic note, said (according to Thomas of Pavia), "The Lord has taken away wives from us, but the devil has given us sisters." St. Dominic tried to keep his followers away from women. The earliest constitutions, written in 1220, before Dominic's death in 1221, prohibit Dominicans from undertaking the cura monialum, "the spiritual direction of women." This prohibition seems not to be based on Dominic's fears about celibacy but on his fear that his followers would be overwhelmed by women and neglect their

preaching to men. This indeed happened. Within a century the Dominicans were devoting their time largely to women (2001).

Thus from as early as the thirteenth century, there was realization that men were being ignored and women had started flocking into the churches in great numbers.

Dominant Dyads and Dominant Attributes in Kinship Structures

It is significant to realize that dyads play a major role in the way people relate to each other. A dyad consists of two linked persons. In a nuclear family, there are eight dyads: father-son, husband-wife, brother-sister, mother-son, father-daughter, mother-daughter, brother-brother, brother-sister, and sister-sister. Each dyad has several attributes. The term attribute refers to the logical or typical mode of behavior and attitude intrinsic to each dyad. There are some dominant dyads and some dominant attributes. "When a dyad is elevated above others, (that is, a dominant dyad) it tends to modify, magnify, reduce, or even eliminate other dyads (that is, non-dominant dyads) in the kinship group. (Hsu 1971, 8).

Dyads and attributes help in understanding kinship relations and behaviors of the different relationship levels. Hsu asserts that in a father-son dominant dyad, for example the mother and father have a lot of say on the son's wife than the son himself, are responsible for deciding where the son is going to put up his house or other decisions. "In the light of the respective sets of attributes intrinsic to the father-son and husband-wife dyads, this means that the attribute of inclusiveness intrinsic to the husband-wife dyad is greatly modified in favor of the attribute of inclusiveness characteristic of that of the father-son". This is seen in the fact the married partners in this system can be expected to be aloof to each other in public, for they often place their duties and obligations toward parents before those toward each other. Custom will strongly disapprove of any sign of public intimacy between spouses (1971, 8-10).

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In case of a quarrel between the wife and the mother in law, the husband must take the side of the latter against the former, especially in public. Polygyny with the ostensible aim of begetting male heirs to continue the father-son line is a structural necessity.

Yet in spite of all this the marital bond in a father-son dominated system tends to endure. Divorce is possible but rare. The attribute of continuity and the attribute of authority militate against the dissolution of the marital bond. Continuity means that all bonds including the marital bond are likely to last once they are formed. Authority, with all that it implies towards the past and the superiors, means that the pleasures or displeasures of the married partners are less important considerations for staying together than those of the elders. Inclusiveness extends the effects of continuity and authority to the kinship group as a whole (Hsu 1971, 18-19)

Akamba Family Structure and Membership

The Akamba kinship structure seems to have a dominant father-son dyad at the expense of the husband-wife dyad. This is exemplified by the fact that a son is so important that a man will marry as many wives as it takes if the previous ones have not given him a son. The Akamba have both nuclear extended families. The nuclear family consists of father, wife or wives and children (and their wives) and grandchildren or even great grandchildren. As long as a man lived, all his "descendants" formed his immediate or nuclear family. This means that a nuclear family could consist of over a hundred members. The members of this family only refer to each other as father, mother, son, daughter, brother or sister, even though some are cousins, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces or such relations. As Mbiti notes, every one knows how they are related to each other and each member is not perceived

as an individual but as a corporate member of the family. The oldest member of the family is regarded as the head of the family (1983, 6).

When a father (grandfather or great grandfather) died, each other father down the line would start taking charge of all the people under him. This meant in the traditional setting that he could move over to a new homestead and put up his house and houses for his children. What is interesting is that in a family, once a son got married, he would continue to prepare and take meals together with his parents until the next son married. Once this happened, he would be officially shifted to his kitchen but required to bring food to his parents at every meal. At this point, his young brothers and sisters would call him "father". The first born son and his wife would be regarded and called father and mother respectively by the consequent wives who would be married to that home. At the death of the father, the first born would take up the responsibilities of the father, making sure that he "bought" wives for his young brothers and also received bride price from families "buying" his young sisters.

A son was so important to a man that if a wife did not get one, he would marry another wife or if the man dies before they get one and the wife can not bear (with the man's brother), then she would "marry" another woman- *iweto* to get sons through her. This *iweto* could get children from any one and she was not even expected to disclose the father of the children. Once born, the children would be called after the dead man and had all the privileges and rights of that family (Ndeti 1972, 65)

The Akamba homestead normally had houses built in a circular way and at the centre is a courtyard (*thome*) where a fire would be lit at the middle every evening. All the males (at least from the age of ten) would meet outside the house where a fire would be lit every night as the women and girls continued to prepare food. This gave the two different groups the opportunity to teach the young the ways of the

community; customs, traditions, taboos, narratives, relations and relatives, and their roles in the community Mbiti 1983, 6-7). From the aforesaid, it seems then logical to conclude that with such a closely knit corporate family, it becomes difficult for individuals to make individual decisions and hope not to touch the lives of others.

Kinship and Family Ties

It is important to mention that among the Akamba, family relations and ties are very important. As children grow, they learn how they are related to each other and to the people who live near by. These relations are so important to know because people are not referred to by their names but by their relation titles. E.g.

Nau - Father

Mwaitu - Mother

Mwanaa mwaitu - Brother

Mwiitu wa mwaitu - Sister

Mwendwau – Father's brother/sister

Naimiwa – Mother's brother/

Mbaa naimiwa – Mother's relatives

Muthoni – wife's mother/father

syitawa – daughter's husband's mother or father

Mwendya – Mother's sister

Mwivawa -Sister's children

Mwanaasa - Clans man

Umau - Grandfather

Usuu - Grand mother

Umaa - Great grandfather

Usua - Greatgrandmother

Mwanaakwa - Son

Mwiituakwa - Daughter

Mwisukua - Grandson/daughter

Ngana - Great grandchild

This shows that among the Akamba, relations were taken very seriously and each member learned early in life how to interact and treat each of these relations. This relationship structure is so integral part of the culture that it greatly influences decision making and the general community stratification. A person introducing himself was expected to do so in a very comprehensive way especially if he was doing so to strangers. For example one would say "I am Sila wa Kakui, a *Mutangwa* man, *Mwivwa* Muiini (with a mother from *Muiini* clan), and *Ngana kwa* (maternal grandchild to) *Amutei* clan from Mutongu village, Kilungu". This kind of introduction is meant to give the other group to figure out whether there is a relationship between you and them, however remote.

Clans

As Ndeti asserts**,** the Akamba community is made up of about twenty five clans. These clans are named after an ancestor believed to have been real. Examples of these clans are; *Atangwa* clan descended from *Mutangwa, Amutei* from *Mutei, Akitondo* from *Kitondo and Aiini* from *Muiini.* There are many myths that surround these clan ancestors with some even saying that their clan's forefather came from heaven. People from the same clan have a sense of solidarity though they may not be related in any other known way In a traditional setting, a person will always be expected to mention his clan as part of his/her introduction. If found to belong to the clan of the people he is introducing himself to, he would immediately be told that he/she is "at home" (1972, 70-72).

Marriage

Marriage to the Akamba people was and remains very significant in as far as procreation and the preservation of a name were concerned. The man seeking for a wife chooses a girl and ascertains that she is willing to marry him. Sometimes, the parents and relatives of a young man approach the parents of a particular girl and hence start marriage negotiations. Parents and the community then play the pivotal role of gathering information about the family and clan of the girl their son wants to marry from. They ascertain that it is a family which is respected, not known for witchcraft or suffers from curse-related diseases like epilepsy. Marriage is not allowed between close relatives (Penwell 1972, 1-3) In fact some clans like the *Aiini* and *Akitondo* do not allow a man to marry from the same clan. Other clans like the *Atangwa* and the *Aombe* allow inter-clan marriages. Where marriage is allowed within the same clan, careful scrutiny is followed to make sure that the two are not closely related. Taboos exist to strengthen marriage prohibitions. For example, it is feared that children of close relatives would die, and that the living-dead who are displeased with such a marriage can bring misfortune to those concerned. There are also very strict rules with harsh punishments for people who would impregnate a relative.

Penwell says that once the suitor has made his choice, formal community meetings- *Syathi* start. Two goats are sent to the girl's father. These are called "*mbui sya ntheo*" and more goats are brought and one is slaughtered (called a covenant goat). From this point on, the two fathers and mothers will call each other *.Syitawa*- my daughter- in- law's mother, until death, or until the couple are divorced (1972, 2-3)

Descent

The Akamba have a patrilineal society where a person is expected to know who he is and his fathers up to several great grandfathers. One introduces himself thus: Sila wa Kakui wa Munyote wa Ngeti wa Mulika wa Wavuthwa wa Kavatha. Of course one does not know the "ancestors" but is told everything about them and the other forefathers so as to understand myself. The dead descendants are so important that a Mkamba would always pour libation to them before eating any food. As they pour the libation they utter prayers and also talk to these living dead members of the family.

The Place of Women among the Akamba

It is worth noting that among the Akamba, a man "manifestly exercises control and preside in the making and breaking of ties made through women but, although women appear as pawns they are not without influence. The Akamba male is aware of the scheming power of women and traditionally advised his sons against placing too much trust in them; (O'Leary 1984, 96). On the other hand he notes that if a woman has proved to be trustworthy and hard working especially in the farm, she could be elevated to a level where her advice could be sought especially in regard to other women being married by her husband.

Decision Making Process

Among the Akamba, decision making was an elaborate process. At the family level, decisions were made by the head of the family (father or grandfather) in consultation with other older married men so as to reach an agreement. Mbiti argues that since there was no political power system as we understand it today, decisions were made by older married men (*atumia*) (1983, 7-8). These *atumia* could consult

elderly women but these were very rare cases and the woman had to be exceptionally diligent and responsible.

Ndeti asserts that for a Mkamba man, the highest level that can be attained is *Motumia.* "The *motumia* age cycle is the most prestigious. Everyone looks forward to it with great anticipation" he says. This is because *motumia* is on top of every situation among the Akamba and "he is regarded as the pillar of wisdom and knowledge". He has knowledge on virtually every aspect of life. He is the head of the family, the clan, he is consulted in all matters concerning morality, legalism, marriage, divination, prophesy, and many other critical issues. He plays an important role in making decisions in the family and clan (1972, 90). In a nutshell, decision making among the Akamba was and still largely remains a man's docket.