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The Growing Socio-Cultural Acceptance of Priestly Celibacy among the Indigenous Nandi Community in Nandi County, Kenya

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Priestly celibacy, a distinctive characteristic of the ministerial priesthood in the Catholic Church, has courted controversies within and outside the Church. Indigenous African communities largely held a cultural and philosophical thought on marriage as a foundation of continuity of life. Few studies have examined the emergence of priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church and due to the existing contextual gaps in studies on priestly celibacy, the paper critically assessed the acceptability/non-acceptability of priestly celibacy among the Nandi community, Nandi County, Kenya. The paper took a qualitative exploratory cross-sectional design. The study purposively sampled 33 community members including sages aged over 75 years in three distinct localities in Nandi County; Kobujoi, Kabiyeet and Tindiret sub-counties for their indigeneity. Data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions. The data were transcribed before being subjected to a content analysis tool (NVivo 8, QSR International). The findings indicated that the Indigenous Nandi community could not fathom the practicality of priestly celibacy. They loathed Fr. Joseph Kuhn on sight (the pioneering Catholic priest in Nandi County in the 1930s). Celibate Catholic priests were not culturally and socially accepted by the Nandi community in the mid-20th century but by the turn of the 21st century, priestly celibacy had gained acceptance as indicated by the acclamation of Late Fr Martin Boyle (Irish Priest who settled in Taachasis, Tindiret in the 1990s). The two White priests from different eras and contexts reflect the evolving nature of priestly celibacy in the Nandi Community, Nandi County, Kenya. The gradual societal shift towards priestly celibacy at the community level has probably arisen because of the value attached to purity in religious festivals and ceremonies. Thus, the study concludes there still exist cultural and social rigidities among the Nandi Community with regard to priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church. The study recommends that the celibacy requirement for the Catholic priesthood should be upheld based on the growing acceptance of priestly celibacy among the community.

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INTRODUCTION

By definition, Celibacy as a practice takes a social or religious definition with the accompanying meanings (Olson, 2007). When considered as a social phenomenon, celibacy entails shared values where individuals jointly endeavour to abstain from all sexual relationships for a specific goal or objective such as the attainment of one's personal goals (Olson, 2007). When celibacy takes a religious phenomenon, it entails a perpetual vow to forego the instinct to procreate (Powers, 2008) coupled with an occupational career of priesthood that goes with the renunciation of marriage (Parish, 2010) and enforced and justified by a religious order or legal framework such as the Canon Law (Cozzens, 2006).

Celibacy as a religious phenomenon draws from two perspectives, the observance of religious practises in service to God and humanity (Parish, 2012) whose history is drawn from the lives of priests such as Melchizedek as documented in Genesis 14:18, Hebrews 5:6, Aaron as read from Numbers 3:10, Eli as read from I Samuel 1:9 or prophets such as Samuel as read 1 Samuel 2:21 and the long list of prophets that include Isaiah, Jeremiah and others. The second perspective relates to ritual purity which involves the observance and

maintenance of purity during religious rituals (Lea, 1884). This largely draws from Jewish/paganistic tradition or culture relating to sacerdotalism which involves the performance of religious ritual by a priest (Prince, 1992; Lea, 1884).

The practice of celibacy ranges from temporary celibacy arrangements to a long-term commitment (Olson, 2007). Extant literature on celibacy takes three viewpoints; the philosophical thought that emanates from the recommendations from encyclicals from the Popes (Ballano, 2019; Flannery, 1996), the legal framework in the form of canons (Joseph *et al.*, 2010; Prince, 1992) and canon law as from 1917 (Horvat, 2022; Mayblin, 2019; O'Loughlin, 1995) such as canon 277 (Horvat, 2022). Another important viewpoint is the theological grounding based on the presumed apparent sexual abstinence by the pioneering apostles (Olson, 2010)

The acceptance of priestly celibacy has largely been attributed to the more cohesive form of Western culture (Perzyński, 2017) where celibacy is considered a discipline for the Catholic Church (Parish, 2012). This is largely due to the existing cultural homogeneity in the Western world (Rowe 2016). Further, it is worth noting that priestly celibacy has begrudgingly gained acceptance due to

the conditional requirement for priesthood service (Prince, 1992). The acceptance of priestly celibacy in the Western world has not translated to universal acceptance as there are dialectical cultural differences at the global level (Chu Ilo, 2017).

In addition to the social acceptability of priestly celibacy, cultural acceptance (Chu Ilo, 2017) is an important consideration by the community at large (Wubbles, 2011) as Wubbels (2011); and Gwaza (2019) observed that priestly celibacy has still not gained cultural acceptance in the African context. Further, two anthropological and cultural studies in Brazil (Serbin, 2006) and Africa (Hastings, 1976 as reported by Sipe, 2013) observed that Amerindians, Afro-Brazilians and Africans were not suited to celibate lives. Serbin (2006) observed that Amerindians and Afro-Brazilians were denied entry into the priesthood on the assumption that 'such 'races were unable to stay celibate', while Hastings (1976) observed that Africans 'were constitutionally incapable of celibacy' As early as 1964, Hastings (1978) called for the priestly ordination of 'tried and tested married men' such as the trained catechists.

From an African viewpoint, priestly celibacy has not gained reasonable social acceptance (Wubbels, 2011) and is frowned upon by Indigenous communities (Gwaza, 2019) who consider celibacy a repugnant practice and that the ecclesiastical law on celibacy contradicts natural law (Gwaza, 2019). Furthermore, celibacy as a philosophical practises interjects between customary law and religious practices (Wubbels, 2011). Priestly celibacy is a controversial issue in different cultures and countries, at different times and in various situations (Sunardi, 2014). The background on priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church especially in Africa informs the need to interrogate this controversial topic based on the indigenous African perspectives, with special reference to the culture of the Nandi people in Nandi County, Kenya.

Problem Statement

The Catholic Church's law of priestly celibacy has become a controversial issue in different cultures and countries, at different times and in various situations (Sunardi, 2014). This debate on celibacy began informally just before the Vatican II Council held in Rome (1962-1965) and was deliberated seriously. The resolution was to exhort all Catholic priests to firmly embrace and esteem the law of celibacy as a gift (Flannery, 1996). The African Synod of 1994 re-emphasized the ongoing formation of priests with special emphasis on sacred celibacy (John Paul II, 1995).

Over centuries, there has been a general acceptance of priestly celibacy from the European perspective (Kung, 2010) and the American perceptive (Rossetti, 2002), save for the insignificant number of wayward and incontinent priests (Frick, Moser & Simmons, 2021; Makamure, 2004).

Priestly celibacy is generating a debate and highlighting the challenges facing indigenous African priests (Sipe, 2013; Hastings, 1978). From an African philosophical viewpoint, priestly celibacy negates social values and cultural attitudes (Olson, 2010) and is an anomaly (Wubbels, 2011; Gwaza, 2019). Based on the African indigenous worldview, the study examined how the indigenous Nandi Community views priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The worldviews are largely conceptual tools to highlight philosophical distinctions between African and Western cultures. It is from these viewpoints, that the study examines the growing acceptability of priestly celibacy from the indigenous African communities based on several African contextualized studies and reviews. First, studies have largely indicated the personal acceptance of celibacy vows (Appiah-Kubi & Korsah, 2020; Adebayo, 2013). Adebayo (2013) observed that celibates face an enormous life

challenge, while Appiah-Kubi and Korsah (2020) noted that celibacy in the context of African indigenous religion appears 'awkward' but it is still embraced by many religious men and women.

Adebayo's study (2013) observed that celibacy in Indigenous African communities is outrightly rejected and that they would - be catholic priest are sometimes disowned by the family. In Nigeria, priestly celibacy remains unacceptable to many Tiv people. Priestly celibacy is unthinkable, inconceivable, and absurd (Gwaza, 2019). In Kenya, Wubbels (2011) priestly celibacy has not gained social acceptance or empathy among the church congregants. According to Okolo (1994), celibacy is an imposed value since the African culture emphasizes marriage, children and family life.

Tambudzai and Ugwuanyi (2011) acknowledge that celibate priests' respect for their African traditions contributed to the wide acceptance of celibacy in certain regions (Appiah-Kubi & Korsah, 2020). Hastings (1978) drawing from his missionary work in Africa observed that celibacy is practically dependent on long years of training in major seminaries but is extremely vulnerable to political pressure. Newaygo (2003) stresses the church's stand on celibacy ignores the pertinent issues of African cultures. It is for this reason that celibacy continues to be contentious within and outside the Church. Though, anecdotal evidence from some African indigenous communities suggests the existence of celibacy in one form or another (Makamure, 2004; Aguilar, 2001), an in-depth study on priestly celibacy is lacking on this front. Hence, the paper sought to unravel how priestly celibacy is viewed from an indigenous culture of the Nandi community in Nandi County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The study took an exploratory, qualitative cross-sectional design using a historical research approach that involves analysing past events and developing the present concept. This study was confined to the

indigenous Nandi community in Nandi County, Kenya and drew its participants from three locations which the study considered to hold existing indigeneity. Based on the recommendations by Dworkin (2012), the study had sampled 33 senior community members and sages and Catholic Lay faithful (22 men and 11 women) aged between 75 and 86 years situated in three geographical zones as follows: Focus group discussion 1 (FGD 1) at Kobujoi had 12 participants (8 men and 4 Women); Focus Group Discussion 2 (FGD 2) at Tindiret had 10 participants (7 men and 3 women), and Focus Group Discussion 3 (FGD 3) at Kabiyeet had 11 participants (7 men and 4 women).

The data was collected through audio recording and note-taking, upon which the data was reviewed, transcribed, analysed, and interpreted into themes and meanings to lay the foundation of codification with the aid of Nvivo software. The researcher also complemented the thematic presentation with narrative analysis. The study obtained requisite regulatory permits and approvals as well as informed consent. In maintaining privacy and confidentiality, the study only refers to the participants by their gender, age and FGD.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Non-Acceptability of the Priestly Celibacy in Mid-20th Century

The conversation during the community FGDs began with the historical perspectives of the entry of Christianity. The participants cited cases of widespread disdain and scorn for the pioneering African celibate priests as early as the mid-20th century. From the FGDs, it was revealed that from 1926 the establishment of the Chepterit Mission, the establishment of the Kobujoi Mission in 1948 and the Kaiboi Mission in 1952, the Christian faith was nascent. The Nandi still had challenges accepting the celibate white priests. They were cautious of the latter's intentions and could not fathom how such men (the priests) deliberately chose to forego marriage. The discussion on the influence of white

men began with an 84-year-old male participant in the FGD 2 elaborated on the reasons why the community rejected the white pioneering priest;

'The community rejected the early advances of the white priest because the seers prophesized that the white people were going to dramatically alter the communal custom of living. Therefore, the seers urged the people to resist the changes introduced by the white men. The seers still existing within the community but are disappearing because of the conversion to Christianity.'

This viewpoint was further corroborated by a 78-year-old female participant in the same FGD who stated:

'After defeating the Nandi community, the British saw that the community didn't accept their ways and decided to coax the community by bringing in white missionaries. The catholic missionaries were unmarried and therefore the community wondered how this was possible. The community at large didn't accept the white priest and thereafter, the priest enticed the community by giving out sugar and other goodies.'

In furthering what the previous discussant had said, an 85-year-old female discussant in the same FGD contributed immensely to the discussion by stating that:

'The pioneering Catholic priest faced significant resistance from the older community members. The young teens would only attend to the Christian teachings offered by the white priest while the parents would refuse their children. The older generation thought that the white priest had come to teach the community wickedness and mischief and thus denied their children the opportunity to attend the Christian teachings offered by the white priest. They thought that the white priest would marry their daughters considering that the priests were

unmarried. They wanted their sons to get married to differentiate them from the priest. The white priest bewildered the community because they were unmarried and therefore the community didn't want their children to be unmarried or 'komee maa' which implies 'the fire died down.'

The notion of 'komee maa' is in tandem with the high value that the Nandi attach to the continuity of society. 'Fire' in this case symbolizes the warmth that is generated by the existence of living beings. Therefore, abstaining from marriage was, to the Nandi, tantamount to a gradual extermination of the community, which was a serious crime from the community's cultural perspective.

The remarks above underline the fact that African communities resisted change brought by the white men, particularly Christians, which was antithetical to their cultures that were rooted in marriage and family, and the idea of continuity of lineage. Similar observations concerning the rejections of the influence of the white pioneering catholic priest were deduced from an 81-year-old male participant in FGD 3 who had the following to say:

'Before the 1950s, the community largely rejected Christianity. When the Catholic Church Mission sought to establish a mission in the present-day Mosoriot they could not because of the 10 Kilometre rule. However, the then Chief of the 'Koileke' division, arap Chemuigut, consulted with the colonial administration which allowed the Catholic Mission to be established in Chepterit (though it was within the 10 KM radius). That's how the Catholic Mission was built and the first Priest, Fr Joseph Kuhn settled and lived in Chepterit in the house of the Chief.'

'Fr Kuhn was able to reach out to the community at large and converted several men of the 'Nyongi' age set including the chief, one Raphael, one Gregory and others. The conversion of a small group of people was

because Fr Kuhn allowed the community to continue practising their indigenous and customary traditions and ceremonies. This led to an increase in the number of converts as Fr Joseph Kuhn didn't interfere with the community's ways of living. The Catholic Church became attractive to the community at large and the Church Mission grew in numbers. Fr Kuhn was then deputized by Fr Meier. The Church grew and opened another mission in Kobujoi Mission in 1948 and then Kaiboi Mission later in 1952.'

The observation underscores how the Church had to adapt its evangelical approach in dealing with the hostile response of the Nandi towards celibacy. Fr. Khun chose to overlook the resistance as he pursued the bigger picture, which was the preaching of the gospel. This was in line with St. Paul's teaching on the chief reason for celibacy in scripture.

The early missionaries were still yet to learn a lot about the notion of inculturation, in which the Christian message could be spread by integrating it within the good cultural norms of the people. Perhaps the missionaries did not need to focus so much on the need for the natives to accept celibacy as opposed to the need for them to accept the salvific message of Christ. The real growth in the acceptance of Catholicism took an exponential growth in the 1950s and 1960s as many members of the Indigenous Nandi community began to attend catechism classes in Chepterit. This was intimated by an 83-year-old male participant in FGD 2:

'I attended Catechism classes in Chepterit in 1950 which took three months from August to October and was baptized in October 1950. The Chumo, Maina and Sawe age-set gladly attended these Catechism classes. The church teachings (Catechism) were supplemented by the catholic-sponsored schools in several schools such as Kimaren, Kesengey, Koibarak and Maraba primary schools where the priest (Fr Meier and Fr Kuhn) and his African

catechist would attend the catechism classes. The next mission was established in Kobujoi in 1952 and then the Kaiboi mission in 1956. The Mission in Kobujoi spread to Kaptumek, Kapkeben, Samutet and Kapkenduywa where the earlier converts from the Chepterit mission established churches in these locations and used schools to propagate the Catholic faith. By the 1960s, the church started to spread to different localities within the region and with the help of the priest helped acquire a location for the building of a church.'

Similarly, a 79-year-old male participant in the same FGD stated: *"I attended catechism classes in 1957 at Chepterit Mission as one of the earliest Christian converts."*

As the discussion, went on, an 83-year-old female participant also indicated that he attended catechism in the Chepterit mission as early as 1957.

'My parents eloped and got baptized and married in Mukumu Catholic mission in 1933. I attended catechism in the Chepterit Mission and later in the Kaiboi Mission in 1957. The parents didn't allow her to interact with the community at large for those who had not accepted Christianity. The father always insisted on infant baptism in the first month and later their house was used for catechism classes for children in Tilolwa (near Chepterit Mission).'

Evidently from the above remarks, the early missionaries foregrounded baptism and conversion, followed by catechism, and pushed the subject of celibacy to the background. Further information on the Nandi community's stand on priestly celibacy was drawn from an 81-year-old male participant in FGD 3:

'I attended Catechism classes in Chepterit in 1950 which took three months from August to October and was baptized in October 1950. Later on, after having attended basic schooling,

I sought to join the priesthood and proceeded to seminary for three months in Mukumu as sponsored by Fr Kuhn in 1955 to only be forcefully returned home by the grandmother because of a family tradition of lineage. The community distasted celibacy as my grandmother indicated that she would lose offspring (kame maa) if I went to Mukumu. She threatened to curse me if did not renege on my desire to join the priesthood.'

Further, an 84-year-old male participant in the same FGD also indicated that he had attended catechism classes in 1957 at the point when the Catholic faith was spreading out to other regions in Nandi County.

Although a significant number of the Nandi had embraced Christianity, it is clear that the vocation of the priesthood was still a long way from being accepted. It is interesting that, at this time, the Nandi perspective – which is also the Catholic Church perspective – was that priesthood was synonymous with celibacy. Yet, it seems that the Nandi were not opposed to the vocation of priesthood per se, but they only took issue with celibacy. Once the community had embraced the Catholic faith, they still didn't accept priestly celibacy. This was stated by an 80-year-old male participant in FGD 3:

'The community didn't object to the celibate white priest but had objections to their own joining the priesthood. The white priest taught the early converts and ensured that the community accepted the celibate life of a priest. However, the community has largely changed from indigeneity to modernism and thus celibate priests are readily accepted more than they were in the 1950s through 1960s. Colonialism has brought cultural changes that have seen the gradual accept the celibate life of a catholic priest.'

This was the turning point as the Catholic Faith spread all over the Nandi region. The early converts to Catholicism in the Nandi region could easily associate their set of laws governing the universe

and some aspects of Christianity. Considering that indigenous religious ceremonies, rites and rituals had been proscribed by the colonial authorities for fear of igniting and spreading rebellion in the region (Ellis, 1976). The strategy of disciplining Nandi Christians through the teaching of scripture did seem to yield much fruit by way of the increased number of local converts to Christianity. Perhaps at this time, the missionaries had learned that the subject of celibacy tended to antagonize the Nandi to reject Christianity as a whole; hence, the issue was probably avoided.

The study noted that the pioneering celibate Catholic priests were mysterious to the community and therefore the community rejected and distanced themselves save for a few converts. This finding largely finds support in several previous studies that showed that celibate Catholic priests were frowned upon at a societal level (Mbiti, 1969; Gwaza, 2019; Wubbels, 2011) because the African culture emphasizes paternity, which conflicts with clerical celibacy (Juma et al., 2018). Appiah-Kubi and Korsah (2020) observe that celibacy vows in the Catholic Church appeared awkward in the African traditional societies in West Africa. Furthermore, Emeka, (2014) observed, that African societies were hesitant to embrace the life of celibacy because they considered it unreasonable, unnatural and totally against African cultural traditions.

The period between the 1950s to 1990s seems to indicate a wait-and-see attitude as the community stayed indifferent to the calling to priesthood. Historical records show that very few individuals from the community ventured into Catholic priesthood as records show that only two persons from the community were ordained priests before 1980, that is Fr George Cheboryot (ordained in 1972) and Fr Michael Toror (Ordained in 1975). Meanwhile, the white priest continued serving among the community (Catholic Diocese of Eldoret, CDE.co.ke, 2023). This evidence of the non-acceptability of celibacy in particular, and priesthood in general, is also adduced by Hastings

(1978), a former priest, who called for the ordination of married catechists as early as 1964 in an article published in the *African Ecclesial Review*.

From the 1980s to 1990, only five individuals from the Nandi Community were ordained Catholic priests and this shows the non – non-acceptability of priestly celibacy among the Nandi Community. The period between 1980 and the turn of the millennium (the year 2000) seems to have been a period of transition as the number of catholic priests rose from two in the 1970s to five in the 1980s and nine in the 1990s and later gradual change in the communal attitudes towards priestly celibacy (CDE.co.ke, 2023).

Acceptability of Priestly Celibacy in the 21st Century

In the 21st century, the growing acceptance of celibacy and the conversion to Christianity among the Nandi could paralleled the loss of indigenous religious practises, as observed from FGDs. The FGD participants averred that the mass conversion to Christianity in Nandi was largely the result of the transformational changes in the community during the colonial period. As articulated by an 86-year-old male participant in FGD 2:

'The Community slowly lost its indigenous religious practices once the colonial government relocated all the seers/oracles from within the community divisions (pororiosiek). Essentially, the acceptance of priestly celibacy by the community was gradual and reluctant based on the loss of rich cultural religious practice, and the acceptance and enticement of the pioneering priest.'

One wonders if there was a way by which the Nandi could have been made to embrace celibacy without necessarily having to erase some of their cultural norms. Perhaps further scholarship on alternative ways missionaries could have converted Africans through inculturation can shed light on this matter. During the discussion, an 82-year-old male

discussant in the same FGD also corroborated and commented as follows:

'At some point, the indigenous religious practices got eroded and were lost forever between the generations of Nyongi and Maina age sets, and thus Chumo could have only heard about the indigenous religious ceremony (Kapkoros). Onwards from the Sawe ageset, Christianity gradually replaced the Indigenous religious practices and the community largely was inclined to hold the basic beliefs such as the morning devotion of facing the rising sun and saying some prayers.'

Once the community had gradually accepted to be converted or largely coerced to accept Christianity, the discussion then shifted to the acceptability of priestly celibacy in the African Catholic Church. It seems the early missionaries were more interested in developing African priests and agents of evangelization than merely converting the Nandi to Christianity. The acceptance of priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church slowly gained traction, through some difficulties. This was observed by an 83-year-old male participant in FGD 2. He offered a unique viewpoint on priestly celibacy that linked the demands of ritual purity in the indigenous religious ceremonies to the Catholic Church's demands on purity.

'It was after the realization that the unmarried Indigenous priest (tisik) was more suited to the rigours of the Indigenous religious practises which required purity at all times. Thus, they slowly accepted the celibacy practice of the priest as they represented the ideal of the Indigenous priest (tisik) at the shrine (Kapkoros).'

An 86-year-old male participant offered a particular insight into the differences between Indigenous priests and Catholic priests which narrowed as the Nandi community underwent transformational changes in its religious philosophy and beliefs from Indigenous religion to Christianity by stating that:

'Originally, the community could not fathom a person to be celibate for the religious rituals at the shrine and thus they resented the view that anyone including the white priest could fulfil the requirement of purity (celibacy) for the long run. However, the Indigenous priests (tisik) were to be secluded before the Indigenous religious ceremony while the priest had been living a celibate life and thus was suited to the rigours of purity of the religious ceremony. However, the indigenous religious ceremonies were outlawed and, in turn, Christianity grew and became a substitute. The priest then became a symbol of purity in the shrine.'

The colonial state outlawed the African cultural and religious beliefs and practices, thereby coercing the Nandi community to embrace Christianity. The colonial annexation of fertile land for the white settlers relocated the Nandi community to reservations, which also led to the loss of the physical shrines. Subsequently, the place of the indigenous African priest was watered down and replaced with the Christian priest.

In comparing an Indigenous priest with a catholic priest, a 79-year-old male participant in the same FGD 2 offered his insights by saying:

'A priest is a unique person in the community who is highly esteemed and is seldomly chastised for the choice of staying unmarried because of the enormous responsibility of providing spiritual and moral guidance to the community. Any reproach or censure towards the catholic priest can only be expected to arise from other Christian denominations. Based on the Nandi tradition, the choice of celibate life of a priest and nun is interesting as it is something unique, appealing and fulfilling as the individual chooses this 'humble' life of spirituality that is incomparable to anything else.'

'Furthermore, there is a distinction between the voluntary celibacy arrangement for the

ritual performance of indigenous ceremonies such as the circumcision rites and the sacerdotal celibacy sought by the catholic priest. The indigenous Nandi Worldview on celibacy is more geared towards sacrificing for the greater good of the community values during the performance of rituals and ceremonies while the priestly celibacy is a personal sacrifice for the good of the church. If someone decides to become a priest, then he/she takes to sacrifice for the greater good of spirituality while foregoing earthly pleasures.'

The above speaker was deeply trained in the Catholic doctrine, yet he was also informed on the nature of celibacy in the indigenous Nandi culture. His views underscore that the modern Nandi Catholic Christian is unequivocally in agreement with the importance and function of clerical celibacy. There isn't syncretism between the traditional Nandi concept of celibacy and the Catholic teachings on and practice of celibacy. In both cases, celibacy serves a spiritual function; it enables the priest to be more acutely sensitive to the spirit and presence of God as a mediator between the human and divine.

In a rejoinder, an 80-year-old male participant in FGD 2 opined that:

'The vocation of priesthood is considered a unique calling in that individuals who are called to it always face direct restraints from both the parent and community in their quest to join the priesthood. They are always asked not to be 'kime maa' as opposed to kipsongoiya (unmarried individuals). Maat usually means fire but when used in circumcision rites it takes a metaphorical meaning 'the fire from the loins' which implies siring offspring. kime maa directly implies the 'fire that died down' but takes a unique metaphorical meaning of 'someone who has refused to sire offspring'.

As drawn from the discussants, those who opt for a priestly vocation in Nandi still suffer from the

stigma of family. They have to overcome the stereotype of being labelled as those who refuse to partake in the maintenance of lineage through procreation in marriage. At the personal level, they may be branded as men who could not bear the courage to take on the difficult responsibilities of marriage and family life.

It is nonetheless worth noting that priesthood was not an alien concept to the Nandi community as indicated by a 76 – year old male discussant in FGD 2:

'The Nandi Indigenous worldview deemed a priest having been chosen from among the community to lead in the religious ceremonies based on specific attributes' (Lipwuop). There are similarities between the Nandi Worldview and the Catholic Church. The processional view during religious ceremonies, obligatory offerings and petitions are more considered to hold similar parallels. This could be drawn from the church's perspective on inculturation.'

During participation in the discussion, an 80-year-old female participant in FGD 2 shared her thoughts on the similarities between *tisik* (Indigenous priest) and Catholic priests:

'The priests are considered shepherds of the flock of the Church and would more likely hold certain similarities with the Indigenous priest (tisik) and the Catholic priest in that they both shepherded the community. Being unmarried is a choice and seems to follow lineage and thus at different ages, individuals would remain unmarried. It is not the wish of the priest to remain unmarried but the community accepted the personal sacrifice made by the individual to become a celibate priest.'

The observation is that the community insisted on ritual purity during ceremonies and this mirrored with what the Catholic church insisted and thus validated the need for ritual purity during the ceremonies.

This understanding came from the steady efforts of the missionaries to catechize the converted Nandi who in turn explained the Catholic doctrine to their people. As the discussion moved forward, it was much easier for the discussants to offer practical examples of how a celibate white priest, Fr Martin Boyle changed the community in Taachasis as informed by an 84-year-old male participant in FGD 2:

'When Fr Martin Boyle came to Taachasis, he came and brought people together and baptized the community, he built a church and established a community of Christians, he cannot be referred to as Kipsongoiya (an unmarried man) because he has changed the community through salvation. Fr Boyle was esteemed and was given a traditional four-legged stool (only used by married men and elderly men) and was named after someone (Kwan Bo meaning 'father to'). The Nandi community being patriarchal in nature had separate symbolism where women would only sit on a three-legged stool.'

The acceptance of Fr Martin Boyle was thus one of the indicators that the Nandi were slowly acquiescing to the concept and practice of priestly celibacy in the Church. More elaboration on this matter was given by a 79-year-old female participant in the same FGD:

'Fr Boyle has begotten people in his name (several Christians have named their children Martin, Boyle and many others in his honour). It is the same, as the indigenous naming ceremony for the children in the early 20th century. Fr Martin Boyle was accepted because of his purity and because his community accepted to offer him to serve in the Christian missionary activity. When he arrived in Africa for his missionary work, his purity was comparable to the purity of the indigenous priest (tisik) who was leading the division in the religious ceremonies in the shrines. Fr Martin

Boyle 'lit a fire' by having a community of believers and the fruits are now visible.'

As shown above, it was necessary for the Nandi to construe the Catholic concept of 'father' assigned to the priest as a sign of his spiritual birthing of others. This understanding helped the Nandi to regard the Catholic priest as a man taking responsibility over a family, just like any biological father in a marital context. It did help that Fr. Martin exhibited exemplary moral character that was in line with demands on a priest within the traditions of the Nandi.

Fr Boyle seems to draw certain similarities with the pioneering white priest, Fr Kuhn as elucidated by a 75-year-old female discussant in FGD 2:

'When Fr. Martin Boyle arrived at Taachasis in 1992 he focused on understanding the Indigenous cultural practises of the community at large more so in betrothal, marriage and circumcision rites. The current catholic priests are exemplary and pure (Libwuob) and are comparable to the Indigenous priests (tisik) who were married. Figuratively, 'we are all children of Fr Martin Boyle, therefore priest cannot be said to be unmarried'. He came and brought together, all classes of people from children to the elderly and shepherded them as his own. He took the Cross of Christ and 'carried the community as his own.'

'A priest remains unmarried but a catholic priest is married to the church (congregants) and not a person, thus he is simply married.' The name 'Father' connotes unique symbolism as it represents fatherhood and thus 'he has many children and was sent by God Almighty to help every congregant'. A priest seeks permission and his father's blessings to be unmarried and serve in the church while an unmarried adult man chooses to unmarried life of solitude thus, he is despised for going against the customary tradition of getting married.'

The study also adduced evidence of hesitance towards a celibate priest from FGD 2. The discussion highlighted the Nandi community's perception of priestly celibacy when the Catholic Mission in Taachasis, Tindiret, was established. The Nandi community was, at first, hesitant to welcome the celibate white priests, but over time they began to understand the essence of celibacy in priesthood.

One of the mistakes made by early Christian missionaries in Africa was that of wholesomely dismissing indigenous beliefs and practices as barbaric and inhumane. However, as indicated by the above remarks in FGD 2, Fr. Martin Boyle took a different direction. He first sought to understand the Nandi before imposing or introducing Christianity. This approach helped him to easily teach and persuade the Nandi to embrace Catholicism, despite their objection to celibacy.

In contrast, one discussant in FGD 3 considered priestly celibacy as a matter of acceptance of the dictates of the Catholic Church. This was the contribution of a 78-year-old female participant in FGD 3:

'The priestly celibacy among the current community draws from the tradition and beliefs of the Catholic Church relating to Jesus Christ in person. Once you submit to the Church's teaching and seek to become a priest, then you accrue respect from being a priest while the Catholic view on priestly celibacy is the personal sacrifice someone makes concerning religious obligation. The current priest has attained purity at an early age because of their training in the seminary. He is therefore believed to have achieved purity at an early age and he is therefore unique after having attended the seminary. His behaviour at all times is exemplary having been anointed to serve Lord Jesus Christ.'

The viewpoint drawn from the FGD acknowledges the Christian view that priesthood is a calling. It is not a vocation that one enters out of his own

volition. It is an invitation by God through the Holy Spirit to serve. Therefore, even before one is trained to be a priest, he must have received and responded to the calling. Celibacy then becomes easy to observe when one understands the need to detach from the world and commit fully to hearing the voice of God and ministering through obedience to God's people. Evidence of social acceptance of celibate life was indicated by three individuals who had allowed their sons and daughters to join priesthood and priesthood. For instance, a 75-year-old female participant in FGD 1 observed:

'I encourage the priest to stay celibate and partake in the Lord's work for it were not for the priest, the work of our lord Jesus Christ would not prosper. For the nuns, I encourage them as they strengthen us in prayers as exemplified by the Book of Ruth. The nuns/sisters are stronger in prayers and help women to surmount the challenges.'

'The community highly valued procreation at all times and there were two instances where the community ensured continuity in lineage; a warrior during foraging battles and a youth dying unexpectedly. In both cases, the individuals were 'named' in a ceremony to ensure that their lineage continues. In the same instances, the unmarried priest does not lose his lineage by not marrying but his name remains forever by his deeds. For instance, the deeds of Fr Martin Boyle are still etched in the memory of the people of the Taachasis community at large.'

A similar viewpoint was expressed in support of personal acceptance of priestly celibacy, by an 80-year-old male participant in FGD 2:

'I am a father to the priest who is currently a serving priest in the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret from Taachasis. During the circumcision period, at his home, Fr Martin Boyle visited and celebrated the occasion with the family. During the reception of the young man, Fr Martin Boyle

visited the family and requested him to offer him to the church so that I may encourage him to be a priest. I consulted my father of Maina age set on the request for my son. The grandfather consented and accepted the young man joining the priesthood but warned him that his grandson would not be married. He accepted the decision and allowed the son to join the priesthood.

I will still agree to have another son to become a priest after having one who currently serving in the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret.'

More support was expressed by a 76-year-old female discussant:

'My son is currently a serving diocesan priest in the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret. I will still agree to have another son to become a priest after having one who currently serving in the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret.'

In contributing to the discussion, one 76-year-old female participant in the same FGD 1 intimated that she always encourages young people to join the different congregations in the Catholic Church:

'I encourage the daughters and sons to join the ecclesiastical missions of priests and nuns. Refer to the Gospel of Mathew 19:27-30 where spiritual tasks are demanding and require one to forego marriage for the sake of having a united mind towards serving God. If a person is married, then he/she will focus more on personal desires as opposed to working in the Lord's vineyard.'

The study noted that the issue of 'naming' deceased individuals draws parallelism between the Nandi atavistic practice of assigning names of the departed to the living and the fatherhood of the priest who has 'sired' many spiritual children through his pastoral ministry. This fusion of perspectives on celibacy and heritage makes a convincing case for why Catholicism has enjoyed steady growth in the Nandi community.

It is clear from these remarks that in Africa individuals place a lot of importance on family approval in their personal choices. The choice to become a priest or nun can thus be difficult where the family is resistant to that choice. Nevertheless, the study noted that there has been a steady acceptance of clerical celibacy among the Nandi women folk over time. This was observed from all the FGDs where several female participants also accented to allowing their sons to become celibate priests in their communities, as echoed in these observations from FGDs:

I would gladly accept my son to be a priest because priesthood is not comparable to an unmarried life but a fruitful life where the priest is of benefit to the community at large.

I agree and accept it because it is an honourable and excellent vocation that is geared towards serving the Almighty God. The priest will serve all of us in the community.

I agree that priesthood is a blessing to everyone in the community and my household. A priest is a blessing to everyone.

I will agree with him because it is a calling that my son is following. I cannot deny him what when he is called. If it a God's calling, I cannot impede it.

As already pointed out, among the Nandi, ritual and moral purity were demanded of all people, but the highest form of purity was expected of those responsible for conducting rituals and other spiritual activities. When celibacy is seen in this context of the call to ritual purity, it becomes easier for the Nandi to embrace Catholic clerical celibacy. This element concerning the observance of purity before Mass service was large a prescription by pioneering white priests in the Nandi community who decreed the observance of purity before the converts could attend Eucharistic mass celebrations. This observation was made by a 79-year-old male participant in FGD 3:

'The pioneering priest in the Chepterit Mission also taught the early individuals to observe purity at all times in preparation for Eucharistic celebrations. The early converts to Christianity were instructed not to indulge in alcohol and any sexual relations two days (Thursday) before the Eucharistic celebration and successive days (Monday).'

The study observed that the societal transformation has seen increased acceptance of priestly celibacy in Nandi. Many of the participants indicated that they would consent to have their sons and daughters live celibate lives. This viewpoint finds support in various studies from several authors and researchers on the subject of celibacy and Catholicism in Africa who largely infer that priestly celibacy has been embraced both at the communal and personal levels (Appiah-Kubi & Korsah, 2020). On his part, Makamure (2004), observes that, in some African countries, acceptance of priestly celibacy is supported by the number of Catholic priests currently on the ground.

The increased acceptance of priestly celibacy in the Nandi community is in stark context to the current global challenges facing the Catholic priesthood in general. The discussants in all the community FGDs nonetheless preferentially supported the provision of both emotional and social support to sexually incontinent priests. This observation, for example, was made by a 76-year-old female participant in FGD 2:

'If a priest is sexually incontinent, then the church structures should withdraw him from the mission and give him time to reflect while counselling him. A parent may wish for a son to join the priesthood but the son may not join the priesthood. In the other case, a young man wishes and seeks to join the priesthood. The son will automatically join the priesthood of his own volition even if the parents dissuaded him and thus, we do not have a ground to castigate them or encourage them to marry. Therefore, we seek

to respect and encourage the priest despite his failings to continue with his vocation so that the church grows and grows.'

The above remarks underscore an important aspect of priesthood which has not come out from the previous sections of this thesis: priests, despite their vows of celibacy and subsequently purity, do suffer from human failings. The above respondent was cognizant of this fact and rightly proposed an empathetic approach to dealing with issues of priestly sexual incontinence. On the same subject of priestly incontinence and abuse of position, several viewpoints from several female discussants were also adduced from all the FGDs. Below are samples of the perspectives:

'Every human being is bound to at one time, err and therefore a priest stumbling should not be viewed with suspicion or malice but the priest requires solace, prayers and understanding. If the women pray for the priest, then nothing can be an impediment. Priests should also pray for themselves to overcome the temptations. Let the priest read 1 Corinthians 7:32-38 to gain encouragement.'

'The priests hold similar capabilities of siring offspring, therefore any individual who has sacrificed his life for the sake of Christ only requires prayers to be steadfast. There is no greater sacrifice than the one an individual has chosen to be a priest. This calling to be a priest requires prayers and wishes from all the congregation.'

'Jesus Christ was not married and therefore the priest should also seek comfort in prayers and petitions. There is a parable in the Nandi language, that when loosely translated means 'Despite a cow having four limbs, it still stumbles'. The parable seeks to offer solace to anyone, who has stumbled based on the fact that a cow has four limbs to stand on while a human being is more likely to stumble because it has two legs to stand on.'

'Despite the media reports of sexual incontinence, we pray that the church stands firm with its priest so that the faith may spread and the church grows through the work of the priest. The priests and nuns should continue with their missionary work as they do despite the challenges.'

Similar opinions were drawn from male participants across the different FGDs:

It is only prayers that we can offer to the sexually incontinent priest so that he may overcome the challenges he is facing as a priest.

The priest and nuns should also pray hard to overcome challenges.

I can tell the priests and nuns that everyone faces worldly challenges and therefore I desire them they persevere and pray to overcome the challenges. Even married persons face challenges thus, when the challenges are significant, then know that victory is beckoning.

You are a priest or a nun who is a saviour to many so see challenges as part of life. It is also important that seek help from counsellors and close friends who may guide and help you to overcome these challenges.

The challenges facing priests may come from within and without and therefore once you have received the calling to be a priest, accept everything that comes with it. Let the priests humble, themselves and pray for strength.

I encourage the priest to stay celibate and partake in the Lord's work for it were not for the priest, the work of our lord Jesus Christ would not prosper. For the nuns, I encourage them as they strengthen us in prayers as exemplified by the Book of Ruth. The nuns/sisters are stronger in prayers and help women to surmount the challenges.

We will only pray for the sexually incontinent priests; we only pray for them to gain strength.

Marriage to a priest is not acceptable even if the priest is incontinent because a priest has a unique calling in society. Despite the unjustifiable media reports on priests' sexual incontinence, the Church hierarchy should maintain its stand on celibacy.

The above excerpts underscore that ritual purity on the side of the priest, is a product of ongoing formation. It is thus important not to overlook the notion that priesthood is synonymous with moral perfection. In the same way, it is the responsibility, first, of the priest himself, then the whole church, including the hierarchy, and congregation to work towards moral perfection through a life marked by the study of scripture, Church teachings, meditation and prayers.

CONCLUSION

Priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church was considered an anomaly by the indigenous Nandi community could not fathom the unmarried pioneering Catholic priest who had settled in Chepterit among the Nandi community. The Nandi thus detested the celibate life of Fr Joseph Kuhn and suspected that he was seeking to marry their children. As the indigenous Nandi religious practises slowly got eroded, the community still held strongly to the customary and cultural beliefs. Up to the mid-20th century until the 1990s, the community could not accept their own to join the priesthood as priestly celibacy became a proposition for a few converted young men to become and resemble indigenous priests (*tisik*) but were held back by the community expectations. This indicated that celibate priests were not culturally and socially acceptable in the community in the mid-20th century.

At the beckoning of the 21st century, the number of converts increased, and the Nandi community slowly began to accept a celibate priest. Catholic priests from the Nandi community are largely accepted by their own Christian community. Further, there has been a gradual societal shift in

perception towards priestly celibacy at the community level as more young men are joining the priesthood. However, the community at large questions their choices regarding celibacy. Despite the cultural evolution in the 21st century, celibate priests are still facing social and cultural rigidities regarding their choices of vocation to be priests as the cultural viewpoints and social backgrounds of Christians still shape much of how they believe and practice their faith.

Recommendations

Considering that there are dialectical differences between the indigenous African worldview and the Catholic Church with regard to celibacy and marriage, the study recommends that the Catholic Church hierarchy appreciate the natural and cultural philosophical value attached to indigenous marriages of African communities. In this manner, the Church would draw specific indigenous and cultural values such as ritual purity, chastity and virtuous living that are more aligned and appropriate to Christian values. This would not only strengthen the Church's mission but also support the growth of the Christian communities in Africa. The celibacy requirement for Catholic priesthood should be upheld considering that the requirement for ritual purity in the African indigenous worldview was similar. This supports the notion that religious ceremonies and rituals require ritual purity and virtuous living by all standards.

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