

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF CIRCUMCISION
AMONG THE BUKUSU

BY

BARASA GABRIEL E. NYONGESA

A Thesis submitted to the Graduate
School in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Mission Studies

JULY, 2003

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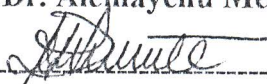
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July, 2003

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Student's declaration

**CONTEXTUALIZATION OF CIRCUMCISION
AMONG THE BUKUSU**

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 here in are not necessarily those of the Nairobi evangelical Graduate school of theology or the examiners.

Barasa Gabriel E. Nyongesa.

June, 2003

ABSTRACT

This is a study into the circumcision rite of passage. It seeks to find out how circumcision can be contextualized to make it compatible with Biblical Christianity. The data was collected through face to face interviews and the administration of a questionnaire to various people from the Bukusu community Randomly selected. The items in the questionnaire were open-ended.

The findings revealed that, there are good things in the traditional circumcision that should be enhanced. It also revealed that there are negative things in this circumcision that are unbiblical and against the progress of the society. These need changing to make this rite of passage benefit the community without negative effects. However, the change should be done carefully to avoid the cultural voids that can be detrimental to the Bukusu community.

Dedication

To

My Loving parents Sarah and Vincent Barasa who have encouraged me and supported me to explore my potential and to become all that I can be for the sake of the kingdom of God.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I feel heavily indebted to my supervisor and mentor Dr. Alemayehu Mekonnen for his guidance and encouragement. He was committed to see me succeed in every step of this thesis. My gratitude also goes to Dr. Henry Mutua my second reader and Dr. Shelly Ashdown for the role they played. I am grateful to Mrs. Sandy Morad for proofreading this thesis and suggesting necessarily grammatical corrections.

I am grateful to all friends and colleagues who supported me in diverse ways. I am grateful to NEGST for the educational scholarship and to other people who helped in paying my fees. This made my studies possible. Special thanks go to Dr. Julius Muthengi the external reader. Special thanks also go to Dr. Victor Cole whose course educational research methods was very helpful in this thesis.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Bukusu are one of the seventeen sub-nations that comprise the Baluyiah cluster of interlacustrine Bantu tribes of Eastern Africa. They inhabit Bungoma District of Western Province of Kenya. This is the largest single ethnic unit of the Baluyiah Nation. They are known to be very committed to their culture and it is hard for one to turn them from what they think is right. They are also known to be independent thinkers. Circumcision is a very important event and it is the most celebrated. Traditionally, everyone participates in this event. It is also very significant as a right of passage that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. Every male normally goes through it. Although circumcision is basically regarded as a social event, there is a lot that goes in it that makes it a religious event as well. This Aspect to a large extent brings about the clash between circumcision and Christianity. It is with this in mind that the researcher found it necessary to do a study on the contextualization of circumcision among the Bukusu.

Problem Statement.

The study seeks to contextualize the Bukusu traditional circumcision in an attempt to make it compatible with Biblical Christianity and at the same time culturally relevant to the Bukusu.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to find out how circumcision among the Bukusu can be contextualized to make it compatible with Biblical Christianity.

Research Questions

1. How is circumcision carried out among the Bukusu?
2. What aspects of the Bukusu Circumcision are good and need enhancing?
3. What aspects of the Bukusu circumcision are not consistent with Biblical Christianity and so need change?
4. What is the church doing to contextualize Bukusu circumcision?

The Significance of the Study

There has been an outcry especially among the Bukusu Christians concerning the Bukusu traditional circumcision. Some have condemned it wholesale and decided to discard it totally. Such have opted to take their children to hospital for circumcision. Others have embraced it fully saying that they see nothing wrong with it. This situation has often created tension between the two groups. Those who have been circumcised traditionally at home often despise those who have undergone circumcision in the hospital sometimes calling them names. This research looks into what is bad in it that needs changing or modifying and what is good in it that needs retaining and what should be added to it to make it richer and of service to the purposes of God.

Limitations and Delimitation

This study is limited to Bukusu circumcision regardless of the other communities that practice circumcision. There was a limitation of time. Because the researcher was doing other courses at NEGST, he did not have enough time to spend in Bungoma district where the data was collected. Further more the research needed some financial resources. Since the researcher had no funding to help in financing the research, he experienced some financial difficulties. The researcher is a Bukusu and has undergone traditional circumcision. However, many of the rituals were left out in his own experience because of his parents' Christian influence. There were some rituals which they could not do being Christians. Because of this, the degree of objectivity is colored by the researcher's knowledge of the Bukusu circumcision ceremony. However, the fact that this researcher has knowledge of this subject may be of positive advantage because he is better placed to evaluate this practice from an Emic (insider's perspective). It has been easier to make recommendations as one who has been involved. Another limitation was that the population in which the researcher did the research did not seem to like writing. Most of them preferred giving information verbally. Because of this, most of those that promised to fill the questionnaire and return to me did not do so. Many of those he managed to trace returned the questionnaire Blank. However this will not pose a danger to the research because he conducted very thorough interviews and this gave him all the data he needed for the research.

Assumptions

1. The researcher assumed that there are some elements in the Bukusu practice of circumcision that are outdated and should be done away with.

2. The researcher assumed that there are some elements in the Bukusu practice of Circumcision that are in conflict with Christianity.
3. The researcher assumed that there are some positive things in the Bukusu Circumcision that should be maintained and encouraged.

Definition of terms

Contextualization: The process by which the gospel not only takes on the forms and idiosyncrasies of different cultures, but also maintains a stance and seeks to transform them.

Circumcision: The act of cutting the foreskin of the male organ of a boy who has reached puberty. A cultural rite by which one passes from childhood to adulthood.

Culture: Culture will be used in this research to mean a way of life of a people; the social legacy that the individual acquires from his group.

ATR: African traditional religion.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The whole of this chapter deals with the literature that others have written on this subject or subjects related to the topic of this thesis. It involves interacting with what these authors have written.

The terms contextualization and indigenisation

Arthur Glasser in his article entitled “Old Testament Contextualization: Revelation and its Environment” in the book “Word Among Us” edited by Gilliland sheds light on the genesis of the term contextualization when he states “Dr. Shoki Coe, a Taiwanese theologian and pioneer in the development of WCC- related education in Eastern Asia and Dr. Nikos A. Nissiotis of the Greek orthodox Church are regarded as having interjected the words contextuality and contextualization in the contemporary missiological debate. Their concern was to develop an existential approach to the task of theological reflection that would shift the focal point more directly to the contemporary context and away from what they regarded as a rigid, almost verbal loyalty to traditional and confessional statements constructed from the Bible” (Gilliland 1989, 32). This was a reaction against some people who regarded the redemptive Gospel as so precisely defined in scripture that harsh limits were automatically placed on any contextualization process.

Gilliland also tries to draw a contrast between contextualization and indigenisation by stating “ the call to make this shift was articulated as a change in emphasis from “ indigenisation” to “ contextualization.” The former tended in their

view to be “past- oriented” because of its stress on relating the Gospel to traditional cultures, which had long been erroneously regarded as rigid and static. To speak of the contextualization of the Gospel seemed more appropriate since it recognized and responded to the concrete and historical situations of our day or what they called taking into account “ the process of secularity, technology and the struggle for human justice which characterized the historical moment of nations in the third world”(ibid, 33).

Robert Schreiter’s definition of contextualization is clearer and is in line with the purposes of this research. He defines contextualization as “ The process by which the Gospel not only takes on the forms and idiosyncrasies of different cultures but also maintains a critical stance and seeks to transform them”(1989, 25). Nicholls on his part tries to draw a distinction between the two terms. He states “Contextualization implies all that is involved in the familiar term indigenisation, but seeks to press beyond it to take into account ‘ the process of secularity, technology and struggle for human justice which characterized the historical moment of nations in the third world” (1979, 21). From this we can deduce that contextualization refers to the application of the Gospel making it relevant to a society’s needs at any given time. The best example of indigenisation is seen in the missionary activities in East Africa. Anderson says that contextualization has developed from the vision of seeking to make sure that the Gospel in every place is clothed in appropriate linguistic and cultural frame of reference to include the concern that the realities of dominant social concerns and ongoing cultural changes are not overlooked and that the gospel remains free to speak prophetically to a culture from within it. There is a more stress on communication through incarnation. We can also say that contextualization is an on going thing. Anderson describes to us the missionary activities in East Africa and how

they tried to indigenise the Christian faith. He states “ Missionaries tried from the start to indigenise their faith, making it genuinely African. This they tried to accomplish through African languages. Worship was put into the language of the people.

Scriptures were translated into most of the tongues in East Africa. Catechists from the Catholic missions, and Protestant preachers and evangelists continued to translate the faith. Doctrines they had taught were put into expressions and stories, which were readily intelligible to the people. They also had to apply the Christian teaching to the way people lived their daily lives. So Christianity began to become

African”(Anderson 1977, 96). Their efforts to indigenise the faith must be appreciated. However, they were limited in many ways. They left out important areas of African experience. Very little help was given to the African troubled with witchcraft except the denial that witchcraft is real. Christian Education ignored matters of sex and family duty. African education dealt with these areas very well. Christianity also failed to convert the older generation at first and dealt with children who were sometimes ignorant of their own traditions and not troubled by them. Some times the translation itself was poorly done (ibid.). Anderson’s comment is worth noting at this point. He states “ full indigenisation, Christians needed not only to translate their faith but to listen to what African societies were saying. They needed to know what African traditions meant and what values they carried. And there needed to be a careful listening to African needs. In East Africa only a few attempts were made to listen to Africans. There were two distinct approaches to indigenisation. Some missionaries tried to preserve intact African customs; others tried to relate them to African teaching and practice (ibid.).

Africans and Christianity

Some people think that to be a Christian, one has to abandon his or her culture completely and take on the western culture. There is no reason for Africans not to retain their identity as Africans and at the same time be authentic Christians. Africans don't have to imitate the Western cultures while discarding their own culture in order to be authentic Christians. History and scriptures show us that, Christianity is associated with Africa from the very beginning. This is evidenced by the frequent reference of the bible to Africa.

Africa and the Bible

Seven hundred forty four references in the Bible refer to African countries and peoples. Cush (Nubia), Egypt and Libya show a close connection between Africa and the Bible and the origins of Christianity. The Old Testament, for instance, records Africa's involvement in the background of Christianity. Africa is represented by Cush (Nubia) in the creation account and in the table of nations. Many geographical references are made to Africa. Apart from this, numerous cultural references are made to the prosperity, trade, religion and wisdom of Africa.

Africa was deeply involved in the politics of the Bible. Africa was a place of refuge for economic and political refugees in the Bible (Genesis 12:10-20). Africa was also a place of refuge for Jesus Christ when his parents fled from the wrath of Herod. Egypt, in Africa, was a place of slavery for God's people Israel (Exodus 1-14). Psalms 68:31-32 states that, "Envoys will come from Egypt, Cush will submit herself to God. Sing to God, O Kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the Lord." Other scriptures that talk about Africa include, Psalm 87:4, Zephaniah 3:9-10, Isaiah 18:1-2, 7 and Isaiah 19:19-25.

The New Testament records Africa's involvement in the founding and establishment of Christianity. Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21 and Luke 23:36; all record the story of Simon of Cyrene. He came from Cyrene, an Island in North Africa, which is very close to Carthage Seaport of Libya. Simon carried the cross of Jesus. In chapter 5 of his book "Is Africa cursed?" Adeyemo states "Jesus was condemned by a Roman, crucified by Jews, and comforted by an African." (1997, 46-50) What a compliment to the Africans. Simon might have been a believer. His sons, Alexander and Rufus, and his wife are mentioned as believers (Mark 15:21, Romans 16:13).

In Acts 2:9-11, we read that Egypt and parts of Libya and Cyrene were represented on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 8:26-38, there is the story of the Ethiopian eunuch (Nubian). He was the "finance minister" of Candace, Queen Mother of Nubia. He was converted by Phillip on his way from Jerusalem and may have taken the gospel to Nubia. In Acts 11:9-12, we read of Christians from Cyrenaica who helped to plant the church at Antioch. We also read of Apollos of Alexandria in Egypt who had become a follower of John the Baptist and was converted to Christianity by Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus. He became an important "Missionary – teacher in Corinth" (Acts 18:27-28, 1 Cor. 1:12). The Bible does not mention Europe so much the way it mentions Africa. This may mean that Christianity is closer to Africa than it is to Europe.

Africa can also boast of great theologians that made a significant contribution to Christianity. Among these people are, Clement of Alexandria who was the first to state that God was at work in the Greek' pre-Christian past, so a Greek does not have to reject his cultural past to become a Christian. He also taught that there is some truth in Greco-Roman culture that can be brought into Christian theology (Baur 1994, 22-

23). In the same way, the Bukusu don't have to reject their cultural past in order to become Christians.

The World Christian Magazine states that Christianity began in Asia. Asians took it to Africa and then to Europe. Africa sent missionaries to Europe before Europe sent missionaries to Africa. "Three black missionaries (Exuperantius, Felix, and his sister Regula) took the faith from Egypt to Europe. All three were killed in Switzerland. But today, the church of Switzerland honors them as saints. The picture of those African missionaries is on the official seal of Switzerland" (September 1989, 15).

History tells us that churches in Egypt and Ethiopia did not spread the faith to all of Africa and beyond before the white people arrived. If they had done that, no one today would be calling Christianity a "white man's religion." Most of Africa did not hear of Christ until European churches finally started sending missionaries in about 1500 AD. The problem is that European missionaries did not bring the faith only. They brought it mixed with their European customs and they failed to contextualize (Britten 1997,30). For example, in 1645, the Italian Capuchins were permitted to work in Congo. This was the largest missionary enterprise before modern times. They sent 440 missionaries, baptized 600,000 and started many schools. But they failed to contextualize. They viewed African culture with horror as part of the kingdom of Satan in opposition to the kingdom of God (European Catholic Christianity). Later, Belgium colonized Zaire. They changed the language and customs to those of Belgium. The British did the same in their colonies. Thomas Freeman complained that Ghana was becoming overly British. He lamented, "How unfortunate it is that when the Gospel came to Ghana, everything British came with it and nearly everything African began to disappear" (Glasswell, 1999). Often, an African

was not accepted as a true Christian unless he agreed to leave his own culture and copy European culture. The confusion between Christianity and European culture has contributed to the false impression that Christianity is a white man's religion. Some people assume that European customs come from the Bible. However, many of these customs come from mistaken beliefs and superstitions. One example is that of bride's maids (Fray 1974, 10).

African Christians are free to follow any customs they prefer provided the customs do not go against the Bible. "We know that Christianity is the bread of life for all races. When the Europeans received this bread, they added a plastic bag (their own customs). Later when European missionaries arrived in Africa, they fed us the plastic bag along with the bread. The plastic makes us sick! The plastic belongs to them . . . but the bread belongs to all of us. We can remove the plastic and enjoy the bread" (Britten 1997, 32). Kato also adds his voice to the discussion by stating "Africans have a right to change their religion from heathen worship to Christianity. Having done so, Christianity can become an African religion. In fact historically that is what has happened. Historically Christianity was thriving in Africa long before it reached the British Isles and north America, from where so many of the Protestant missionaries came. We can, therefore rightly call Christianity an African religion" (1985, 35). He also adds "Let Christianity truly find its home in Africa, by adopting local hymnology, using native language, idioms and concepts to express the unchanging faith. But always let our primary goal be that Jesus Christ might have the foremost place. 'So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God'(1 Corinthians 10:31)" (ibid., 38). From all these one can conclude that we should critically examine the Christianity implanted in Africa in order to extract from it that which is of essence and strip it from European cultural trappings.

Another fact I would like to point out is that, many Biblical teachings were believed and practiced by Africans in their own culture. First of all, many African tribes believed in one God just like the Jews. They were monotheists. For example, the Kikuyus have always believed in one God Ngai. The Luyiahs have always believed in one God, Nyasaye or Wele. The limitation was that, to the Africans, God was so far away and could only be approached through the ancestors. The news that there is a way to God through Jesus Christ was not very difficult for the Africans to believe. In fact, it could have been more difficult for the Europeans who believed in many gods and later on were affected by many philosophies and secularism to accept Christianity than many African tribes who were monotheists. The Africans also believed in unbreakable marriage ties, obedience to parents and hospitality. Drunkardness was discouraged. Blood sacrifices which were practiced in the Old Testament were also practiced by the Africans who sacrificed to God. The blood sacrifices in the Old Testament were replaced by the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross because of the sin of the world. It is not very difficult for the Africans to understand this. We can easily see that Christianity and the Bible can easily fit into the African life. Through Christianity, the distant God can be brought closer to the Africans. There are also unbiblical beliefs and practices which Christianity helps to eradicate. These include the giving away of wives by some African men to men visiting them for the night(Maasai), Female circumcision(Marakwet, Kikuyu and Meru) and widow inheritance(Luyiahs and Luo).

Before the coming of Islam, Christianity was producing great theologians and scholars such as Tertulian, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria and Augustine. African Christianity contributed greatly to Christendom through scholarship, theology, translation and preservation of scriptures, martyrdom, liturgy and

monasticism. It is appropriate at this point to quote Acts 10:34-35. "Now I realize that God has no favorite race. He accepts people of every nation"(Paraphrased).

Through Contextualization of the Bukusu Circumcision we are dealing with the question of Christianity and the African culture. Hiebert captures this when he states, "What should people do with their cultural ways when they become Christians and how should the missionary respond to these traditional beliefs and practices?" He also adds, " When missionaries arrive in a new region, they do not enter a religious vacuum. They find societies with well-developed cultures that provide for essential needs and make human life possible. They also find religious and philosophical beliefs that provide the people with answers to many of their deepest questions. How then should they relate to existing cultural beliefs and practices? Are they all evil? Or are they good? (1985,171). About the importance of rituals he states "Missionaries find it particularly difficult to deal with rituals in new cultures, since these often speak of the most profound experiences of human life and reflect the deepest beliefs of the people. How should Christians respond to them?" (ibid.).

Syncretism

Robert Schreiter defines syncretism as, " The mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point where at least one, if not both of the systems loses its basic structure and identity" (Schreiter 1986, 144). Pointing at the danger of syncretism Tippet states " I am becoming more and more convinced that the greatest challenge to pure Biblical Christianity comes from syncretism...the challenge of syncretism is frequently latent. It adventures incognito within our ranks"(Tippet 1973, 32). His sentiments are true. Syncretism not only poses a challenge to pure Biblical

Biblical Christianity but also to the contextualization of Christianity. This call for a lot of care in the process of contextualization to avoid this danger.

History of the Bukusu circumcision

It seems that circumcision has been with the Bukusu Community for a long time. It is not known exactly when this practice started. Somewhere along the way in their history, this practice became neglected. Makila states, "The Bukusu lived at Mwiala for a long time. During this period, war, weariness, and constant migrations caused them to neglect the circumcision tradition" (Makila 1978, 57). It was Mango, now a household name among the Bukusu, who was responsible for the reformation of circumcision on a firmer footing which has since continued without interruption up to the present. He was a brave and resolute young man whose popularity won him leadership over the majority of clans that lived at Mwiala.

Mango and the Snake

Makila tells the story that is well known and is popular among the Bukusu. The story of Mango and the snake is very key to understanding a lot about the Bukusu circumcision as it is practiced today. Mango lived at a place called Mwiala. At Mwiala, there lived a notorious snake called Khuruwe Yabebe. It was enormous in size and vicious in appearance. It had deep red eyes and it could see any object at night. Its jaws were overgrown with whiskers like a he-goat and it moved swiftly by crawling and half flying in the air. The snake caused a lot of commotion wherever it moved. It used to eat beast and human beings that came near where it lived – a cave overgrown with trees. Although the snake caused a lot of havoc, people were very scared of it and many people lost their children, goats, cows, but nobody dared to hunt

it. One day, the snake killed Nakhosi, the son of Khakula, an influential leader (Omukasa). He was able to stir up the people into the idea of launching a mass hunt for the snake. While the people were still debating among themselves as to how to go about this, the snake killed Mango's son Malaba. This enraged Mango so much because he loved his son. He swore to kill the snake. When the Kalenjin neighbors (Barua) who were scared of the snake heard this, they said to him, "Mango, if you can kill that snake, we will circumcise you and give you one of our daughters to marry." Mango rose up one morning and started making preparations to fight the snake. He sharpened his sword (Embalu) and spear until they were razor sharp. He took his shield and headed for the cave where the snake lived. The Kalenjin neighbors who had studied the movement of the snake described to Mango in detail how and when the snake retires after hunting. Usually, the snake retired at midday, curling itself into a coil and resting its head at the mouth of the cave. Mango placed a log at the spot where the snake normally rested its head. After stripping naked, he entered the cave and hid in the dark corner near the entrance. People gathered to observe but from a safe distance looking in all directions lest the serpent came upon them unawares. Suddenly, the snake arrived snorting like a dog. It smelt the log at the entrance then made one inspection around the cave. It entered, curled its body in a heap and rested its body on the log. Without wasting any time, Mango struck out a mighty blow with his sword slashing the snake's head. The head flew off and fell against a nearby tree with a tremendous noise. Because of the deadly venom, the tree died instantly. Mango thought he was dreaming and for some time he was in shock. He could not utter a word nor stand. After regaining his senses, he dashed out of the cave calling people who were scared and could not move near. They thought he was mad when he told them that the snake was dead. Some went to the cave and confirmed that the

snake was dead. Mango was carried shoulder high and the people sang jubilantly.

The women sang and jubilated.

Mango agreed to be circumcised by the Kalenjins. While he was being led to the circumcision ground, his old mother burst out crying, “Woocii, woocii! My only son. Ahaa, hoooh, Mango did I not tell you that this circumcision is painful? You have chosen it yourself. There you are”. The Bukusu turned this cry into a song. This was the origin of the famous “sioyaye” chant sang when a circumcision candidate is returning from the mudding place (Sietosi) to the circumcision ground outside the house (khuluya).

The circumcision chant

1. Hee – heee – hee

Hee

Hee – heee

Hee

Hee – heee

Heee – heeeh!

2. Wangu maalule khekhale

Haa – haah

Omusinde we

Haaa – haah

Omusinde we

Haa – haah hoooh

3. Embalu yefwe ekhalakhale yebele

HooH

Omusinde we

HooH

Omusinde we

Hoooh – hoooh!

4. Mango we mwila wakuwa embalu

Haa – haah

Wakuwa embalu

Haa – haa

Wakuwa embalu

Haaha – hoooh

5. Omusinde oteremaka achia ebunyolo

Haaula

Achia Ebunyolo

Haaha – looh

6. Embalu elumabubi eli ematabula

Haaaha

Eli ematabula

Haaaha – hoooh

7. Kumwoyo kwa nautu webele

Hoooh

Omusinde we

Hoooh

Omusinde we

Hooo – hoooooh!

- 1) The Leopard which scratches hard is hiding to pounce on you.
- 2) Our age old circumcision tradition should remain with us.
- 3) It was handed down to us by Mango of Mwiala.
- 4) A cowardly uncircumcised boy should take refuge in Luoland (where circumcision is not practiced).
- 5) When the knife comes near the end, it hurts badly.
- 6) If you uncircumcised boy, are unprepared for the knife, you better give up now before it is too late.

This act of Mango gave the Bukusu a new vigor and pride. A reformed circumcision style was instituted. From that time, mass circumcisions were to be organized periodically (initially, circumcision was sporadic). From this time, for one to attain maturity one had to be circumcised. The Kalenjins kept their word and gave Mango a bride after his circumcision (Were 1967, 172-173).

Circumcision age sets

Mango founded his own circumcision age set of Bakolongolo. Those circumcised the same year form an age set or age group. Members of the age group do many things together. The Bukusu tribe became better disciplined than before. From this time onwards regimentation of society into circumcision age sets became more

permanent. There are similarities between the Bukusu circumcision age-set structure and that of the Nandi and the Kipsigis. It looks like the Bukusuborrowed a lot in this area from their neighbors.

The following is a comparison of these circumcision agesets among the Bukusu, Tiriki and the Nandi according to Makila.

Bukusu	Tiriki	Nandi
Kolongolo	Golongolo	Korongoro
Kikwameti	_____	Kipkoimet
Kananachi	Kabalachi	Kaplelachi
Kinyikeu	Jiminigayi	Kipnyikeu
Nyange	Nyonje	Nyongi
Maina	Mayina	Mainek(Maina)
Chuma	Juma	Chumo
Sawa	Sawe	Sawe

(Makila 1978,178)

There are some similarities between these age sets and the Kikuyu age sets. I recommend that a research be done to find out why there are these similarities.

Circumcision in the Bible

The Old Testament gives us an account of the origin and practice of circumcision in Israel. In Genesis 17, we see the origin of circumcision. Circumcision was integrated into the mosaic system in connection with the Passover (Ex. 12:44). After God had appeared to Abraham and repeated to him promises of a great nation and the land, he states "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for generations to come. This is my covenant with you

and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision. It will be the sign of the covenant between you and me. For the generations to come, every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner – those who are not your offspring whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Gen. 17:9-14). Circumcision was then integrated into the mosaic system in connection with the Passover (Ex. 12:44). It states, “The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “These are the regulations for the Passover: No foreigner is to eat of it. Any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him, but a temporary resident and a hired worker may not eat of it.” It seems that circumcision continued throughout the Old Testament after this. It was also a very important feature in the New Testament Judaism. It caused controversy in the early church when some people went to Antioch and claimed that, the Gentiles could not be converted until they had been circumcised. This matter was resolved in the Jerusalem Council where it was decided that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised to be Christians (Acts 15). Other passages that talk about circumcision are Acts 21:21 and Galatians 5:2, 3, 11. As time went on, the Jews in the New Testament time associated circumcision mostly with Moses. They seem to have forgotten its association with Abraham.

The significance of Biblical circumcision

Genesis 17 shows us that, circumcision is a spiritual sign. In Genesis 10, 11, 13, 14 and Acts 7:8 circumcision is identified with the covenant made with Abraham. The New Bible Dictionary states, "Circumcision signifies the gracious movement of God to man, and only derivatively as we shall see, the consecration of man to God" (Douglas 1962, 233). This point is further proved by Joshua 5:2. As the nation of Israel walked in the wilderness under God's displeasure, circumcision lapsed. Joshua was told to make knives and circumcise all the males who had been born after departure from Egypt. After the exercises, we read the following: "Then the Lord said to Joshua, 'Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you,' so the place has been called Gilgal to this day" (Joshua 5:9).

We also see from the Bible that, when Moses spoke of possessing uncircumcised lips, only the fire of God's word could remedy it. The New Testament speaks of circumcision as a seal. Romans 4:11 states, "and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised." The New Bible Dictionary states, "Circumcision therefore is the token of that work of grace whereby God chooses out and marks men for his own" (NBD, 233).

The covenant of circumcision operates on the basis of the spiritual union of the household and its head as Genesis 17:7 states, "The covenant is between me and thee and thy seed after thee". In this way, instant circumcision became the practice of most people in Israel. This practice focused attention on the spiritual nature of the rite.

The contrast differing circumcision to puberty or later adolescence as in the case of the Bukusu makes it of primary social importance, entrance into the privileges and duties of adult tribal membership. Circumcision involves the idea of consecration

to God. There is the relationship between circumcision and obedience to God's law. God expressed this to Abraham when he told him, "Walk before me, and be perfect" (Genesis 17: 1, KJV). This is further reinforced by scriptures such as Jeremiah 4:4 and Romans 2:25-29.

The blood that is shed during circumcision expresses the costly demand which God makes of those whom he calls to himself and marks with the sign of his covenant. Even with circumcision as a sign of the covenant between God and Israel, the children of Israel did not always obey God. It is possible to possess the sign and nothing more. This makes the whole thing spiritually defunct and condemnatory.

Literature on Interview questions.

Weiss states "Most of the significant events of people's lives can become known to others through interview"(1994, 2). The interviews helped to extract what the respondents feel and think about the Bukusu traditional circumcision.

The interviews contacted by the researcher must meet the standard of validity and reliability that apply to collection of information. About this, Best states, "The Key to effective interviewing is the extent to which the interviewer can establish rapport" (Best 1981, 166). About the subject of interviews, Engelhart states, "The data collected by interviews should be relevant to the problem of the research, should be as reliable as possible and should be sufficiently representative to justify generalizations...questions in interviews should be characterized by vocabulary or phraseology appropriate to the level of understanding of the respondents...both fixed-alternative and open ended questions may be used" (Engelhart 1973, 108). All these were reflected in the interviews.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Entry

The researcher obtained a letter of introduction from the office of the Deputy vice chancellor for academic affairs to various people that he interviewed or administered the questionnaire to. The letter from the school was to help the researcher to obtain permission to collect data and any other information needed for the research. There were no cultural or language problems because the researcher belongs to the Bukusu community and he is fluent in their language.

Sources of information

Although the researcher is a Bukusu, he did not go through a typical traditional circumcision because of his and his parent's Christian faith. Because of this, most of the information was from the informants. The researcher conducted interviews with various people who have been involved in Bukusu circumcision ceremony in one way or another. These included both men and women. Although the Bukusu don't practice female circumcision, the women are involved in the ceremony and they are affected by it in many ways. It would not have been fair for me to leave them out of my research. The researcher also interviewed some Church leaders in the area affected by the traditional circumcision. The researcher conducted group interviews. I gathered people together in focus groups of two to four. All together six groups were interviewed. The participants were free to talk with and influence each other in the process of sharing their ideas and perceptions on the topic.

Together, they could express feelings and perceptions obscured in individual interviews. Four people were interviewed individually. Since these people were already known to me, rapport had been established. Confidentiality was assured and openness encouraged. The interview process was tiring and time consuming. It would take up to three hours with each group I interviewed. However, this gave me a lot of information that was needed. Apart from interviews, the researcher also administered the questionnaire to the respondents. Sogaard explains how to construct a good questionnaire. He considers four things that are crucial to a good questionnaire. These are, a) The main components of a questionnaire. b) The questions themselves and the format of response. c) How to phrase and sequence questions. d) Working on the physical layout of the questionnaire itself (Sogaard 1996, 130). The researcher followed these guidelines. This is helpful in making the questionnaire user friendly. The questions were framed based on research questions. The researcher also used some written material on the subject. Observation was another source of information.

Population

Mugenda and Mugenda define population as an entire group of individuals, objects, events, having a common observable characteristic (Mugenda and Mugenda 1999, 9). The population of this study is the Bukusu Community in Bungoma District of western Kenya. Because it is not possible to interview and administer the questionnaire to every member of this community, sampling was done. Men and women, including church leaders, were picked to be interviewed and to fill the questionnaires for this study. Most of my informers came from Kandui division. Others came from Bumula and Webuye. This was for the purpose of incorporating views from different regions of the district. The participants had rich information

because of their involvement in the circumcision. The informants' age range from 25 to 80 years. The informants were Protestants and Catholics, not necessarily born again. Many of them practice ATR but it is hard for them to admit this. However, many people identify with Christianity, although they don't admit it. There are very few Muslims in Bungoma and the researcher did not have opportunity to interview any.

Interview questions

The questions in the questionnaire also served as interview questions. The questionnaire was designed to give the general background of the respondent, his/her age and religious background information. The questions were given to Dr. Ashdown, a research expert from the Department of Translation Studies. She offered constructive criticism that helped to ensure that the questions asked related to the research objectives. Her suggestions helped the researcher to make the necessary corrections. The instrument was also given to Robin Mulunda a student of Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, who having taken Educational Research Methods course, was also able to offer constructive criticism. Some necessary changes were made accordingly. The researcher prepared the questionnaire in such a way that it could be used also for interviews. The researcher asked more questions and sought clarification on issues that rose during the interviews. Apart from interviews, the questionnaire was given to people who filled them out and turned them in. Some filled the questionnaire and were interviewed after that for more details.

There was no language barrier since the researcher belongs to the same ethnic group as the informants and he is fluent in their language. The interviews were

contacted face to face. The research aims at integrating the facts obtained into meaningful generalizations.

Pilot Testing

The researcher contacted a pilot study by approaching some guards from the Bukusu community that work in the Christian learning Material Center (CLMC) compound. The interview questions were tested on them and appropriate modifications and corrections were made to the instrument.

Method of Analyzing Data

The researcher used qualitative analysis of information. The material was organized by thematic form. This was based on the research questions.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to find out how the Bukusu circumcision can be conceptualized in a way that is relevant to the Bukusu culture but at the same time true to Christianity. This section contains data analysis and findings which follows qualitative method of analysis.

Questionnaire returns

Table 1 shows the rate of returns on the questionnaires distributed to the respondents. Overall 50% response was obtained on the questionnaires. Out of 40 people that were given the questionnaire, 20 of them returned the questionnaire. The men had 50% return, the same as the women. Most of the data was obtained through interviews. Both interview and questionnaire methods combined to make the research a success.

Table 1. Questionnaire returns.

	No of Questionnaires sent	No of Questionnaires returned	%
Men	30	15	37.5
Women	10	5	12.5
Total	40	20	50

How is circumcision carried out among the Bukusu?

This part is answered by questions 2-12 of the questionnaire. Every August of an even year is the season of the uncircumcised (Basinde). This is a time when boys are made men, and the time of license and merry-making. According to some Church leaders that were among my informants, this is a time when churches are half full. This is because many members get involved in the circumcision ceremony.

When the candidate is ready for circumcision and feels courageous enough to face the knife, he approaches his father and tells him about it. This is at the age of between 14 and 17 years. The father, in consultation with his other relatives, grants permission and set the date for circumcision. The boy goes around ringing the circumcision bells visiting the relatives to invite them for the big day. They go around singing circumcision songs. Some of the songs are about events and people who have done bad things. This is the time to expose bad people and correct them publicly. Nobody is supposed to sue anybody or complain about this. It is a way of social control, says Wanjala, one of my informants.

The day before the actual circumcision takes place, the boy goes to the maternal uncle's home. His uncle slaughters a cow and part of the meat is put in the neck of the candidate. This meat is called Likhoni. Many of my informants did not know why the meat is put on the neck though they have practiced this for long. However, one of them said that the putting of the meat on the neck signifies the love the uncles have for their nephew since the meat hangs on the chest which is very close to the heart. The other meat is shared among the mother's relatives but most of it is carried to the home where the circumcision ceremony will take place. At the uncle's place the boy is given words of encouragement to stand firm as a man and is threatened with dire consequences if he dares to embarrass them by shaking when

being circumcised. The elders look inside the dead cow and they are able to tell whether the boy will be courageous or not. If they sense any danger, they use charms to strengthen the boy. The uncle can only slaughter a cow if the father of the initiate paid dowry to the family of the initiate's mother. Where dowry was not paid a cow cannot be slaughtered. Some of the people interviewed said that this is a way of recovering some of the cows that were paid as dowry.

Another ceremony that takes place is the sacrifice at the grave of the dead grandfather. This is a way of inviting the ancestors who are part of the family to participate in the circumcision. They are called upon to protect the initiate from any misfortune during the operation. This ceremony is very crucial. If the ancestors are ignored, they are likely to cause misfortune. The operation can be done wrongly in such a way that the initiate can bleed to death or any other misfortune can develop. My informants felt that this is the most important thing to do to ensure the safety of the initiate.

At home the relatives gather and it is a whole night of singing, dancing and feasting. There is also drinking of traditional beer. I was informed that, some people use this as an opportunity to engage in illicit sex. The initiate is given only a few hours to sleep and then he is waken up very early in the morning to be taken to the river. Just before being taken to the river, the initiate is given some special ugali made from millet together with roasted meat. This is prepared and given by the aunt.

At the river, the initiate takes a traditional mud bath called khulonga. The mudding is done by a special person normally the uncle. Some words are told to the initiate to make him courageous and ready to face the Knife. After this bath, no one can escape the knife. The whole body gets covered in mud to strengthen it and make it stiff. On his head, a piece of grass is put (kwa ututu). Stark naked, and ringing his

circumcision bells (Chinyimba), the initiate is led home. The Sioyaye song is sung. This is a song like no other, with few words and many vocal meandering, and it is never sung at any other time of the year but now, when the initiate confronts the moment of sudden adulthood. Ululation rents the air as the boy walks into the home stark naked. Some times there is total silence. Near the home, the boy is met by an aunt. On her ear hangs a piece of meat. She is carrying a sickle in one hand and in the other she is carrying a cooking stick with porridge at the end of it. She meets the initiate and touches his lips with the porridge on the cooking stick. By all this, says Wanjala, the aunt is trying to give the initiate the last opportunity to surrender if he is fearing and is not ready to face the Knife. He is free to express this to her because she is the closest person. After this, there will be no other chance. The boy is welcomed by his father or his grandfather if he is the first born. The blanket is draped over the father's clothes, marking him out as the owner of the homestead. He holds a club in his right hand. The boy is led to the courtyard where maize floor has been poured to mark out the spot. This is called Etiang'i. Traditionally, they dig a hole and place the axe head in it with the sharp end facing upwards. The axe is then covered with a small portion of the sharp end exposed to the surface. The initiate stands with the axe between his two legs. This shows the seriousness of this ceremony. Later on, one can swear of having stood on the axe. It is a sign of courage. The father stands in front of the boy and looks into his unblinking eyes. At this point, the chief circumciser appears covered in a colobus monkey skin brandishing a sharp knife that glints eerily in the light. This usually sends a scare through the crowd of curious people especially the women. He is accompanied by assistants dressed in uniforms. The assistant circumcisors check that the young man's foreskin is not still attached to the prepuce. At that time, the chief circumcisor leaps forwards and swoops on the boy. This is

usually a tense moment for everyone. Within seconds the boy's fore skin lies on the ground and a whistle breaks the silence. As drops of blood continue to drip on the ground, the circumcisors step back to allow the excited audience to congratulate the initiate. There is a riot of ululation, singing and celebration. Friends and relatives close in to congratulate the boy on his bravery. He is given gifts, money, cows and other things. The boy who has now become a man is escorted to a special room prepared for him called Mwikombe. This is a seclusion place where he stays until he is healed.

During the time of recovery, the initiates are visited by a special person normally an old man who advises them on various issues concerning life as an adult. There are also two people to take care of each initiate. These are called Namachengeche and Namakhala. Namachengeche is normally a young lady, a cousin or a sister to the initiate. Her work is to feed the initiate. She is to make sure that food is ready at the right time and that the initiate feeds well. The role of Namakhala, who is normally a young boy, is to act as a messenger to the initiate. He stays and goes with the initiate wherever he goes. If there is any problem, these are the people to alert the parents and the elders. The initiates sleep on a special bed made of banana leaves (Lusanja). The new initiates spend three days inside the house. On the third day they can go out and join the other initiates in the village near the river where they spend most of their time together. They hunt for birds and fish from the river. They also discuss many things together. All this causes them to bond together as an age set. The initiates don't wear clothes. They cover themselves with bed sheets or blankets. This is to allow the wound to heal properly. They are not to bathe with water. They smear their bodies with white clay. This keeps the body from becoming dirty. Girls run away when they meet them on the way. The time of seclusion and recovery takes about

three months. They use traditional medicine called Enguu for treatment. Leaves from a certain plant are taken, dried, burned and ground into powder. Before Enguu is applied on the wounds, some other leaves are put on it to clean the place of any dirt. Then the Enguu is applied. This is usually very painful. This also tests how much one can endure pain.

The completion of this rite of passage is elaborate and it involves a number of things. The initiates first of all burn the banana leaves used as their bedding. This signifies separation from the seclusion life. This is usually at dusk. They then light torches with grass and run into the darkness cursing the circumcisor that operated on them. They then go to spend that night in the banana plantation. A bonfire is lighted to keep them warm and to scare away snakes and dangerous animals. Seated around the fire, the initiates roast bananas, which they eat as their supper as they talk and tell stories. Early in the morning, the initiates go to the river where they bathe and stay there for some time. During the day, someone comes from home to call them announcing that food is ready. This is usually bananas and sweet potatoes. On reaching home, they are given food to eat. When they are satisfied, they begin to throw the food at each other and make fun. When the eating is over, the father comes with new clothes and puts them on the initiates. They are also given a new blanket each. My informants did not agree as to what point the new clothes are put on. Some said that they are put on the way from the river before reaching home. My conclusion was that some put them on the way, while some do it at home. At this point, the father advises them on how to live. He warns against vices such as adultery and stealing. He tells them that the door which is open, is yours, and the one that is closed belongs to another person. The closed door is a married woman and the open one is an unmarried girl. After a time of instructions, he is given gifts and there is singing and celebration.

The initiated man now goes to visit relatives to thank them for coming to participate in his circumcision. They give him gifts which includes money, cows, goats and others. He is now an adult with all the rights and privileges of an adult person.

Meaning and importance of Bukusu circumcision.

This part is answered by questions 13-15 of the questionnaire. The blood which is shed during the operation binds the person to the land and consequently to the departed members of his society, thus circumcision is like a covenant or solemn agreement between the individual and his people joining the stream of his people and becoming truly one of them. According to my informants, this promotes unity and needs enhancing.

By undergoing circumcision, the individual is recognized to be an adult. It is a public recognition that the individual is now passing from childhood to adulthood. The cutting off of his flesh symbolizes a break from the period of childhood and getting ready for the period of adulthood. A person who has not gone through initiation is regarded as a child and cannot be given full responsibility at home and in the community. He cannot be a leader. A circumcised person is not supposed to behave like a child any more. It is wrong for such a person to walk naked. He cannot be beaten by the mother because he is considered to be an adult. This is very good and should be enhanced

Initiation is a gateway to marriage. Nobody is allowed to get married before going through initiation. During the period of seclusion, the initiates are taught many things regarding the life of their people. This includes its history, traditions, beliefs and how to raise a family. They are also taught how to relate to the opposite sex. The secrets of married life are taught to the initiates at this stage to prepare them for what

is soon to come. After circumcision, one is ready to be a warrior. He can defend the community against the enemies or any danger that faces his family or the whole community.

The underlying beliefs and values of the circumcision rite of passage.

The story of Mango, which was told earlier on in detail, gives us a window into the beliefs and values that are cherished by the Bukusu and which underlie the circumcision rite of passage.

The story of Mango and the snake is key to understanding of the Bukusu circumcision as it is practiced today. Most of the people interviewed by the researcher know this story. However I found some slight variations from person to person. They all point to it as the event that made Bukusu circumcision what it is today. In this story, we see the value of courage. Circumcision shows that somebody is courageous. The Bukusu were surrounded by wild animals and enemy tribes that posed a danger to the people and their livestock. Courage was necessary to defend the community. Cowardice is despised and frowned upon. Mango was given a wife as a reward for his achievement. Marriage and procreation is an important value among the Bukusu. Barrenness and refusing to marry is despised. Circumcision is a way of cleansing the source of life and procreation. Land is very important to the Bukusu. The shedding of blood joins the initiates to the land. It makes them truly members of the community or the sons of the soil as it were. A sense of community is an important value to the Bukusu. After his achievement, Mango became a very important leader (Omukasa). Nobody can be made a leader among the Bukusu unless he is circumcised. He is not allowed to marry and have children. All these values are good and should be enhanced.

Dynamics (Change) in Bukusu circumcision.

This part is answered by questions 1,15-17. All the people interviewed and those filled questionnaires felt that the Bukusu traditional circumcision is in dire need of change. This was because of the negative aspects that accompany circumcision. These are discussed under the disadvantages of the Bukusu circumcision.

Disadvantages of Bukusu circumcision

The following things were pointed out as disadvantages of Bukusu circumcision.

1. There is the risk of HIV/AIDS due to the unhygienic ways in which it is done. Initially, one knife could be used to circumcise many candidates. This posed a danger of transferring disease from one person to another in cases where some initiates are infected. Many felt that since Aids is killing many people every effort to stop its spread is necessary and there is no taking risks. Exposing people to life threatening dangers such as HIV/AIDS is un biblical. The ceremony also gives opportunity for immoral activities. This also spreads Aids, apart from being condemned in the Bible.
2. The cost that the relatives have to shoulder for the exercise are very heavy. Thousands of shillings that go into the elaborate traditional ceremonies could be put to better use. Normally at least two cows are slaughtered, one by the father and another one by the uncle. Most of the informants pointed out this problem. Wastefulness and extravagance is against biblical principles.
3. The level of education falls drastically in the region because of the unusually long time spent on the ceremonies. During the circumcision season, school children

leave their studies to join the ceremonies. This is bad stewardship of time and is against the principles of Christianity. Since the celebrations take place at night, it provides an opportunity for immorality and other social evils. There is a lot of witchcraft that take, place during the circumcision season. The traditional surgeons have to perform a lot of rituals before performing the exercise. This involves sacrificing to the ancestors to appease them, to stop them from causing any problems when the candidate is being operated on. They also have to wear some charms to avoid being bewitched by rival circumcissors. In some homes where circumcision is done, sacrifices are made to the ancestors to invoke their blessing and protection on the candidate. All these things are contrary to the biblical teachings.

What is the church doing to contextualize Bukusu circumcision?

This part is answered by questions 18-21 on the questionnaire. Every society has its own culture that provides for essential needs and make it possible for survival in their environment, meeting any challenges they face as a people. They also have religious and philosophical beliefs that provide them with answers to many of their deepest questions. Any changes that are introduced must be done with a lot of caution. This is because not all cultural beliefs and practices are evil and not all of them are good. In this situation, Luzbetak's advice is appropriate. He states, "Anyone accepting the role of uncompromising agent of culture change assumes a grave responsibility, the responsibility of introducing necessary cultural changes in such a way as to avoid as much social and cultural disorganization as possible. Personal conflict associated with culture change must likewise be reduced to a minimum. The prudent well-trained and responsible missionary will, therefore, introduce and direct change not in a

haphazard manner but in a way most in accord with the existing life-way. But to do so will require a thorough acquaintance with culture in general as well as with the particular way of life in which the missionary must labor”(1970, 6). This position is strengthened when we look at the mistakes made by some of the missionaries.

Concerning these, Hiebert states, “ Past missionaries often made the decisions and tended to reject most of the old customs as “Pagan.” Drums, songs, dramas, dances, body decorations, certain types of dress and food, marriage customs, and funeral rites were frequently condemned because they were thought to be directly or indirectly related to traditional religions, hence unacceptable for Christians (1985,184). This can be blamed on their ethnocentrism. They equated the gospel with their own culture and judged other cultural ways as bad. The whole sale rejection of old cultural ways created a cultural void. Sometimes Western customs were imported to fill this the void. This made Christianity to be seen as foreign and the Christian converts were seen as aliens in their own land.

Many Bukusu who have embraced Christianity have tried to contextualize circumcision. Some people invite the members of the church who come and join them in a night of feasting, prayer and fellowship. In the morning the candidate is prayed for by the pastor before he is circumcised by a modern circumcisor from nearby hospitals. These circumcisors use anesthesia and care is taken to ensure that the circumcision tools are not shared with other candidates. Last August 2002, these circumcisors were charging 600 shillings for every person they circumcise and they were on call in case of any complications. For the Bukusu, this concession to modify the traditional rites of passage is a great achievement. However, the greatest success so far in the campaign to contextualize traditional circumcision that circumvents the negative aspects of it is being done by a grouping of churches under the auspices of

the Inter-Christian Fellowship Evangelical Mission. One of my classmates, Robin Mulunda, who has been involved with this group in contextualizing circumcision, was one of my major informants in this. Another person was Pastor Lazarus Wafula of the prophetic church of God, among others. The churches have started a program to initiate boys at only 100 shillings each. A pilot project of this mission is based at Kaptola near Kimilili. Last August, their efforts were very successful. District officers, chiefs and assistant chiefs, village elders and church elders were incorporated into the mission. This was for the purpose of popularizing the project. According to Mr. Francis Makita, the missions assistant director, they expected 500 initiates in the whole month of August but before one week was over, they had received more than double the number of candidates. Apart from those who came from around the Kimilili area, others came from as far as Trans Nzoia, Mount Elgon and Chwele. About 86 boys were being circumcised daily by 4 surgeons who worked in a makeshift clinic for at least 8 hours a day.

At four in the morning, the initiates begin arriving. Church leaders hold prayers to exorcise any evil spirits and dedicate the clinic to God. Every initiate is given Bible lessons after the surgery and they are given two Bibles, one for himself and another for his father. The purpose of the Bible teachings is to inculcate good and acceptable behavior in the young men. This program is also being used as an evangelistic tool to bring the initiates and their relatives to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. There are plans to expand this project to cover other divisions. They plan to do this tactfully so as not to create antagonism. They plan to talk to the people slowly and convince them to change. For any meaningful change to take place, the church has to lead the way and the church is doing just that.

However, this project is not without resistance from some people. The initiates are the biggest obstacles to changing the rituals of circumcision. Some parents no longer believe in the traditional rite of passage but their sons refuse to consider the alternative rites. When advised to opt for the modern method, they are defiant. They fear to be called cowards and they are so eager to prove that they are brave men. Many parents have overcome this by circumcising their boys at an early age before they can resist. But this defeats the whole purpose of Bukusu circumcision, which is a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood.

The traditional circumcisors is the other group that is resistant to the modern method of circumcision and they defend their work so vigorously. Regarding the spread of HIV/AIDS and deaths resulting from the operations, they say that they heat the knife charcoal red then wash it in spirit before letting it to cool. They say that the traditional operations that result in death are brought about by inexperienced circumcisors. However according to Longinus Wanjala, a teacher at Iregi Teachers College (one of my informants), so many of them have accepted to undergo some basic medical training on how to do their work. They are given certificates after the training. This is a major break through because for any success to be realized there is a need to involve them in the exercise. All these changes are helping to overcome the negative aspects that accompany the traditional circumcision.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.

This section will give a brief summary of everything covered in the first three chapters of the research proposal including the findings. The conclusion will include a report of the findings from the interview questions in reference to the research questions. Observations based on findings for further study will be made to provide foresight into researchable work.

The life of a Bukusu man is marked by rites of passage, which include birth, initiation, marriage and death. Circumcision is a very important event among the Bukusu of Western Kenya and it is the most celebrated. Among the Bukusu, just like the case is in many African societies, there is no division between sacred and secular, beliefs, behaviors and institutions as there is in modern societies. This is why studying the rites of passage gives a window into the life of a Bukusu man. This is very crucial for the communication of the Gospel and discipleship work among the Bukusu. This is where missions, cultural anthropology and theology work together to fulfill the great commission. Because of limited time and resources, the researcher could only pick one of these rites of passage. He recommends that research be done on the other. As stated in the purpose statement, the study sought to find out how circumcision among the Bukusu can be contextualized to make it compatible with biblical Christianity. The research has fully addressed the four research questions.

Some of the Christians that were interviewed by the researcher felt that there is no need for the traditional method of circumcision. Their feeling was that it should be done away with completely. This is largely because of the negative aspects of the

practice that are discussed in chapter 4 and religious reasons. There is a danger in this way of thinking. If Christians discard the traditional circumcision, they will miss the positive things in this practice that are important for the society. Apart from this, Hiebert warns us of another danger of suppressing old cultural ways. He says that they don't die but they merely go underground. He states, "It is not uncommon in Africa, for instance, for the people to conduct a formal Christian wedding in the church and then go to the village for the traditional celebrations. In the long run when pagan customs are practiced in secret, they combine with pagan Christian teachings to form christo paganism, a syncretistic mix of Christian and non-Christian beliefs" (1985, 184). The opposite of this position where traditional practices are accepted uncritically is also wrong because we should bear in mind that there are corporate and cultural sins as well as personal sins. This can be found in institutions and practices of a society. The other problem of uncritical contextualization is that it opens the door to syncretism. Many of the African independent churches have this problem. With proper and necessary precautions, positive cultural change is necessary. Luzbetak's sentiments on this are worth noting. He says that the greatest cultural transformation in the history of mankind was brought about by a single missionary, the Lord Jesus Christ. He preached without compromise and his preaching was tantamount to changing the world and its cultures (1970, 6-7). Old cultural practices can be modified to give them explicit Christian meanings. For example Luzbetak states that, Charles Wesley used melodies of popular bar songs but he gave them Christian words. The early Christians used the style of worship found in Jewish synagogues, modified to fit their beliefs. They met on pagan festival days to celebrate Christian events such as the birth of Christ. In time, the pagan meanings were forgotten (Ibid, 189). But in all these, the Bible should be the guide.

The Bukusu believe in the living dead. To them, the dead are not completely cut off from the living but there is continued interaction with them. They warn, punish, help and bless. The living seek counsel, advice, direction and assistance from the living dead. That is why the Bukusu sacrifice a cow on the grave on the grandfather or the great grandfather of the initiate. The dead is invited to participate in the circumcision ceremony. This practice is unscriptural. When David's child died, he told his servants "But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him but he will not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23). David had the hope of joining the child but no hope that the dead child would return to him. Some people interpret 1 Samuel 28 as an example where dead Samuel spoke to the living Saul. This can be seen as an exception rather than a common practice. The practice of speaking with the dead, called necromancy, is forbidden in the scripture.

Deuteronomy 18: 10-12 states "There shall not be found among you anyone that maketh his son to pass through the fire... or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard or a necromancer." This should be avoided by Christians.

What the church is doing is commendable and this is the way forward. However, the educational aspect seems inadequate. The time for this should be prolonged to ground the young people in the word of God and good moral teachings. Christian parents and the church should actively plan forums for social education for the young people. This should be done in homes, youth rallies and youth camps. This is already happening in some places but there is need to intensify them. The ceremony should not be made too expensive. The extravagances that often accompany this ceremony should be avoided. The time for celebration, which is normally at night, gives a chance for immorality and other evils. The celebration should be done during the day. The season of circumcision should be reduced to two weeks to allow the

initiates to attend to studies. Traditional ways like putting mud on the initiate to numb the body and walking naked for a long distance on the way from the river is out dated. There are better ways of doing things. Instead of mud they should use modern anesthesia to numb the body. All these changes will make the circumcision rite of passage a good exercise that promotes a good and godly society. This research has proved the assumptions made in this research to be true. These are: -

- 1.The researcher assumed that there are some elements in the Bukusu practice of circumcision that are outdated and should be done away with.
- 2.The researcher assumed that there are some elements in the Bukusu practice of circumcision that are in conflict with Christianity.
- 3.The researcher assumed that there are some positive things in the Bukusu circumcision that should be maintained and encouraged.

There is so much cultural change that is taking place in the Bukusu society. I doubt if traditional circumcision will survive the wind of change. However, traditional circumcision will be with us for some time before it dies a natural death and becomes history. Because of this changes are necessary to avoid any negative effects it is causing.

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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire.

Circumcision among the Bukusu

Date-----

Name of respondent-----Male---- female-----

Age: a) Under 30 years b) 30 – 35 years c) 35 – 40 years d) Over 40 years

Religion a) ATR b) Protestant C) Catholic D) Any other. Tick.

1. Why did the Bukusu practice circumcision?

2. How do the young people qualify for circumcision?

3. What preparations are made for circumcision? And Who prepares the young people for circumcision?

4. Who are involved in the circumcision ceremony? Who are the participants? Who are the audience Or the by standers?

5. What ceremonies were done during circumcision?

6. Who does the circumcising ?

7. How does he qualify to be a circumcisor?

8. How is the circumcision done?

9. Where do those who have been circumcised stay during recovery?

10. What do they do during this time?

11. Who is in charge of the recovery period?

12. How is this rite of passage completed? (Khukhwalukha)

13. What is expected of their life after graduation?

14. What are the advantages of Bukusu circumcision? Why do you think they are advantages?

15. What are the disadvantages of the Bukusu circumcision?

16. Why do some people take their children to be circumcised in the hospital instead of circumcising them at home using the traditional method?

17. Should the Bukusu traditional circumcision continue to be practiced?

18. What changes should be made in the Bukusu circumcision?

19. How can we improve the Bukusu circumcision?

20. Do you know of any thing being done to improve the Bukusu circumcision?

21. If any Briefly describe what is being done.



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13th March, 2003

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/madam,

RE: RSEARCH WORK

The bearer of this letter, Mr. Gabriel Eric Nyongesa Barasa is a student at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) and is doing research towards the completion of the Master of Arts in Missions. The research is on "Contextualization of Circumcision among the Bukusu.

Any assistance that you can give to Mr. Barasa will be much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Victor B. Cole

Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs

VITA

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