

## **A Clash of Worldviews: Towards an Assessment of its Impact on Discipleship among Evangelical Christians in the Tharaka Community of Kenya.**

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### ***Abstract***

*The prevalence of Tharaka's traditional worldview among Tharaka community continues to reflect a complex dynamic of culture and Christianity. The Tharaka community has maintained a deeply rooted spiritual framework that has withstood the test of time in the emergence and spread of evangelism more than a century ago. This worldview unleashes a profound paradox, challenging the essence of Christianity as it is in many African communities. The Tharaka worldview is inconsistent with the Evangelical faith or the Evangelical Christian worldview. For instance, professing Tharaka Christians consult diviners for help or a witch to harm perceived enemies. Secretly this is for an outward impression of loyalty and faithfulness. In addition, it is the Christian faith, or to impress Church leadership. Evangelicals oppose and condemn such oscillating between the Christian and traditional worldviews because of its impact on discipleship. This study revealed that the unholy alliance of the two worldviews promotes nominal Christianity, produces inconsistent Christian faith, leads to syncretism, demeans the means of grace, leads to poor evangelism, undermines the place of Jesus Christ in redemptive work, and produces imbalanced theology. The study employed a qualitative research methodology, utilizing interviews, focus groups, and literature reviews to understand the paradoxical interplay between faith and traditional beliefs. Reflecting on the theories of the Flaw of the Excluded Middle and Lamin Sanneh's translatability principle, the paper argues that the persistence of Tharaka's traditional worldview affirms that evangelicals find relevance in the traditional worldview. The study advises that for the gospel to speak to the cultural reality and for the African Church to contribute her influence in world Christianity like the early Church, the gospel must be presented at the level of the Tharaka traditional worldview, ensuring a more authentic and transformative Christian experience.*

**Keywords:** *Worldview, Discipleship, Evangelicals, Tharaka, Traditional.*

## **Introduction**

The persistence of traditional worldviews within modern religious practices is a profound paradox that challenges the very fabric of faith. The Tharaka community experiences this paradox particularly as the enduring influence of their indigenous beliefs continues to shape and, at times, undermine Christian discipleship. Like in many other African communities, the traditional African worldview has remained largely intact among the Tharaka community for more than a century after the gospel's introduction to the African continent. The recent resurgence of bizarre cultural practices in Central Kenya and elsewhere in Africa has risen to haunt the missionaries' wholesale condemnation and repudiation of the African worldview in their evangelization of Africa. This paper posits that the theory of the flaw of the excluded middle has contributed to the persistence of the Tharaka traditional worldview, rendering the Christian faith less effective in contributing to world Christianity and public discourse. By exploring the Tharaka community's spiritual landscape, this study seeks to unravel the complex interplay between traditional beliefs and evangelical Christianity, revealing the tensions and potential resolutions lying at the heart of this ongoing struggle.

According to Dixon et al. (2016), the ideal foundation for conducting research is the presence of a problem the study aims to address. In the case of Christian discipleship among evangelicals in Tharaka, challenges have arisen due to the persistence of certain traditional worldview elements conflict with the evangelical worldview. Despite the recent translation of the Old and New Testaments into the Tharaka language and the use of the mother tongue in worship—both significant advances for the growth of faith—the benefits of these efforts must be safeguarded. Hartman (2022) explains that Theologians such as Kwame Bediako posit that African cultures should serve as the foundation for constructing an indigenous African Christianity. His argument alludes to the significant influence culture has on people. Similarly, Sanneh's concept of translatability advocates for the gospel's translation to resonate with the local worldview by bridging the gap between Christianity and traditional beliefs (Sanneh, 1990). Christianity is inherently translatable, as it is not bound to a single language, culture, or worldview. Therefore, African cultures can reshape and reinterpret the faith in ways that are authentic to their worldview,

making Christianity more accessible and relevant globally. Despite these studies and enriched awareness, the problem persists.

Investigating the impact of adhering to conflicting aspects of the traditional worldview on Christian discipleship shows the gravity of the issue and underscores the urgency of addressing it. This is especially important because, for evangelicals, disciple making is a command to follow with significant implications for both present and future generations. This explains the study's focus on examining the consequences of evangelicals maintaining elements of their traditional worldview that contradict their faith to encourage them to engage with Christian discipleship at the worldview level, where belief systems are deeply rooted.

The Tharaka people form part of the more extensive Ameru community, who live further to the east and lower parts of Mt. Kenya. As of the last census, they numbered 393,177 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Missionaries brought Christianity and evangelized to the Tharaka community in the 1940s (Ndunjo, 2018). Even though both Protestants and Catholics have a robust presence in Tharaka, the evangelicals, which this paper focuses on, follow closely, accounting for 20.4% of the entire Christian community (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Central to their identity is religion, which permeates every aspect of Tharaka's life. From rites of passage to agricultural activities, shaping their worldview, and guiding their interpretations of daily events, religion plays a significant role (Ndunjo et al., 2018). This intricate tapestry of spirituality ensures that no aspect of life remains secular, as every action and experience is filtered through a religious lens (Ferdinando, 2012).

Christianity's emergence and spread by Western missionaries did not occur in a cultural vacuum; instead, it entered a society deeply rooted in its indigenous religious framework (Ndunjo, 2018; Gitonga, 2008). However, unlike the early disciples, particularly Paul, who skillfully integrated certain cultural practices to make the gospel accessible without disparaging local traditions, Western missionaries often demanded the complete abandonment of traditional beliefs and practices as a prerequisite for genuine conversion (Mugambi, 1989). Hill and Hill (2008) assert that early disciples were selective in integrating cultural practices, but one should evaluate whether these scholars adequately identified scriptural support for this claim. The apostles, especially Paul, utilized cultural categories to explain the gospel's mysteries. They recognized the value of

engaging with familiar cultural frameworks as a means of effective evangelism. In Acts 17:21-24, Paul built on the religious consciousness of the Athenians (having many gods, including one with no name) by infusing them with the richness of the gospel. Sanneh's principle of the translatability of the gospel suggests that the early Church allowed the gospel for incarnation within diverse cultures, discarding only those aspects deemed antithetical to the Christian faith (Hill & Hill, 2008). Critically, Western missionary approaches failed to embody this nuanced understanding, instead enforcing a rigid framework that often alienated indigenous cultures.

The Western missionaries' approach in Africa led many to continue holding on to the Christian faith while secretly practicing their traditional faith (Gitonga, 2008). Some continued to keep protective medicine as charms or have some incisions made on their body to protect them from malicious people such as witches and wizards. Others continue to visit diviners and medicine men, especially during a crisis, to know the source of their problems, which they believe is due to human or divine influences (Ndunjo, 2018; Gitonga, 2008). However, Christians in other parts of the world, including members of the Orthodox Church, may use protective charms made by their priests (Badone, 1990). Furthermore, many Christians wear symbols like the crucifix or pray through the rosary as acts of faith, and certain incantations from the Psalms used for protection against enemies. These practices raise broader questions about the boundary between cultural traditions and Christian faith, illustrating the complexity of distinguishing between spiritual protection and superstition across different Christian communities.

This situation prevails even though evangelicals in Tharaka oppose it (Ndunjo, 2008). The evangelicals urge their members to reject any aspect of their traditional worldview that is discordant with their faith (Ndunjo, 2018). The Evangelicals recognize the supremacy of Scripture in its authority in matters of faith and practice, reliability, inerrant, non-contradiction, and universality" (Kigame, 2018). Therefore, it can speak to all cultures with supreme authority.

The rigid missionary approach fomented syncretism, where many Tharaka Christians maintained dual allegiances by secretly adhering to ancestral customs alongside their Christian faith (Gitonga, 2008; Ndunjo, 2018). Despite evangelical efforts to uphold the supremacy of Scripture and check traditional worldviews, the enduring influence of Tharaka traditions continues to challenge and shape Christian discipleship within the community. Evangelicals believe that the Bible can speak

to all cultures with supreme authority. This study examines the impact of the persistent Tharaka's traditional worldview on Christian discipleship, elucidating the dissonance that emerges when indigenous beliefs clash with evangelical faith

### **1.0 Tharaka's Traditional Worldview**

Every community exhibits a distinct way of life that distinguishes it from others. This distinctiveness is rooted in a people's culture, which defines their identity. When two or more cultures come into contact, certain aspects of either culture assimilate while others resist change. The worldview is the key element that remains resistant to change. It represents a collection of values, attitudes, and beliefs that an individual or society holds firmly.

An individual's worldview develops from religious beliefs (Ndunjo, 2018). Worldview answers the most crucial questions of human concern—questions of human life's origin, purpose, and destiny (Ndunjo, 2018). Mathema (2007) further notes that worldview is crucial as it determines the values a person pursues, guards, and preserves to guide decision-making and influence behavior. The Tharaka traditional Worldview profoundly influences the lives and practices of the Tharaka people. This paper will examine several aspects of the Tharaka Worldview.

First, the Tharaka community believes in the existence of the spirit world. This world hosts a myriad of spirit beings. They equate shadows and images seen at night to spirits (Ndunjo, 2018). When one dies, they enter the world of spirits; some occupy specific places like forests and rivers. For this reason, the Tharaka community treats these places with awe, and interfering with such sites demands a sacrifice (Ndunjo, 2018). John Mbiti describes such spirits as natural spirits (Mbiti, 1975). Interestingly, the Bible also inspires belief in the existence of spirits and the spirit world, providing a convergence point between the Tharaka and Biblical worldviews. Both worldviews recognize the presence of unseen spiritual forces that can influence the physical world. However, the Bible presents these spirits within a framework that God governs, recognizing spirits as part of a larger cosmic battle between good and evil under the ultimate authority of God. This shared belief in the spirit world offers an opportunity for deeper theological dialogue, as Christianity can engage with indigenous understandings while reinterpreting them within a Biblical framework.

Second, the Tharaka community believes in human spirits that were, at one time, ordinary people but are now dead (Ndunjo, 2018). These spirits can appear to the living at will or with interventions from religious specialists such as diviners (*Muringi wa mbugu*) (Ndunjo, 2018). The said spirits are thought to communicate with the living through dreams and visions, and the living can consult them for help or guidance (Ndunjo, 2018). Subsequently, individuals must obey the messages from these spirit beings, as defiance can result in calamity for those who ignore them.

The third worldview aspect is the belief in mystical power manifested in magic, sorcery, witchcraft, and divination. In Tharaka, human body parts such as nails, hair, and clothes can transmit mystical powers (Ndunjo, 2018). As a result, it is taboo for one to pick things along the road as they may be infused with mystical power and cause harm to the one who picks them. Additionally, some members use mystical powers to stupefy thieves, attract game to hunters, bring prosperity, or offer protection (Ndunjo, 2018).

Fourth, Tharaka communities believe in magic. They regard white magic as good and can be used to protect one against real or imagined enemies who may use witchcraft or sorcery to destroy them or their property. Diviners (Aringi Mbugu) and medicine men (Agao) use white magic for the good of the community. Witches and sorcerers, on the other hand, use evil magic to harm. There is also belief in the mystical power of words; Words are associated with the power to bless or curse. The words become effective from people with authority, such as parents, elders, or religious specialists.

Fifth, the Tharaka people have a distinctive understanding of suffering. According to their beliefs, suffering is not an accident and does not simply occur; it has a cause. They often say *Tibwamana* (meaning it is not without a cause), a common phrase that aptly captures this belief (Ndunjo, 2018). Suffering is from an agent, which can be a spirit being such as an ancestor, or a human being such as a witch or sorcerer. Consequently, serious measures are necessary to find out the cause of the suffering by consulting a diviner (Ndunjo, 2018), and a way is sought to restore normalcy.

Lastly, the Tharaka people hold to an anthropocentric worldview where religious cosmology is utilitarian, existing to serve the interest of man. God is sought to benefit the family, clan, or community. People only turn to God in need, seeking blessings and favor. When everything is going well, God is left undisturbed. This approach contrasts with the missionaries' theocentric

worldview, which promotes a God-centered relationship in which the pursuit of worship is for God's benevolence.

## **2.0 The Impact of Persistence of Tharaka Traditional Worldview on Christian Discipleship**

From our discussion, we have noted that evangelicals in Tharaka, and by extension in Africa, continue to hold on to African traditional worldviews considered incompatible with the biblical faith. This is so despite evangelicals' persistent condemnation of such practices. The following section examines the implications of this practice to the quest for Christian discipleship.

The study used a descriptive survey research design with focus group discussions and face-to-face interviews as the data collection method. The evangelical congregations in Tharaka involved in this study were the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Methodist Church in Kenya, Anglican Church in Kenya, African Inland Church, Full Gospel Churches of Kenya, Redeemed Gospel Church, and East Africa Pentecostal Church. The study used stratified random sampling to obtain a representative sample of 357 church members and 20 pastors. The study adopted qualitative and quantitative analysis approaches.

### **2.1 Promotion of Nominal Christianity**

Persistent traditional Tharaka worldview has resulted in the growth of nominal Christianity. Data from 321 respondents revealed that 180 participants (56%) believe that Christians who consult diviners and medicine men gradually lose seriousness in their faith and disobey God's commands. Similarly, 135 participants (42%) show that people may eventually become mere churchgoers without active participation in church ministries. Additionally, 21% of the participants noted that the believers disregard God's word in life and practice, while 26% attend Sunday service but fail to practice what they learn. Moreover, 116 participants (36%) reported that some openly rebel against Christian principles while still professing Christianity. In conclusion, people who consult traditional religious specialists demonstrate weak and nominal Christianity with no visible distinction from unbelievers.

Focus group discussions and face-to-face interviews expressed similar views. Muthee (01:20:10:2017) reported that when believers reverted to seeking help from diviners and medicine

men because of their view of causation, they displayed several characteristics. They lose their sense of commitment to the things of God, as they no longer get involved in serving God. They may be perennially late for Sunday service or may not attend at all, become passive in Church, become disinterested in the work of God, are no longer interested in prayer, display lack of trust in God, and become uncomfortable when in the company of believers. If the sin is not confessed, one eventually loses any relationship with Jesus Christ and merely becomes a Christian by name and not practice (Muthee 01:20:10:2017). Nominal Christians do not demonstrate that Christ is the Lord or master of their lives, as they do not submit to his authority (Muthengi FGD: 20:08:2017).

Our study aligns with existing research on the resurgence of traditional occult practices, explicitly emphasizing the Tharaka community in Kenya. This examination of the influence of the distinct Tharaka traditional worldview on evangelism highlights a recurring challenge: the clash between indigenous worldviews and the preservation of the gospel's authenticity. Adopting Bediako's framework for Christianity offers a potential solution to this conflict, allowing for the integration of African cultural identities without compromising the integrity of the gospel. Kimathi (2024) opines that some individuals who engage in occult practices reject the message of salvation and actively oppose anything related to God. Those involved in such practices often struggle to maintain faith in God, experiencing doubts and sometimes even gravitating towards cults or sects. Understanding and interpreting the Bible becomes challenging for them, as with prayers. Following interactions with occult practitioners, individuals may find it challenging to participate in spiritual matters or cultivate a meaningful relationship with God. Depending on the extent of their involvement, they may even become antagonistic towards the Church and its members, seeking to undermine them.

O'Donovan (2000) identifies many nominal Christians in the Church of Africa today, attributing this to unclear gospel preaching and inadequate evangelical efforts (Edre, 2015). Ndunjo et al. (2018) further argue that such a failure has contributed to the persistence of the Tharaka worldview among evangelicals in Tharaka. They display an external change, such as going to service on Sunday or having a Christian name, but have no evidence of an internal transformation that affects their whole being (Kunhiyop, 2006). As a result, they resolutely hold on to deep-seated traditional beliefs and practices as their hearts are unconverted (Kunhiyop, 2008). Kunhiyop (2012) thus



agrees with the respondents that when professing Christians continue sticking to worldviews that conflict with biblical Christianity, they demonstrate that they are nominal Christians.

The above clearly illustrates that holding on to aspects of African traditional worldview that conflict with the Christian faith promotes nominal Christianity. Such individuals continue to profess Christians yet do not live according to the Christian ideals required of a disciple of Jesus. Acts 19:19 indicates that at Ephesus, many people involved in magic brought the items of their art to be burnt as a clear indication that they had repented and were willing to follow Jesus. Nominal Christians, however, have no evidence of repentance. The prevalence of nominal Christianity means that the quality of Christianity is weak and below the standard, the New Testament sets. Ndunjo (2018) adds that nominal Christianity results in a weakened quality of faith, passed to future generations. Therefore, even though the church population may increase, members' spiritual vitality remains compromised. Therefore, evangelical denominations in Africa must emphasize biblical discipleship and repentance, emphasizing the example Jesus Christ set for Christians.

Nominal Christianity significantly affects ministry as Christians should be the light and salt of the world, demonstrate integrity, and positively influence others (Matthew 5:13-16). Maintaining business integrity among Christians is possible if their worldview reflects the biblical view of reality. Conversely, nominal Christians lack this, failing to reflect the biblical view of reality in their personal and professional lives. A renewed understanding of the gospel's impact is essential for Christians to influence various societal institutions positively.

## **2.2 Increase in Inconsistent Christians**

A hallmark of Christian discipleship is a consistent relationship with Jesus Christ as the true vine (John 15). Believing and practicing African traditional cosmology that conflicts with the Christian faith causes inconsistencies in a Christian's walk with God. Ndunjo (2018) explains that inconsistent Christians with firmly held traditional views of causation may abandon their faith during suffering, opting for divination for quick solutions. This inconsistency increases when believers, feeling abandoned by God, seek alternatives but return to Christ only when their situation improves.

Mwangangi (FGD: 27:08:2017) highlights that believers who attribute suffering to spiritual or human agents often exhibit poor or weak faith. They only follow Jesus when convenient for them and show genuine faith during favorable conditions but falter in adversity. As Ndunjo (2018) highlights, some evangelicals also turn to God solely in times of need, lacking a consistent pursuit of God throughout their lives.

While it may be true that some professing Christians may fall away from the faith during times of suffering due to thinking God is not concerned, this is not necessarily the case. Sometimes, difficulties may cause people to seek God more. In addition, some people may follow God more when He responds to their needs. However, what stands out is the fact that it is possible for those who maintain the African view of causation and the anthropocentric worldview to seek help from diviners and medicine men rather than wait for God. When they do that, they do not display a supreme love for Jesus Christ but demonstrate their unwillingness to carry the cross and fail to continue abiding in the Lord Jesus Christ - all requirements of Christian discipleship (Ndunjo, 2018).

The situation among some evangelicals in Africa may indicate a failure of the evangelicals to help believers first embrace the biblical theodicy that recognizes God's sovereignty over the believer even in suffering. Secondly, evangelicals seemingly have failed to help believers embrace a theocentric approach to God. The view of causation addresses itself to the present crisis of this life, and when evangelicals in Africa do not answer the cause of the present crisis, believers will thus continue reverting to aspects of the African traditional worldview. This follows the theory of the flaw of the excluded middle, which maintains that Western missionaries ignored the middle zone, comprising spirits, demons, and powers, when preaching the gospel to cultures that emphasize these zones (Anyanwe, 2004; Hiebert, 1982). The theory of the Flaw of the Excluded Middle, as missionary anthropologist Paul Hiebert asserts, identifies a critical gap in Western theological framework when engaging with non-Western cultures. It posits that Western Christianity tends to ignore spiritual and supernatural concerns—such as spirits, ancestors, and mystical powers—key to many non-Western worldviews. As a result, converts from such cultures may feel compelled to revert to traditional practices to address these concerns, leading to syncretism and dual allegiances (Ntarangwi, 2023). By acknowledging the existing gap, the theory

calls for a more holistic approach to evangelism that resonates with these spiritual realities, allowing Christianity to speak more fully to the cultural context. A biblical perspective on these issues may address the challenge of believers who will follow Christ only when convenient.

This oversight can hinder effective engagement with non-Western worldviews, such as those in Tharaka, where spiritual and everyday life are intertwined. Lamin Sanneh's translatability theory emphasizes the importance of translating concepts in a way that resonates with the local worldview, bridging the gap between the gospel and indigenous beliefs. By addressing the excluded middle, translatability ensures that the Christian message engages deeply with the cultural and spiritual realities of the people.

### **2.3 Syncretism**

The persistence of Tharaka's traditional worldview manifests in syncretism with believers practicing dual allegiance - practicing the Christian faith alongside traditional African religion. From the interview, 241 participants (75.2%) affirmed that the persistence of Tharaka's traditional worldview promotes syncretism. In syncretism, believers may seek help from the Christian faith and traditional powers, attempting to benefit from whichever source proves effective. This dual allegiance mirrors the scenario in 1 Kings 18, where Elijah challenged the Israelites to choose between God and Baal. Mwenda (01:13:11:2017) observed that some believers consult diviners for health issues while also seeking pastoral prayer, demonstrating dual allegiance in spiritual matters. Additionally, some individuals use charms for protection while praying for divine intervention (Mwenda 01:13:11:2017).

Syncretism affects congregants and church leaders alike. Mutembei (FGD: 20:08:2017) opined that some pastors visited religious specialists to seek power to draw crowds while, at the same time, calling on the name of Jesus Christ. This pseudo-power may enable the ministers to move in what looks like a word of knowledge. This, coupled with their purported miracles, draws crowds (Mutembei: FGD: 20:08:2017). Kiremu (2009) makes a similar observation when he notes that some Christians in the healing ministry leverage magical powers with the help of the magicians.

It is indisputable that some ministers can perform miracles with the help of magical powers. These incidents as recorded in the Bible, for example, Exodus 7:11-12, 22:8:7. Jesus said that not all those who preach in his name and perform miracles are his disciples (Matthew 7:21-23). Evangelicals consequently do not support the use of magic to access power. The Holy Spirit is legitimately the source of a minister's power: He enables the gospel's preaching with conviction and power (Acts 1:8). Authentic power through the Holy Spirit is paramount in gospel proclamation rather than power from magic.

Gitonga (FGD: 27:08:2017) adds that the danger with syncretism is that disciples of Jesus Christ believe that their ancestors can communicate with them and that they are obligated to obey the message communicated. This makes them susceptible to deception. The biblical truth affirms the impossibility of the dead appearing to the living and communicating with them.

Commenting on this, O'Donovan (1992) notes that the dead are not free to leave their abode and visit the world of the living. From the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31, it is evident that the Bible does not allow such communication. Evangelicals agree that it is only God alone who can permit the dead to leave their abode as it was with Samuel's appearance to Saul with a message of condemnation, 1 Samuel 28:15-19 (Gehman, 1989). Similarly, Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus and three of his disciples. However, in this case, Moses and Elijah spoke to Jesus only as recorded in (Matthew 19:1-19 O'Donovan, 1992) and not to his disciples.

Evangelicals, therefore, note that since the devil is called a liar and a father of lies (John 8:44), as well as a deceiver (Revelation 12:9), the devil and his agents can imitate the dead relatives as they can appear in any form to human beings even as angels of light, (2 Corinthians 11:14). As such, one can be deceived easily, thinking that the message is from one's ancestor while actually, it is from the deceiver of brethren, Satan or his agents (Nkansah, 2006). Without a doubt, syncretism affects one's relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ requires his disciples to love him supremely and have no other relationship that supplants Christ's centrality in the life of believers, as syncretism produces dual allegiance and renders Christian discipleship untenable. Equally valid, it is impossible to love God wholly while paying allegiance to what he hates, namely, turning to diviners and medicine men in this context.

Syncretism also shows a lack of confidence in God's ability to help an individual, undermining the Christian discipleship principle of obedience in following God wherever he leads. Where divided loyalty exists, one fails to enjoy the fruit of abiding in Jesus Christ, of answered prayer (John 15:16, James 1:5-6). Syncretism leads to deception. Evangelicals should help their members to appreciate the Scripture's centrality and only embrace cultural beliefs and practices that do not contradict the Scriptures.

#### **2.4 Demeans the Means of Grace**

Evangelicals see salvation as a means of grace (Ephesians 2:5, 8-9). They emphasize the need for the believer to grow in the grace of God (2 Timothy 2:1). One way of growing in the grace of God is by utilizing the means of grace provided by God. These include prayer, fasting, reading and applying the word of God in one's life, fellowship, and even worship, among others. Our study revealed that the persistence of Tharaka's traditional worldview demeans the means of grace provided by God to believers.

When evangelicals continue reverting to traditional religious specialists for help, they do not see the need for prayer but instead rely on diviners and medicine men to help them. Such believers tend to avoid fellowship with other believers as they think that the latter know what they have done. They carry a sense of guilt that may keep them from other believers (Ndunjo, 2018). In addition, these individuals may not have room for the word of God and neglect prayer, Christian fellowship, and the word of God - the key means of grace (Ndunjo, 2018).

Grudem (1994) sees the means of grace as God's provision to help believers become more like Christ. The gift of the Holy Spirit helps believers take charge of their lives and by observing them, discipleship is enhanced as confirmed by Coleman (1993) further makes an important observation about this subject by asserting that Jesus Christ helped his disciples learn his way of living with God. This was through his personal prayer life and referencing the Holy Scriptures. His disciples caught up on these godly habits and passed them to their converts (Acts 2:42). Simpson and Willard (2005) add that humanity first fell into sin by yielding to deception. Restoration occurs the renewal of one's mind through knowing and obeying God's word.

Since the means of grace are central to helping a disciple of Jesus follow him and overcome temptation, neglecting them has consequences. When a disciple of Jesus Christ ignores God's guidance through prayer, the word, and the community of believers and seeks help from diviners, one denies himself or herself an opportunity to nurture a genuine love for Jesus Christ. Consequently, believers lack the spiritual power to overcome temptation while losing a vibrant walk with God.

Muthuri (FGD: 27:08:2017) reported that,

“The current teaching that all believers should prosper and not suffer at all is gaining popularity in Tharaka as it resonates with the Tharaka worldview. Such teachings do not motivate believers to seek God at all times to deepen their fellowship with God. In a man-centered approach to God, one turns to God when there is need. One is not thus encouraged to follow Jesus closely when such a worldview persists.”

In response to this assertion, it is good to note that Jesus Christ called his disciples so that he could have a relationship with them and send them to share the good news with others (Mark 3:13-14). This underscores the fact that Jesus Christ's desire for his disciples is to have a personal and growing relationship with them. This is necessary for anyone who would want to follow him. The professing Christian, therefore, cannot follow Jesus Christ as is expected of a disciple of Jesus Christ since the motivation is not Christ but his benevolence.

## **2.5 Poor Evangelism**

Effective evangelism requires a thorough grasp of God's word and a life that reflects that truth. However, as Ndunjo (2018) explains, many evangelicals in Africa exhibit dual piety, displaying outward religiosity on Sundays while engaging in traditional practices during the week. This inconsistency undermines the Christian example and confuses younger generations, potentially leading to moral decline or abandonment of faith altogether.

Individuals who revert to traditional practices can discourage others and diminish the credibility of Christian witnesses. This is especially detrimental when those who have left the faith are seen as role models. Additionally, unconfessed sin can lead to losing confidence in sharing the gospel,

as individuals may shy away from public ministry due to perceived hypocrisy (Nyaga: FGD: 27:08:2017).

Indeed, the conduct of believers is crucial in so far as lifestyle evangelism is concerned. Matthew 5:13-16 and John 9:5 show that disciples of Jesus Christ are the salt and the light of the world. They thus have a responsibility to impact society positively through how they live. Dual allegiance ruins this witness. Titus 2:10 indicates that through their lifestyle, disciples of Jesus Christ should endeavor to make the gospel of Jesus Christ attractive to those around them. Coleman (1993) and Olander (2013) agree that lifestyle evangelism is a robust method of evangelism as it involves living the Christian life in a fallen world awaiting a good example.

To sum up, the reverting of some evangelicals in Tharaka to their traditional worldview, which is unbiblical by evangelicals, implies that something ought to be done. Evangelicals should proclaim the gospel to address their traditional worldview by presenting it at the worldview ideological level (values, beliefs, and practices). This is by letting the gospel meet the needs that cause people to turn to medicine men, diviners, or even carry charms and amulets. In other words, Christians should present Jesus as one who can address human fear, uncertainty, anxiety, etc.

## **2.6 Undermined Role of Jesus Christ in Redemption**

Jesus Christ has the sole role in redemption—the salvation of humanity from sin. During the annunciation of Jesus' birth, the angel of the Lord told Mary that the child she would bear would be called Jesus because he would save his people from sin (Matthew 1:21). The gospel message underscores this salvation.

From Nyaga's (FGD: 27:08:2017) interview, the study noted an anthropocentric approach to God being common among evangelicals in Tharaka and Africa. The approach undermines the place of Jesus Christ's sacrificial death in salvation by emphasizing that people need to come to Christ so that they may receive physical blessing. Such a gospel has no place for the cross of Jesus and the need for personal repentance. Similarly, Adeleye (2011) and Musyimi (2016) state that the man-centered approach to God misses the heart of the gospel: the redemption of humanity from sin. This observation further finds support from Allred (2003), who notes that Jesus Christ came to

save humanity from the state of lostness – lostness from God’s presence (Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10).

The prosperity gospel's anthropocentric worldview resembles the man-centered approach to God found in African cosmology. In both cases, drawing near to God is for His intervention in human situations. Such an approach, therefore, reveals that most evangelicals may not be aware of the true meaning of the gospel. Evangelicals in Tharaka must preach and teach the true gospel, one that is theocentric.

On the other hand, evangelicals state that Jesus Christ is sufficient and well able to address all areas of life: believer's fears, anxiety, sickness, worries, deliverance from oppression by Satan, and so on (Arnold, 1992). This is because Jesus Christ has been given a name greater than all others have and is seated at the place of honor and authority as high priest and mediator, Ephesians 1:20-23 and Philippians 2:9-11 (Arnold, 1992). His power is, therefore, more significant than all other powers, and it is available to all believers. To sum up then, when evangelicals continue to fear witchcraft and to seek personal protection outside of God, visit diviners and medicine men, they undermine Christ's role in redemption.

Regarding the role of Christ in redemption, Kabuitu (FGD: 27:08:2017) underscored that Christ's role in redemption is essential as he is also God's voice for the world today. In that case, believers who claim to have received a message from their ancestors that they or other departed family members are obligated to obey tend to belittle Jesus’ ability to guide them in their pilgrimage (Kabuiti FGD: 27:08:2017). Indeed, Jesus is the voice of God, and believers must listen to him (Matthew 17:5; Hebrew 1:1-2).

## **2.7 Unbalanced Theology**

Evangelical believers anchor their faith in God's word. In their proclamation, they, too, seek to present the whole council of God to avoid emphasizing other doctrine at the expense of others. Evangelicals should emphasize all doctrines to maintain good theological balance (2 Timothy 2:15). Theological balance becomes susceptible when an African traditional worldview that



conflicts with biblical faith continues to guide the life of many evangelicals in Africa. To this, Turaki (2006) notes,

Traditional Africans strongly believe that supernatural or unseen mystical powers control and manipulate their destiny and well-being. Thus, they seek power to predict, control, and manipulate the spirit powers for their own benefit .... They can consult specialists with unique means of gaining access to the spirit powers and may use rituals, divination, ceremonies, sacrifices, incantation, symbolism, witchcraft, sorcery, charms, fetishes, and white and black magic.

For this reason, Africans desire to be associated with people who have power.

It is believed that by keeping in close contact or touch with great men or women such as heroes, heroines, leaders, and warriors, one may be able to absorb significant measure of life force .... One result of this belief is that men and women of stature, status, and power usually attract a great following and many disciples. This also applies to great religious leaders in modern Africa and, to some extent, to certain Christian groups in their expressions of African Christianity. Unusual spiritual and mystical powers manifested by the religious leaders the followers and disciples. (Turaki, 2006)

In this case, people follow these leaders not because of the biblical teachings they receive from them but because their ministry has evidence of power, the very thing they seek. Instead of signs and wonders accompanying them, people pursue them irrespective of whether what the leaders teach is true or false. Kigame (2018) supports Turaki's assertion when he notes, "People who do or look like they can wield power are often elevated over the word of God, over Christ and God the Father." People often perceive such words or messages as gospel truth, and their followers do not exercise the wisdom the Bereans exemplified, who, after listening to Paul and Silas, consulted the Scriptures to find out if what Paul and Silas were preaching was true (Acts 17:10-11). Some Africans tend to view such 'influential preachers' as the men of God or the anointed ones. They hold a special place in their followers as demigods, promoting personality cults.

Recognizing that imbalanced theology may stem from Africans' primary desire for power, Evangelicals should pursue a biblical theology of power in a balanced way. Evangelicals, too, should constantly teach their members to fully understand and appreciate that God is the only source of legitimate power, and He holds and sustains His creation with His providential and sustaining power. Any power obtained from sources other than His is illegitimate and condemned (Turaki, 2006). A believer's source of power and security should thus be the omnipotent God who has revealed Himself to humanity through Christ Jesus. Since Jesus lives in the heart of every believer, a believer has all the power he or she needs to overcome every challenge in life, whether fear of witchcraft, uncertainty about the future, or suffering.

### **Conclusion**

The impact of the continued persistence of the pre-Christian worldview among evangelicals in Tharaka and other parts of Africa, especially during the crisis points of life, is enormous. This is not a tiny threat by any means. The weakening of church witnesses in Africa affects Africa and Christianity worldwide. This is especially so because Christianity is recording exponential growth in Africa compared to other parts of the world, a point aptly captured by many scholars. Jenkins (2002) has rightly observed that the Church's numerical growth worldwide tends to lean South of the Equator - in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The study questions the type of Christianity Tharaka converts embrace and practice. Suppose Christians in Africa are to experience spiritual depth in faith in the face of significant expansion of the faith and the challenge of Islam and other faiths. In that case, there should be a profound emphasis on Christian discipleship. In so doing, African churches will significantly influence world Christianity, as was the case in the days of the early Church.

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