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Bridges of Understanding: Shared Elements of Faith and Practice between Anglicans and Akorino in Kenya

Solomon Waigwa

A recent writer captures the sense of desire that is common among many "African Indigenous Churches" (AICs): the need "to end their isolation and enter into sincere dialog with those outside. . . . [This need] is significant for both AIC self understanding and more accurate AIC understanding by those outside."[1] In the past, differences between AICs and Missionary Planted Churches (MPCs) have been overemphasized at the expense of Christian unity in Africa. AICs have often been described negatively—in terms of what they are not rather than what they are. The Akorino Church in Kenya, for instance, has been described as anti-European and anti-missionary.[2] However, the Akorino did not reject Western culture *in toto* as is often claimed, neither was it anti-missionary *per se*. What they opposed was cultural intrusion and the missionary demand that converts forsake African cultural values in favor of Western ones.

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[1] George Pickens, *African Christian God-Talk: Matthew Ajuoga's Johera Narrative* (Lanham, MD: 2004), 179.

[2] Irving Kaplan and Margarita K. Dobert, *Area Handbook for Kenya* (Washington, DC: 1976), 117. See also Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa: 1450–1950* (Oxford, 1994), 534.

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The purpose of this paper is to encourage mutual understanding between the Akorino Church and the Anglican Church in particular, as well as other MPCs. I write with the hope of initiating a dialog between the Akorino and MPCs which will be of mutual benefit. I begin with an historical overview of the Akorino Church and then highlight some of its practices which can be traced back to the Anglican Church and other MPCs in colonial Kenya.

As a minister in the Akorino Church, I am convinced that AICs will be more successful in their witness if they engage in constructive dialog with MPCs. Such dialog is necessary in order to build bridges of understanding between the two traditions. In particular I hope that a better understanding of the Akorino Church will bring unity, partnership and fellowship among members of both AICs and MPCs. In spite of efforts made by the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) and the Organization of African Indigenous Churches (OAIC), divisions, misunderstandings, and isolation persist, rather than unity, understanding, and fellowship. This has resulted in intolerance and condemnations from both sides. An appreciation of aspects of faith and practice held commonly among the Akorino and individual MPCs will go a long way toward enhancing fellowship and partnership.

Self-examination is vital in the process of dialog. It enlightens all involved.[3] Therefore this paper is written from an emic viewpoint. It is an exercise in self-examination from the Akorino Church as the first stage of dialog. This process is crucial because there has been a denial by many Akorino that many theological ideas and worship practices actually have their origin in the MPCs. The tendency has been to insist that the Holy Spirit revealed all Akorino teachings to the founders.

Conversations between the Akorino and MPCs will need to be held within the parameters of the African context. From that common platform, both traditions might discover shared identities and common elements which, if given proper emphasis, will become a reconciling force.

[3] Pickens, *African Christian God-Talk*, 179.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Akorino Church began as a Christian movement of charismatic preachers called *Arathi*, which means prophets. Its members wear white turbans, the equivalent of the mitre in the Anglican Church, to emphasize the priesthood of all believers. Many of the early Akorino came from Anglican missions in Gĩkũyũ districts and in the Rift Valley province of Kenya in the late 1920s. Anglican missions had grown steadily in those areas since Canon Harry Leakey opened a mission station at Kabete, near Nairobi in 1900. That growth was so fast that by 1910, fewer than ten years after the arrival of the first mission agency, Gĩkũyũland "was dotted with Churches, schools, and clinics."[4] David Barrett, a former Anglican missionary in Kenya, noted that by 1913 the Anglican Church had recorded an enormous growth in the interior of the country which had overcome its slow growth at the strongly Muslim coast: "by 1916, one can speak of a full-scale mass movement into the Churches having begun."[5] A new culture had been introduced, that of the *athomi*, the "readers," as Gĩkũyũ Christians were called.

As Christianity spread, so also was British imperial power being established assertively all over the country. That colonializing process involved the use of force against communities which opposed it.[6] It was harsh and brutal. The Christian power that claimed to be a civilizing agent was seen by Africans as anything but civil. The expeditions "typically involved 'scorched' earth methods—mass confiscation of livestock, destruction of crops and slaughter of humans."[7] The British flexed their military might against all who attempted to defend their territories against imperial

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[4] Marshal S. Clough, *Fighting Two Sides: Kenyan Chiefs and Politicians, 1918–1940* (Boulder, 1990), xx.

[5] David Barrett, et al, *Kenya Churches Handbook: The Development of Kenyan Christianity, 1498–1973* (Kisumu, Kenya: 1973), 168.

[6] Charles Ambler, "What is the World Going to Come to?" in *Revealing Prophets: Prophecy in Eastern African History*, ed. David M. Anderson and Douglas H. Johnson (Athens, OH: 1995), 229.

[7] Dane Keith Kennedy, "A Tale of Two Colonies: The Social Origins and Cultural Consequences of White Settlement in Kenya and Rhodesia, 1890–1939" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1981), 308–09.

encroachment, especially the Agĩkũyũ and the Nandi, in central Kenya and in the Rift Valley respectively.

DISENCHANTMENT AND ENTHRALLMENT

Surprisingly, it was within that context of official harassment by colonial forces that Africans embraced the new faith. No attempt to exonerate the church from being an accomplice to both imperialism and colonialism has been successful. To scholars like John Seely, the culpability of the church is obvious.

> Though Britain was not feverishly acquisitive, Empire became the basis of British power and the guise in which the Anglican Church spread to the non-western world. The Church readily adopted the role of religious establishment to the Empire, seeing itself as the vanguard of historical progress.[8]

Kenya was a part of the British Empire, and British missionaries naturally felt at home in the colony. In all British colonies, "Anglicans consistently sought advantages from proximity to secular power, and contributed informally to the expansion of the Empire."[9] The church often appeared to condone the racist stance of colonialism by regarding non-western people "as children of God in a less developed form."[10]

The silence of most missionaries in the face of colonial hostilities spoke volumes. Many of them assumed a quietist attitude to the political status quo. Bishop Alfred R. Tucker of Uganda underscored that position. "As a general rule," he argued, "it may be laid down that missionaries should hold aloof from interfering in the politics of the country in which their lot is cast."[11]

That nonchalance to the plight of Africans under colonial rule resulted in disenchantment among many converts. Many *athomi* doubted the sincerity of the MPCs. Missionaries and colonists were

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[8] John Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (Chicago and London, 1971), 165.
[9] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 176.
[10] Ibid., 186.
[11] Ibid., 177.

understood as operating out of the same ulterior motive: the subjugation and marginalization of Africans in their homeland. Lands presently owned by some MPCs in the former White Highlands are a reminder of the missions' participation in land grabbing. Elizabeth Isichei captured Agĩkũyũ sentiment when she wrote that "the vast tracts of mission land were often deeply resented: *Gũtirĩ mũthũngũ na mũbĩa*, 'There is no difference between a missionary and a settler,' said the twentieth century Kikuyu."[12]

Many Agĩkũyũ, especially the mission educated *athomi*, opposed not just the foreign cultural invasion that had caused unprecedented divisions among the people, but also the Christian tradition itself. To them, Jesus was just another European and, for that matter, a colonist. They claimed that Christianity was the religion of white people and that it was being used as a sedative to make Africans docile and submissive so that the invading power could steal their land with little or no resistance. The same religious stupor would render Africans incapable of reclaiming their dignity and make them subservient to settler hegemony. Such feelings generated apathy, doubt, and apprehension among Gĩkũyũ converts. Many hardened themselves against what they considered an onslaught against their African identity. The resulting disenchantment led many *athomi* to abandon Christianity altogether. Many returned to Gĩkũyũ traditional religion.[13]

On the other hand, the same disenchantment with imperialism that led some away from Christianity drew many others to a deeper sense of Christian piety. They were enthralled by the message brought by European missionaries. The new faith captured their attention so strongly that going back to traditional religion was out of the question. To them, Christianity was not a European religion anymore. It had become an African faith, for Africans themselves had been instrumental in evangelizing their villages. Without minimizing the role of Western missionaries, one could safely say that

[12] Elizabeth Allo Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (London, 1995), 136.

[13] On traditional religion in Kenya, see Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (Nairobi, 1978 [1938].

the Christianization of sub-Saharan Africa was largely an African initiative.[14] "The Protestant influence in Africa was essentially a self-Christianization and transition into indigenous Churches."[15] Africans themselves bore the message. Missionaries had built the church organizations, but it was their African "assistants" who did most of the preaching in the villages.

AFRICAN INDEPENDENCY

The Christianity that enthralled the *athomi* so deeply was still wrapped in the swaddling clothes of Western culture in which it had been transmitted. Although the new faith offered answers to many of the theological and ethical questions confronting the Agĩkũyũ, and even though it had become so dear to them, there was something alien about it. Notwithstanding that foreignness, the *athomi* embraced the new faith and intended to keep it. In spite of their resolve, however, the feelings of disenchantment and enthrallment which polarized Gĩkũyũ society divided even the *athomi* as well. There were, on the one side, those *athomi* who were unquestioning adherents of the missions. On the other, there were those who doubted the sincerity of the missions and desired a more authentic African Christianity. The former remained in mission churches, while the latter broke away to start what David Barrett has called African independency.[16]

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[14] For the role of African evangelists in Gĩkũyũland in particular see John Karanja, *Founding an African Faith: Kikuyu Anglican Christianity 1900–1945* (Nairobi, 1999).

[15] Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton, 1997), 98.

[16] David Barrett defines independency as "the formation and existence within a tribe or tribal unit, temporarily or permanently, of any organized religious movement with a distinct name and membership, which claims the title Christian in that it acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord, and which has separated by secession from a mission Church or an existing African independent Church, or has been founded outside the mission Churches as a new kind of religious entity under African initiative and leadership"; see David Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi, 1968), 50.

ARATHI EVANGELISTS

The 1920s were a time of crisis in Kenya. Africans suffered from the effects of World War I and from the harsh laws enacted by the colonial government to ensure that Africans provided cheap labor for European farms. In a volatile environment, ridden with cultural conflicts, political tensions, and strenuous social-economic upheavals, the *Arathi* Movement emerged, creating new church structures and formulating a distinctive theology. The movement itself was a synthesis of sorts, a convergence of Christianity and African traditional spirituality. Seeking to salvage and redeem Gĩkũyũ culture which had been disgraced by the missions, *Arathi* evangelists cultivated a homegrown Christianity. Believing they had received the Holy Spirit following repentance and conversion, they traversed Central Kenya with a message that Africans should repent so that God could free them from the yoke of colonialism. From a small group started by Joseph Ng'ang'a in 1926, the church grew numerically as more people accepted the message of repentance and subsequent infilling of the Holy Spirit.[17]

Unlike the MPCs who interpreted the Christian tradition in foreign terms, the *Arathi* articulated the Christian faith in categories that were local and contextual. Long before the birth of liberation theology in Latin America, *Arathi* evangelists in Kenya were interpreting the gospel in liberationist terms. Their theology was shaped by contextual issues affecting Africans at that time.

Since *Arathi* preachers used idioms and metaphors from Gĩkũyũ culture to interpret scripture, the gospel message was heard in terminology relevant to the philosophical and linguistic matrix of their Gĩkũyũ audience. From the point of view of the missions, the *Arathi* Movement was nothing more than a cult, a syncretistic corruption of Christian doctrine. To those who had been converted to Christianity and clung to Gĩkũyũ traditional ways, however, the *Arathi* were a new kind of religion. The *Arathi* toted the white man's holy book and called people to repentance and faith

[17] See Elijah Kinjanjui, "The Rise and Persecution of the Aroti Prophets, 1927–1948," in Barrett, ed. *Kenya Churches Handbook*, 124–28

in Jesus. Unlike the missionaries, the *Arathi* had a compelling message delivered in a language with which Africans could identify. The prophets also had a new emphasis on the holy spirit, a power that "possessed" them and made them appear drunk or even lunatic. No wonder then, that Jomo Kenyatta titled his chapter on the *Arathi*, "the New Religion in East Africa."[18]

From the early 1930s the functional name of the *Arathi* was *Andũ a Ngai*, "people of God." The colonial government preferred the Swahili translation, *Watu wa Mungu*. In either language the term implies that the *Arathi* understood themselves as prophets who relayed God's message to the people. Another name that became common was *Aroti*, which means "dreamers," and indicates the movement's emphasis on dreams ("*iroto*"), visions ("*cioneki*"), and auditions ("*mĩgambo*"). The meaning of the name Akorino is not clear even among the Akorino. There are those who say it has to do with the "interpretation 'roaring prophets' based on an Old Testament reference to the prophets roaring like lions"[19] (Isaiah 5:29–30). This text may be the scriptural basis the *Arathi* used to explain their act of roaring and trembling violently while in spiritual ecstasy.[20] Most Akorino today maintain that the name was formed from the question "*Mũkũri nũũ?*" (Who is the Redeemer?), a popular slogan among early Akorino in their crowd-pulling evangelistic meetings. A preacher would ask the crowd, "*Mũkũri nũũ?*" to which they would respond, "*Nĩ Jesũ*": "it is Jesus."

The *Arathi* believed they were called to pray for a political agenda that would not have been openly voiced in MPCs at that time without evoking the charge of treason. It is said among the Akorino that the Holy Spirit taught them how to pray for Kenya's political independence without exposing themselves to the danger of a serious criminal charge. Since the transition of political power from the hands of foreigners to Africans was God's decree, they did not need to be elaborate about it or the process it would take. Intercession for that process was reduced to only a few words. The leader would say: "*Ngai Baba ũrĩa ũtuĩte nĩgũtuĩke guo,*" (O God our

[18] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (New York, 1962), 259.
[19] Barrett, *Kenya Churches Handbook*, 127.
[20] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 264.

Father, may what you have decreed come to pass.) In turn, the congregation would answer: "*Kwenda-inĩ gwaku, na kwa Roho, na kwa Jesũ Kristo Mũkũri witũ*," (In your will, O God, and of the Holy Spirit, and of Jesus Christ our redeemer).

A second focus of *Arathi* ministry was evangelism. Listeners were called to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ because "the Kingdom of God was at hand." Some missionaries read millenarian overtones into this *Arathi* message, maintaining that the *Arathi* were preparing for the arrival of the kingdom of God on earth which would replace the British colonial government. According to Francis Githieya, Father Chilardi of Ruchu Catholic Parish in Murang'a held this view. In a testimony against the *Arathi*, Chilard said that Moses Thuo, one of the founders of the Akorino, led his followers "in prayers for the deliverance of the Agĩkũyũ people from colonialism."[21] Reading millenarian nuances into *Arathi* messages was a misunderstanding of their exegesis. The "Kingdom of God" was never understood as an independent African self-government. It was a spiritual reality, known to the Akorino as "*ũthamaki wa igũrũ*" (the Kingdom of the heavens) as many of their hymns show.

Such misunderstandings have persisted partly because the Akorino have not been forthcoming in explicating their theology beyond their church walls. To overcome misunderstanding, an appraisal of elements of faith and practice which the Akorino Church shares with other Christian groups is necessary. Let us now turn to some of those elements in the Akorino Church which could be traced back to the missionary enterprise, and especially to Anglicanism.

ELEMENTS OF FAITH AND PRACTICE: CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY IN THE AKORINO CHURCH

A major element in the Akorino Church which can be traced back to the MPCs is the church's stance on Christian orthodoxy. The founders of the Akorino Church did not hold any conference to formulate their position on Christian theology. They preached

[21] Francis Githieya, *The Freedom of the Spirit*, (Atlanta, 1997), 126.

the Christian faith as they had received it from the MPCs without revision or alteration besides articulating it in a language relevant to their people. Although the historic creeds are never recited in the Akorino Church, and although very few pastors can explicate Christian doctrine in the creedal definitions and terminologies of Nicaea and Chalcedon, the tenets of those creeds are believed by the Akorino as "the faith which was once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

When *Arathi* evangelists left the MPCs, they took with them all aspects of the Christian faith that they had learned. Christian doctrines were rephrased using local categories in order to make them contextual and relevant to the faithful. This was vital because without the benefit of Western education, the heavy use of Hellenistic categories in Christian theology as expressed in the MPCs made little sense to African converts.

The Akorino do not recite any creed, but they do sing the same creedal tenets as a declaration of the faith they hold in common with other Christians. For instance, the Trinitarian definition is understood as a relation of love. One Akorino hymn puts it this way:

Ngai na Jesũ na Roho (God [the Father] Jesus, and the Spirit)
Matũũraga mendanĩte, (Abide in love)
Maiyũirũo nĩ ũhoro wama, (They are filled with truth)
Gũtirĩ ũcambagia ũrĩa ũngĩ. (None speaks ill of the other).[22]

Space will not allow a demonstration of how specific aspects of Christian doctrine are rephrased by the Akorino using Gĩkũyũ linguistic categories. It will suffice to say here that Akorino insistence on biblical faith, their sense of evangelistic mission and the obligation to worship should be a starting point from where bridges of understanding may be built to connect the Akorino to the larger fellowship of churches.

AKORINO CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Another aspect of the Akorino Church that speaks of the Anglican provenance of the theology of many of its founders is its

[22] Daudi Ikigu Nderi, *Nyĩmbo Cia Roho Mũtheru* (Kijabe, Kenya: 1977), 14.

system of church government. In an environment where churches with other systems of governance were prevalent, it is interesting to note that the Akorino adopted the Anglican system of three-fold ministry, adding to it an additional order of elders. Anglicans acknowledge three orders of ministry: bishop, priest, and deacon. A bishop in the Akorino Church, known as *mũhoi mũnene*, or presiding priest, is a leading pastor who supervises local churches and ensures that followers receive Christian instruction. As in the Anglican Church, where the bishop is the one called "to guard the faith, unity and discipline of the whole Church,"[23] an Akorino bishop is a teacher of the faith. When the bishop visits the local church he conducts teaching sessions for elders and pastors and lay leaders. Along with teaching basic Christian doctrine, Akorino bishops preside over worship services and church ceremonies. This is quite similar to what happens within Anglicanism where, "whenever present, the bishop is the chief liturgical officer."[24]

The Akorino Church also follows its Anglican progenitor in the holy orders of pastor or priest, and deacon. A pastor or priest is called simply *mũhoi*, or leader of prayers. A pastor is responsible for the daily care of the congregation over which he has been placed by the bishop. As in the Anglican Church, Akorino deacons assist the bishop and priests in ministering to the needs of the faithful and by proclaiming the gospel. The pastor gives each deacon specific duties to perform and supervises such functions. Deacons may be elevated to the office of pastor and assigned to a church as the need arises. Elders, called "*athuuri a gĩtĩ-inĩ*" (elders of the head pew), serve under pastors and deacons. Since all Akorino clergy wear the same white robes, seniority can only be identified by seating arrangement during church functions. Bishops and pastors sit at the front of the church in a space called "*gĩthĩnjĩro*" (the sanctuary).[25] A bishop takes the seat to the

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[23] The Ordinal of The Book of Common Prayer.

[24] Urban T. Holmes III, *What is Anglicanism?* (Wilton, CN: 1982), 53.

[25] The term *gĩthĩnjĩro* is derived from the verb *gũthĩnja*, to slaughter, and therefore literally means "a slaughter place." In the *Agĩkũyũ* Old Testament it translates the Hebrew term *mizbeah*. A *gĩthĩnjĩro*, which is separated from the nave by a three-foot wall with a door at the center, differs from an Anglican sanctuary in that it has no communion table.

furthest right and clergy of lower rank seat to the furthest left. Elders sit on a pew placed along the half wall separating the nave and sanctuary and facing the congregation.

THE BIBLE IN AKORINO THEOLOGY AND WORSHIP

Another element in the Akorino Church which can be traced back to the Anglicans is the use of the Bible. Theologian Adrian Hastings recognized the special place given to the Bible among the Akorino as a characteristic vein of AIC tradition. "The Bible remained somehow central in almost every case even if you could not read it."[26] Akorino clergy carry a white bag (*mondo*) over their shoulders during service, and especially during church ceremonies (*magongona*). Inside the bag is the Gĩkũyũ Bible *Ibuku Rĩa Ngai*, the Akorino hymnal, *Nyĩmbo Cia Roho Mũtheru*, the Anglican hymnal, *Nyĩmbo Cia Kũinĩra Ngai*, and *Ibuku rĩa Thaara*, the Gĩkũyũ version of The Book of Common Prayer. Another item in the clerical bag is a hand-written enchiridion called "*kobi*" (copy), a little concordance arranged into topical headings with lists of Bible verses that speak on each topic. Pastors write their own *kobi* in small address books or even expired pocket diaries. While *kobi* is essential for Akorino pastors and church workers, most adults will usually own one as well.

During church ceremonies, an ordained minister would be inadequately dressed if he did not wear a clerical bag over his priestly vestments. The bag, strapped over the right shoulder is said to be "hung over the heart" (*gũcuuria mondo ngoro*), signifying the solemnity with which the clergy undertake the function at hand. Since the bag contains the books of doctrine and practice of the Akorino community, it is handled with honor and reverence.

The central place which "*kiugo*" (the preached word), takes in Akorino worship is reminiscent of the Anglican theology of the founders of the Akorino Church. Anglican missions in Kenya were of the evangelical variety. The missionaries underscored the ministry of the preached word. Akorino leaders who had

[26] Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa* (Oxford, 1994), 533.

been introduced to Christianity by those missions brought to the Akorino Church that Anglican element of worship. Preachers like Jason Kanini of Kangema in Mũrang'a district emphasized the significance that *kiugo* should be given at any gathering of the faithful. There cannot be worship without a reading of the scriptures and an exhortation, however short.

The development of Akorino theology was influenced by that high place given to the ministry of the preached word. With the publication of the Gĩkũyũ Bible in 1926, *Arathi* founders retreated from daily activities to devote themselves to the study of scripture at the beginning of their respective ministries. Francis Githieya has observed that "early *Arathi* did not ground their teachings on pre-existing Gĩkũyũ beliefs or on the existing structures and beliefs of missions but on the newly translated Gĩkũyũ versions of the Christian scriptures."[27] In spite of the apparent differences between the practices of the MPCs and those of the Akorino, it is safe to argue that Akorino founders brought with them a spiritual consciousness that reflects their Christian nurture as neophytes of Anglican missions. Spiritualities of their parent MPCs were imbedded into the new African expression of Christianity.

The Bible is regarded as the final authority in matters of faith and practice. Before hearing a sermon, Akorino worshippers sing that "*mbuku ya Ngai nĩ theru, ĩndeithagia gũthinga*" (the book of God is Holy, it helps me to be holy), as a confession to the effect that the Bible is the accepted norm for Christian living and the plumb line by which to construct doctrine. It is the mirror in which Christians check themselves and align with its precepts. *Arathi* Christians saw in the Holy Bible a striking semblance between their traditional customs and those of the communities which produced it. The values of their traditional society and religion seemed to be replicated and even sanctioned in the Bible, while those taught by the missionaries seemed to be far removed from those they saw witnessed in the book of God.

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[27] Francis Githieya, "The Church of the Holy Spirit," in *East African Expressions of Christianity,* ed. Thomas Spear and Isaria N. Kimambo (Athens, OH: 1999), 233

The supremacy of the Bible is evident in the Akorino relationship with all aspects of life, especially with African culture. Githieya underscored this supremacy of the Bible over culture among the early *Arathi* particularly in regard to their selective acceptance of aspects of African traditional religion and culture. He noted that Joseph Ng'ang'a, the founder of the *Arathi* movement, preached against many Western as well as African beliefs and practices which he believed to be contrary to the teachings of the Christian faith.

> Particularly, he rejected Agĩkũyũ practice of ritual cleansing (*gũtahĩkio*) and sacrifices to the ancestors. He also taught against Western medicine, way of dressing, food, all which he believed were heathen, while selectively stressing the importance of scripture, prayer, personal holiness, and above all, the presence of the Holy Spirit for the believer.[28]

In a context where there were no written devotional materials, listening and hearing the word read out or sung became a significant aspect of worship. Since then, the public reading of the Bible has become a vital aspect of Akorino life. A worship event starts with a call to worship in the form of a song of exhortation, followed by a short opening prayer. After this, there is the reading of "*mũhari wa Ibuku Ria Ngai*" (a line from the book of God), followed by a brief exposition. The group may then sing another hymn, or several, whose themes are based on the text just expositied to "*gũkindira ciugo*" (to affirm or emphasize the word). The worship exercise is concluded with a prayer asking God to help the faithful to be true to the word they heard.

One of the verses I learned early in life from hearing it read repeatedly in Akorino Church services is Ecclesiastes 5:1. It is used by the Akorino to encapsulate the idea of listening to the reading of the Bible as an act of worship. Worshippers are exhorted to guard their steps as they approach the sanctuary. "Go near to listen, rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong." Since listening to the reading of scripture is contrasted with "the sacrifice of fools," the Akorino believe that

[28] Githieya, *Freedom of the Spirit*, 125.

participatory listening of the read word is by inference, "the sacrifice of the wise."

Using the Bible from the mission churches, the *Arathi* instituted a homegrown Christianity that used local metaphors. The contextual nature of *Arathi* hermeneutics cannot be sufficiently addressed here. It remains a virgin topic deserving its own treatment.[29] In the present paper, it will suffice it to say that *Arathi* hermeneutics addressed everyday issues facing Africans at that time: the issue of loss of land to European settlers, forced labor, racism, classism, restriction of movement by "pass" laws, oppressive taxation without representation, the arrogance of British colonial officers and sometimes missionary agents, and the quest for freedom for the African people. For the first time, the gospel was being articulated by Africans themselves in ways that were contextual and relevant to their socio-political and economic context.

AKORINO USE OF THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

Although the *Ibuku Rĩa Thara*, the Gĩkũyũ version of The Book of Common Prayer, is an item found in the Akorino minister's bag, the Akorino do not use the prayer book for regular worship because it does not allow for spontaneous expressions of prayer which the innovative genius of African spirituality prefers. Furthermore, some of its expressions are considered to be too foreign. Those prayers obviously emerged within the specific context of Western culture and respond to equally specific needs of the same. When the use of such collects and prayers was transferred to Africa without any attempt to contextualize them, they were often perceived as alien.

Many Africans found worship in the MPCs too dry because it was highly intellectualized. That was because, as Peter Craig-Wild has pointed out, the Reformation and the Enlightenment were the

[29] While Nahashon W. Ndung'u has provided a fine treatment of the use of the Bible in the Akorino Church in his "The Role of the Bible in the Rise of African Instituted Churches: The Case of the Akurinu Churches in Kenya," in *Bible in Africa: Transactions Trajectories and Trends*, ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Leiden, 2000), 236–47. The actual nature of Akorino hermeneutics has not been studied yet.

soil in which mission churches were rooted and the air that they had breathed. "They were word-based times and have generated a word-based Church with a word-obsessed worship."[30] Words become empty ideas if they are devoid of action. The gospel, as Paul described it, is not found in mere "enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power" (1 Cor. 2:4). It is action that gives power to words. Craig-Wild laments that a word-obsessed worship without a demonstration of the presence of the Holy Spirit "leaves us dissatisfied, and we are not sure why."[31]

If *Ibuku Rĩa Thara* is not particularly helpful in regular Akorino worship, it is esteemed as very valuable in other church ceremonies like weddings. It provides a sequential order which ensures that significant aspects of the service are not overlooked as they might be in a spontaneous context. According to D. E. Harrison and Michael Sansom, the prayer book offers a wedding service where the marriage is "cerebrated with the Church as witness and the Church's blessing added."[32] It is these aspects of the solemnization of holy matrimony in *Ibuku Rĩa Thara* that have attracted the Akorino to its use. The church's witness of the marriage underscores the African understanding of a marriage as a social affair. The church as a community of faith commits itself to support the couple in their task of building a Christian family. The prayer book also invites the Church to bless the marriage. Other services where the Akorino use *Ibuku Rĩa Thara* include ordination and funerals.

AKORINO USE OF THE ANGLICAN HYMN BOOK

Another element of the Akorino Church that points to its connection to the Anglican Church is the use of the familiar *Nyĩmbo Cia Kũinĩra Ngai* published by the Anglican Church in Kenya. The

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[30] Peter Craig-Wild, *Roots of Transformation: Making Worship Work* (London, 2002), 5.

[31] Craig-Wild, *Roots of Transformation*, ix.

[32] D. E. William Harrison and Michael C. Sansom, *Worship in the Church of England.* (London, 1982), 110.

Akorino refer to the Anglican Hymnal as *Nyĩmbo Cia Atũmwo* (Hymns of the Apostles), while the Akorino hymnal is called *Nyĩmbo Cia Roho Mũtheru* (Songs of the Holy Spirit).

The Anglican hymnal is another item found in the white clerical bag which Akorino clergy carry over their shoulders during church ceremonies. The Akorino have indigenized traditional Christian hymns from the Anglican hymnal by using typical African tunes and melodies. Consequently, the Anglican hymnal features prominently in Akorino worship. In an environment where most other Christian services in Kenya have become more contemporary and use newer choruses, most of which are direct translations of those sung in American and English charismatic churches, the use of traditional Christian hymns is gradually diminishing. Joseph Wandera has noted this departure of Anglican congregations in Kenya from the use of traditional Christian hymns. In a service he attended at St. Paul's University in Limuru Kenya, Wandera witnessed congregational singing that "was different from the traditional Hymns that would normally be sung in a traditional Anglican Church."[33] While the Anglican hymnal is being used in fewer contemporary Anglican settings, the Akorino have maintained its significance in their worship. The Anglican hymnal enjoys significance equal to the Akorino's own hymnal, *Nyĩmbo Cia Roho Mũtheru.*

Traditional hymns in MPCs are sung to typical European tunes which evoke a foreignness that fails to touch the African soul. The singing of traditional Christian hymns in typical African tunes and melodies in Akorino worship reaches deep into the African psyche causing the hearer to draw near and listen to the message. That is why, perhaps, Akorino worship tunes have dominated the gospel music industry in Kenya and have even been adopted by musicians who are not themselves Akorino. Drums and other percussive instruments, used only in Akorino Churches just a few decades ago, have now become common in MPCs as well.

[33] Joseph Wandera, "Being Anglican In a Liturgically Ecumenical Setting," available at http://www.stpaulslimuru.ac.ke/research/research.htm.

CONCLUSION

Intolerant attitudes towards the Akorino and other AICs arise when critics zero in on external elements like religious dress and Old Testament practices like ritual cleansing and dietary laws which are peculiar to many indigenous churches. When uniquely Akorino elements are stressed by members of the church, fellowship with MPCs become a mirage. This paper has invited both the Akorino and MPCs to consider elements which the Akorino have in common with other Christians, especially Anglicans. Most of the early Akorino had been introduced to the Christian faith in Anglican missions and other MPCs. The disenchantment that led some away from Christianity drew the founders of Akorino Church into a deep, authentically African Christian spirituality which was a convergence of Christianity as taught by MPCs and African traditional spirituality.

We have also observed that Akorino insistence on Christian orthodoxy can be traced back to MPCs. Their articulation of biblical faith and their deep sense of evangelistic mission are significant. Another common element that speaks of the Akorino as a progeny of MPCs is their ecclesiastical offices, preserving the three-fold order but added an office of elder. The Akorino Church has also developed a strictly Christian identity in its high regard of the Bible as manual for faith and practice. The Akorino can use documents from the Anglican Church, particularly The Book of Common Prayer, albeit in a limited manner. The important role played by *Nyĩmbo Cia Kũinĩra Ngai*, the Anglican hymn book, in Akorino worship is indicative of the significant connection between the two traditions that needs to be further explored for better understanding and fellowship.

The *modus operandi* of Akorino Christian communities in their task of mission and worship is underpinned by their understanding of Christian doctrine and their self-understanding as *Watu wa Mungu*, people of God. A continuum of dialog will enlarge the Akorino understanding of what it is to be people of God, as they include Anglicans and other Christians in that definition. It will also extend Anglican horizons to include members of the Akorino Church and other AICs as partakers of "our common salvation" (Jude 3).