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# The Cosmology of Witchcraft in the African Context: Implications for Mission and Theology

## Introduction

There have been a lot of debates about whether witchcraft is real or is just based on superstition among African communities (Bond and Diane 2001:6, 7). Different scholars in the area of anthropology and philosophy who have studied the phenomenon have established varied views based on ethnographic studies they conducted among different African people groups over the years. Based on such studies, Bond and Diane suggest four positions that have been established by such scholars on witchcraft: These include: “[1] Witchcraft [beliefs] are real, [2] There are no witches, only the belief in them, [3] Witches may or may not be real, and further research may shed light on the issue, [4]. For the study of witchcraft the above positions are irrelevant” (Bond and Diane 2001:6). This divide has created a never-ending discussion about the reality of witchcraft manifestations among African communities. For instance, early anthropologists like Wilson (1951), Middleton (1960), and Marwick (1965) viewed witchcraft as a phenomenon that was used to maintain social order in small-scale societies. Bongmba points out that there could be at least two reasons those anthropologists do not hold the view that witchcraft is real: (1) it does not fit their view of rationality (Bongmba 2001:xxii), and (2) it is just a “way of moralizing terminologies”<sup>1</sup> (Geschiere 1997:12, cited in Bongmba 2001:xxii; see also Bond and Diane 2001:44). Therefore, Bond and Diane argue that, any conclusion arrived at as to whether witches exists or not, largely depends on the mindset of the ethnographic researcher (Bond and Diane 2001:7).

Nonetheless, such scholars who believe that witchcraft is not real in the African context may be viewing the phenomenon through “scientific” lenses. By scientific lenses I mean, they may be drawing their conclusions based on what they may claim as either evidential or non-evidential. I

cannot deny the fact that they may have good reasons for such claims because sometimes those who believe in witchcraft may go to the extent of claiming that even patients infected by the HIV/AIDS virus are bewitched. I still remember very well when one of my relatives contracted the HIV virus (allegedly transmitted from her husband) that led to her death. However, even after the death of her husband from the same disease, which could be viewed as proof of the virus, some still said that the cause of her death was because she was bewitched. To make matters worse, when she was ailing, I learned that she was taken to a witchdoctor for some traditional treatment by another close relative. I had to intervene and took her to the hospital for a diagnosis only for it to be confirmed that she was suffering from HIV/AIDS. This case study illustrates the fact that the belief in witchcraft often does not recognize scientific reality; hence, rendering some witchcraft accusations as a belief with no basis. On the other hand, the illustration shows how deeply the belief in witchcraft is rooted in the minds of most Africans, making it very easy for many to attribute every problem to the spirit world. Therefore, because sometimes the manifestation of witchcraft may not be able to be empirically verified, this allows some to argue that witchcraft is not real but just superstition. Based on this understanding Bond and Diane conclude that “witchcraft is about the manner in which people apprehend the world and the way in which they attempt to interpret and explain it” (2001:25). Even though each position raised by Bond and Diane may have some validity, nonetheless, it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss those positions; rather, I hold a presupposition that witchcraft among most African communities is a worldview issue.

### Witchcraft as a Worldview Phenomenon

I have not conducted any empirical research on witchcraft *per se*. Nonetheless, as I review works of scholars who have examined African Traditional Religions and philosophy like Mbiti, Ayisi, Kirwen, Harries, and others, I constantly hear them state that witchcraft in the African traditional context is largely a worldview phenomenon (Ayisi 1979; Harries 2010:140; Kirwen 2005; Manala 2004:1503; Mbiti 1991). I join this line of thought based on their definition and examination of African religious and philosophical thought. For instance, Mbiti argues “the spiritual world of African peoples is very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits, and the living-dead” (2011:75). Geoffrey Parrinder suggests that in the African cosmological view “everything in nature is living, or at least pre-living, and there is no such thing as absolutely dead matter” (1969:47). In other words, in the African worldview there are a host of different spirits

that exist in the universe (Mbiti 1969:75–81; 2011:75). Most scholars agree that this spiritual world is inseparable from the physical world of the living (Parrinder 1969:26). Hence, Mbiti further argues that the awareness of the spirit world “affects their [Africans] outlook and experiences in life for better and for worse” (1991:81). Therefore, in this regard the outward manifestation of African symbols and practices express the underlining assumptions of life. This is why scholars like Mwalwa make such a strong affirmation concerning this reality by stating, “I am convinced that witchcraft is NOT imaginary, nor unreal. It is still a strong force in Africa” (cited in Manala 2004:1503). In his concluding remarks, Mbiti affirms this fact by arguing that “belief in the function and dangers of bad magic, sorcery and witchcraft is deeply rooted in African life, and in spite of modern education and religions like Christianity and Islam it is very difficult to eradicate this belief” (1991:165).

Harries refers to this deeply held belief as the “DNA of life” among African people (2010:144), which gives some indication that the phenomenon is deeply embedded in the belief systems of African culture. Most Africans need no special orientation to believe that witchcraft exists, which means that witchcraft cannot be separated from the life of an African. This is evident by the fact that even though a significant percentage of the population of Africa has been exposed to Western scientific knowledge, witchcraft tendencies have remained a phenomenon among them even in urban settings (Drucker-Brown 1993:539; Behringer 2004:14; Donkor 2011:38; Kohnert 1996:1347; ter Haar 2007:10; Van Dyk 2001). Even today with the strong media and educational influence of secularism and modernity, the African commitment to belief in witchcraft has not been eroded. This is demonstrated over and over again in African society by how many Africans deal with sickness. When sickness does not respond to the scientific methods of treatment and when an illness persists, many resort to traditional methods. This led ter Haar to conclude that “it is notoriously difficult to change people’s beliefs, particularly when they are as deeply entrenched culturally as is the case with witchcraft beliefs in Africa” (2007:9, 67, 68). This deeply embedded worldview phenomenon is something that media, education, and even governmental legislation have not been able to eradicate in Africa.

One may ask, Why has the influence of modernity and the Christian faith not addressed this phenomenon adequately? Behringer suggests that one of the reasons may be that in the contacts by early missionaries and colonialists there was very little attempt to understand the African’s culture and practices (see Behringer 2004:26–46; ter Haar 2007:10, 16). Instead of addressing the underlying worldview assumptions and values that were in direct opposition with the Bible, they labeled everything as pagan

and forbade the practices without giving the people a biblical functional substitute. This resulted in many of the forbidden activities going underground and being practiced in secret. The missionaries used what Hiebert refers to “under contextualization”<sup>2</sup> (Hiebert 1985:171) that allowed the continuity of witchcraft tendencies. Whenever there is a lack of a careful contextualization process in the presentation of the gospel, traditional beliefs and practices such as those connected with witchcraft often remain embedded in the people’s worldview.

Witchcraft beliefs are grounded in the concept of causation, which remains a guiding principle among Africans in explaining why misfortunes happen. This principle suggests that all misfortunes are caused by some unseen power. Most African groups have expressions alluding to such beliefs. For instance, the Swahili people of the Kenyan coast may exclaim when someone becomes sick, “*kuna mkono wa mtu hapa*” (there is someone’s hand behind this) (Mitchell 1977:68; see also Behringer 2004:14; Healey and Sybertz 1996:291, 291; Kirwen 2005:220; Manala 2004:1498; Mbiti 1991:117, 165, 166; Opuku 2002:78, 79). This saying indicates that someone with ill motive has decided to harm another person. Therefore, according to the African mindset, any misfortune or sickness is viewed as being caused either by ancestral spirits, bad magic, sorcery, or witchcraft (Magesa 1997:69, 183; Donkor 2011:69; Manala 2004:1499, 1500). This highly emotive issue is the source of a lot of enmity even among family members.

Those sicknesses caused by witches and sorcerers are regarded as severe and life threatening (Moila 2002:23), consequentially witchcraft is viewed as “the greatest wrong or destructiveness” (Magesa 1997:69; also see Maimela 1985:68) in the African traditional religious context. “It is a life-threatening evil” (Manala 2004:1501), therefore witches are the most dangerous and feared individuals in any African community (Mbiti 1991:168). Nonetheless, Mbiti further argues that such a fear could be viewed in a positive way because it is used to stabilize “relationship among relatives, neighbours, and members of the community” (168), hence enhancing harmonious living. Witchcraft is also regarded as a vice, which has no connection with African Traditional Religion (19). However, witches have suffered from brutal killings in order to eliminate them from society. Governments have responded by passing laws categorizing witchcraft activities as a crime in order to save witches from extra judicial killings (Geschiere 2006:221–223). Ghana has also established witch refuge camps to rescue those who have been accused of witchcraft.

### Sources of Witchcraft Powers

This deep-seated belief in witchcraft in the African traditional context

resides in what Mbiti calls the “mystical order” (1991:41) as rendered in his categorization of African understanding of order and power in the universe.<sup>3</sup> He further feels this mystical order governs the universe because it is connected to God’s power; therefore, it is viewed as a mystical power from God because “it is hidden and mysterious” at the same time (42; Magesa 1997:181). It is believed to be a power that resides in the spirit world “available for use by anyone who knows how to tap it” (Fuller 2001:80). Nonetheless, only a few people in society may have “skills on how to tap, control and use these forces. . . . These mystical forces of the universe are neither evil nor good in themselves, they are just like other natural things at man’s disposal” (Mbiti 1991:166) and can be used to help or harm other people. Those who use these powers to help others are known as witchdoctors; whereas those who use the powers to harm people are witches. The work of the witchdoctor is to counteract the harm caused by witchcraft (Miller 2012:2).

Unlike sorcerers who use materials and other paraphernalia to harm, a witch “is believed to have an inherent power to harm other people” (Mitchell 1977:67). It is believed that witches, by using magical power, have the capacity to operate in different forms such as animals, birds, or reptiles, and can hide themselves from people by taking on these other forms (Magesa 1997:185; Behringer 2004:13). The powers they employ enable them to operate in the spirit realm, and whereas sorcery is exercised when a sorcerer is in his or her conscious mind, witches expedite witchcraft unconsciously (Bellamy 2004:11).

These magical powers and witchcraft practices can be acquired in various ways: by voluntarily joining a witch society, by inheriting the powers from a family member, by buying the power from a witch, or as an innate ability (Mitchell 1977:67, 68; see also Fuller 2001:88; Kirwen 2005:228; Magesa 1997:184, 185; Manala 2004:1492). Some of the reasons witchcraft is directed at a person include jealousy, envy, and enmity (Harries 2010:142, 143). It is easy to see why witches are the most feared individuals in a community.

### **Traditional Context of *Mijikenda*<sup>4</sup>**

Because witchcraft is viewed as an ontological reality, different African traditions use different magic to protect themselves from the evil powers exercised through witchcraft (Parrinder 1969:64, 65). In view of this, Manala argues that “in traditional Africa an unprotected homestead is referred to as the playing ground for witches and its occupants are in danger of becoming easy targets of witches” (2004:1502). He tries to pass a notion that, according to the African mindset, witchcraft is so real that no one is

ready to take a chance of not taking necessary precautions for the protection of him/herself and the family.

For instance, the *Mijikenda* (the people group I belong to that is found along the Kenyan coast) use a protective charm called *finjo*. *Finjo* is made from medicinal herbs and dry powdered roots of trees that are then placed in a sacred pot. The pot may be buried at the center or in one corner of a homestead. The main purpose is to protect the homestead and the family members from evil men. This custom grew out of the practice of early *Mijikenda* settlers who lived in dense forests. They put *finjo* at the center of the homestead to protect the people against invaders. They believed that the charm made the settlement invisible to the invading enemy or could also counteract any magical powers used against them or create confusion among anyone attacking them. They further believed that the powers of the *finjo* could cause the invaders to expose their intentions by causing some form of insanity (field notes taken during my ethnographic study among the Digo people in 2009).

During the ethnographic study among the Digo people, I discovered that in times of community need, such as sickness and drought, the village elders used to visit the *finjo* with the diviner to seek spiritual advice from their ancestors. The ancestors would reveal the cause of the problem and what should be done to remove it. For the community to be healed from the calamity, the village elders would then organize a community prayer ceremony called *tambiko*. The reason for all these rituals was because of their cosmological understanding that the ancestral spirits have a direct influence on the daily affairs of the living (Parrinder 1962:23). Hence, the community members would call upon the ancestors to protect them from evil men and evil powers. To illustrate this point I will share some experiences that happened to me and some of my family members.

### Case Study #1

In 2007 I lost my father-in-law through an accident. He was carrying out his normal duty of repairing the roof of a house when he fell and broke his neck. While my two brothers-in-laws were going home for the funeral service, one of them got upset by his young brother who asked him, "Now that dad is dead, who will be next?" He then pointed to his elder brother, "you will be the next, so prepare." Upon hearing that, the elder brother was very angry and he started fighting with his younger brother. He told me that he knew who killed his dad—his younger brother. It had been reported that one time his younger brother was witnessed to have been involved in a ritual of eating human flesh that was offered as a rain sacrifice. Therefore, he was viewed as one of the members of the

local witches club. A requirement of the club was that each member had to offer a relative as a sacrifice. It was believed that he offered his father to the club, but because he was very old they did not like his meat because it was very tough so they were now demanding another person. The young brother was very aware about this when he asked his brother, "Who will be next?" At the time my brother-in-law was telling me this story (2016), we had lost his younger brother a few years earlier in a mysterious way. He died in 2008, the year after the death of their father. He had not suffered any sickness. I remember that evening when we got the news that my brother-in-law was dead. We went to his house and found him dead in his chair. The medical report indicated that he had died of suffocation. His elder brother strongly believed that the club of witches offered him as a sacrifice. Because of the family's belief concerning causation, before the body was taken to the graveyard, I witnessed them taking the body into his house first, which is not normal. Then after about 30 minutes, they came out and proceeded to the grave. Magesa alludes to the fact that the practice of feasting on the flesh of a relative is normal among witches (1997:185). He argues, "A general condition of 'graduation' into a witchcraft sorority or fraternity (coven) is to kill and eat the flesh of a close relation (185)." This is another reason why witches are ostracized and pushed out of family relationships. Then last year (2016) when I was interacting with my brother-in-law I came to learn that when they took the body into the house they had poisoned the entire body so that the witch club members would not be able to eat his flesh. My brother-in-law also mentioned that the chairman of the witch club had died just a week prior to our meeting. That death was received with a lot of jubilation in the community for he was well known as a witch.

### Case Study #2

I vividly remember how in 1986 I was very sick for two weeks. I was bed ridden with a lot of pain throughout my entire body. When I tried to take any medication or pain killers I would immediately throw it back up. All the tests were negative. I wondered what this could be. After two weeks, the sickness disappeared and I regained my health and strength without taking medication. This seemed like a miracle to me. Time passed, then one day as my elder brother and I were chatting he made a statement which shocked me. He claimed that one of our distant grandmothers told him that I had a lot of blood. I asked myself, how could this grandmother know anything about my blood, since I never had any close relationship with her? One thing I knew about her was that she had been accused of being a witch. I then quickly connected my sickness with that statement

that she was interested in my blood and that she was an accused witch. This knowledge led me to conclude that she may have tried to bewitch me. In this case, there was a possibility that she sent a *Jinn* (an Arabic word for a spirit) to come and kill me. It is believed that when someone sends *Jinn*, they come at night and suck your blood until you die. I believe that that evil power sent to me could not take my life because of the indwelling power of Jesus Christ in me.

### Case Study #3

Safari is a witchdoctor who meets between five to six clients each week. He mainly specialized in helping people overcome misfortunes (the Swahili term is *visirani* or *mikosi*) and clients who are disturbed by night runners (*wanga*). Concerning misfortunes, clients complain to him how they have lost many opportunities in life because of the perceived effects of witchcraft (*kurogwa*). Most people among the *Mijikenda* allude to failures in life as being caused by someone. They believe that someone may be jealous of their life, so they want to pull them down. Some of the indicators of *visirani* are a lack of employment, barrenness, miscarriage, or low performance in academic pursuits. Failure or poor grades in school may happen even to someone who may have a high qualification in their academics, but because of the perceived powers of witchcraft, they fail. Hence, those who visit witchdoctors like Safari do it with a belief that they will be treated and protected from any witchcraft power (Hearley and Sybertz 1996:292).

### Witchcraft Worldview Values and Their Implications for Mission

Even though Christianity and Islam have experienced rapid growth in sub-Saharan Africa, many of those joining those religions continue to battle with tendencies towards dual allegiance.<sup>5</sup> In other words, even though 70% of the population in the sub-Saharan region belongs to Christianity and Islam, witchcraft beliefs and practices are not disappearing. As alluded to earlier, this may be largely due to the African worldview concerning the spirit world. According to Hiebert worldview is “the basic assumptions about reality which lie behind the beliefs and behavior of a culture” (1985:45). Such assumptions are part of the DNA of a culture, which may be practiced “consciously or subconsciously” (James Sire 2004:17, cited in Terry and Payne 2013:159), hence, they are “largely implicit” (Hiebert 1985:85). Hiebert further brings to mind three types of assumptions: Cognitive assumptions relating to beliefs, affective assumptions relating to



feelings, and evaluative assumptions relating to values (43; 2009:77). It is the cognitive assumptions which “shape the mental categories people use for thinking” (1985:46). These mental categories are the ones that help an individual filter and interpret any experience based on how he/she relates with the world. Hence, when new converts find themselves facing a unique problem, they may quickly interpret the situation through their cognitive categories on how they define reality.

How does worldview affect mission then? In most cases Adventist missionaries and local pastors have rushed to introduce their doctrinal teachings without understanding some of the people groups’ worldview, values, and assumptions. Some missionaries went to the extent of demonizing indigenous traditional practices and discarding them completely without providing biblical functional substitutes. Although this may have been viewed as needed on the part of the missionary to protect the teachings, nonetheless, this led the new believers to engage in syncretistic practices, that is, they mixed the new truth acquired from the missionary with traditional practices that were at odds with their newly acquired teachings (Parshall 2003:49). Bill Musk, while commenting about Islam, argues that such tendencies among new converts to a new religion are nurtured by the fact that official Islam “has few resources for dealing with the everyday concerns and nightly dreads of ordinary Muslims” (2003:215, 216). Witchcraft generates fear and uncertainty among African communities to the extent that when an unresolvable misfortune or sickness hits a person or family they may revert to traditional methods. Case Study #1 and #3 above demonstrate the existence of this phenomenon. As a result, the spiritual foundation of many Christians are shaken leading to compromise and syncretism.

### Missiological Reflections and Recommendations

The main purpose of Christian mission is to share the gospel truth for the salvation of humanity. The gospel message is intended to address sinful tendencies and bring restoration to believers. Therefore, anyone who presents the gospel needs to understand that for mission to be effective the gospel message must also address the heart-felt needs of a people. This requires cultural sensitivity. Why should the Christian witness bother to present the gospel in the cultural context of the listener? Because a people’s culture<sup>6</sup> is defined by their worldview and they can only relate to a new concept in the context of their perceived cultural realities. “To minister in another culture, one must enter the culture” (Grunlan and Marvin 1988:22). By entering the culture, Christian witnesses must not only seek to understand the culture but also become one with the community as far

as possible. This will help them contextualize the message to adequately address the cultural and worldview issues.

Culture operates at two levels: surface and hidden (Kraft 1996:20). The surface level consists of visible behaviors while the hidden level involves the values and assumptions of a people. Surface level manifestations may include things like rituals, music, drama, and dance—each performed with a specific purpose to express joy, sadness, or fear of the spirit (Hiebert 1985:172). Most of these ritualistic activities act as a bridge between the physical and the spiritual world (176–77). It is important to note that each cultural expression is driven by a particular objective meant to respond to a cognitive category. For instance, Africans perform different rituals in order to appease their ancestral spirits as they seek protection from evil people and evil spirits. The underlining objective of such rituals is to create harmony between people, the spirit world, and God.

Cultural expressions are outward manifestations of the schema, that is, the cognitive conceptualization of thoughts and patterns of a culture (Douglas 1966:1–3; Hiebert 2009:94). Hiebert views culture as having “three dimensions: cognitive, affective and evaluative” (1985:30–35; 2009:150–153). These three dimensions form the bedrock of any given culture. The cognitive dimension deals with a shared belief system. People in a given culture will act in a particular manner because they possess uniform cognitive perceptions of their universe. These perceptions exist in different categories that correlate with each other. Such categories may include but are not limited to: the invisible and the visible, the physical and the spiritual, the profane and sacred, the form and formlessness (Douglas 1966:95–99). Douglas elucidates this reality between the physical and spiritual category by arguing that

the spiritual powers which human action can unleash can roughly be divided into two classes—internal and external. The first reside within the psyche of the agent—such as evil eye, witchcraft, gifts of vision or prophecy. The second are external symbols on which the agent must consciously work: spells, blessings, curses, charms and formulas and invocations. These powers require actions by which spiritual power is discharged. (99)

Therefore, it is important that both missiological and theological tools and approaches be employed to address the challenges a people group faces when they are becoming followers of Jesus Christ. Hiebert suggests that in doing mission among a people group that “we need to understand the people and their thinking to translate the gospel into their thought patterns, we need also to understand the scriptures within their cultural context, so that we can translate them into the local culture without losing

their divine message” (1985:97). This will facilitate in addressing the predicament of a people group.

The belief in witchcraft causes fear and uncertainty among many Africans. This is a predicament that has widespread implications for the Christian faith. I have witnessed the results of such fear among my own extended family members like the one shared in case study #1, most of whom are Christians. Some of my family members felt comfortable installing a fingo in their homestead in order to protect their home. Outsiders may wonder why an African should be concerned about witchcraft after coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Christians using traditional means for protection is a result of not clearly teaching what the Bible has to say about evil spiritual powers. The problem is not about a basic knowledge of Jesus, but rather the lack of biblical teaching on how a Christian is protected by God in the face of witchcraft attacks.

### Theological Reflection and Recommendations

To address the challenge of witchcraft in Africa, deliberate efforts must be taken to address the African worldview assumptions in the area of mystical spiritual forces. Witchcraft powers are real, so to counteract this reality, followers of Jesus need to know and to see demonstrated that Jesus Christ is more powerful than any spirit or power. They need to know that Jesus Christ has powers to subdue any and all powers of darkness. Two possible approaches could be used in addressing witchcraft fears—better biblical teaching on witchcraft issues and better teaching on the part faith and prayer in the name of Jesus play.

#### Better Biblical Teaching

In order for Adventist theology to be relevant to an African believer, it must address the cultural challenges such as witchcraft. It is not enough to just share the 28 fundamental beliefs of Adventism. Cultural applications must be made that answer the fears and concerns of Africans. Believers need to know that witchcraft falls in the domain of evil powers, which are propagated by the devil. Nonetheless, there should be awareness that the powers of darkness have been defeated by the power of God in the name of Jesus. Only when the biblical message responds to the fears in such a powerful way that African believers know that “the spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world” (1 John 4:4 NLT) will believers be able to reject the traditional ways of seeking protection. Africans need to understand the power that is available to them in the name of Jesus. They need to better understand what it means to have

God's angels surrounding them and protecting them (Ps 34:7). Then need to understand that "a guardian angel is appointed to every follower of Christ. These heavenly watchers shield the righteous from the power of the wicket one" (White 1950:512, 513).

### Better Teaching on Faith and Prayer

Adventists have traditionally avoided talking about evil spirits and deliverance and have done little to instruct its members how to deal biblically with evil spiritual powers. Grounding in the Word of God is the first step, but believers also need to understand the importance of faith that God can protect. Africans need to understand that "those who follow Christ are ever under His watch care. Angels that excel in strength are sent from heaven to protect them. The wicked one cannot break through the guard God has stationed about His people" (White 1950:517).

Faith and prayer are ingredients that allow God's people to stand firm against the attacks of the devil. However, when God's people compromise, when they revert back to the traditional means of protection from witchcraft powers, they lose God's protection.

Satan is well aware that the weakest soul who abides in Christ is more than a match for the hosts of darkness, and that, should he reveal himself openly, he would be met and resisted. Therefore, he seeks to draw away the soldiers of the cross from their strong fortification, while he lies in ambush with his forces, ready to destroy all who venture upon his ground. Only in humble reliance upon God, and obedience to all His commandments, can we be secure. (White 1950:530)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to Geschiere, "moralizing terminology [is] an unequivocal opposition between good and evil, even when the local terminology hardly lends itself to this" (1997:12, cited in Bongmba 2001, xxii).

<sup>2</sup> Hiebert (1985:184–190) established four levels of contextualization: 1. Poor contextualization, which is the mixing of the old cultural beliefs and practices with the new. This results to a blend of practices that may lead to syncretic beliefs and practices. 2. Over contextualization, which is the acceptance of the all beliefs and practices regardless their compatibility to the new faith? This equally may result to syncretism. 3. Under contextualization, which is the denial of the old beliefs and practices to the expense of the new. In this regard, some of the old positive beliefs and practices that could have been used to build bridges of understanding are disregarded and equally demonized. 4. Critical contextualization. According to Hiebert, this involves a careful process of analyzing of each old belief and practice in relation to the gospel message. In the finale analysis, those old cultural tendencies that are in direct opposition with the Bible are rejected and possibly

replaced by biblical ones, whereas those beliefs, which are not in opposition with the Bible, may be used as a bridge in developing a meaningful biblical teaching that may illuminate the previous cultural belief.

<sup>3</sup>Mbiti (1991) has established four categories on “order and power in the universe” which include: Order in the laws of nature, moral order among people, religious order in the universe, and mystical order in the universe. In his view, it is this order, which brings harmony in the universe.

<sup>4</sup>The name *Mijikenda* is a compound Swahili word meaning “nine villages” (nine kaya or homesteads). The sub-groups that form the nine villages are: *wa-Giriama*, *waDuruma*, *waDigo*, *waRabai*, *waKambe*, *waRibe*, *waChonyi*, *waJibana* and *waKauma*. According to Spear these villages are related very closely but distinct, hence *mijikenda* is a communicative term to demonstrate their close relationship in their culture and the dialects they speak as people from one origin, *Shungwaya*. Several scholars have written about the *Mijikenda* people of the Kenyan coast. Their works have largely focused on the historical perspective of the people groups, their indigenous socio-cultural practices and how the emergence of Islam and Christianity in the region affected their traditional religions and cultural practices (see Allen et al. 1983; Briginshaw 1987; Brown 1980; Gomm 1972; 1975; Herlehy 1982; Holway 1971–72; Kraft 2007; Morton 1972; Ngw’eno 1997; J. Sesi 2009; S. Sesi 2003; Spear 1974). In this regard, their works have proved useful in understanding some of the cultural dynamics of the people as they (*Mijikenda*) interacted with the outside world.

<sup>5</sup>According to Pew Research by 2017, 57% of the sub-Saharan population is Christian, 29% are Muslim, and 13% believe and practice African Traditional Religions. See <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2010/04/28/christianity-and-islam-in-sub-saharan-africa>. (accessed 5 July 2017).

<sup>6</sup>In simple terms Howell and Jenell (2011) defined culture as “the total way of life of a group of people that is learned, adaptive, shared, and integrated” (36).

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