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Indigenous Symbols of Nourishment: What is their Place in the Sacramental Rite of Holy Communion in the Anglican Church of Kenya?

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Abstract

The use of bread and wine in the sacramental rite of the Holy Communion in the Anglican Church are so significant that they mark the climax of the Anglican worship. However, there are emerging debates and voices regarding these dominical symbols in the Anglican Communion where some Provinces are substituting them with indigenous symbols. While other Provinces in the Anglican Communion are considering their indigenous symbols of nourishment for reappropriation in the Holy Communion, the Kenyan Church is reluctant to embrace them. It is against this backdrop that this article is set to explore the place of indigenous symbols of nourishment and their relevance to the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) adherents particularly in the ACK diocese of Thika.

Key Words: Anglican, Holy Communion, Inculturation, Kenya, Symbols, Nourishment.

Introduction

The sacrament of the Holy Communion in the Anglican ecclesiastical tradition plays a fundamental role in the life of Christians. In this sacrament, the bread and the wine are the officially recognized and recommended elements for use. However, this rich inherited tradition in the ecclesiastical tradition of the Anglican identity has been challenged and questioned by various provinces in the Anglican Communion. This has spread widely in many provinces in the Anglican Communion, to the extent that this has attracted the attention of the Anglican Consultative Council that deals with

issues affecting the Communion, among them being the liturgy.¹ In their survey, statistics indicated that the question of substituting bread and wine in the sacrament of the Holy Communion has risen, albeit unofficially.² Interestingly, while other provinces in the Anglican Communion are substituting the Holy Communion symbols, that is bread and wine, with indigenous symbols, the ACK is still stuck with bread and wine as the official and authorized symbols for use, as bequeathed by the CMS missionaries. Therefore, it is in the light of this plight that this article wants to investigate how the ACK and her Christian think about substituting bread and wine with the locally available food products, like other provinces are doing.

This article draws its raw data from both empirical and non-empirical methods. The raw data was collected from twenty-five parishes between 2013 and 2014. The respondents comprised of both clergy and laity in the ACK diocese of Thika. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires were used in data collection. Sixty-seven respondents with deeper knowledge of the Holy Communion from the ACK were purposively sampled. The collected data was analysed qualitatively. In the next section, this article will explore on the place of indigenous symbols in the sacramental rite of the Holy Communion.

Do Indigenous Symbols have a Place in Holy Communion?

F. W. Dillistone, writing on *symbols and culture*, introduces this discussion by posing a question to us: “can a symbol, representing food and drink so characteristic of Mediterranean culture, be transferred into the worship of all other cultures? Or does an unchangeable transfer reduce it to no more than a sign, useful in its way but unable to touch the depth of human feeling?”³ These questions posed by this scholar are so relevant and critical in the twenty-first century Church that is threatened by secularization and globalization. This is because symbols speak to people in their own context, leaving ‘outsiders’ with a superficial meaning of that symbol. This was evident in ACK Christians that constructed diverse layers of meaning toward bread and wine in the Holy Communion as symbols of body and blood of Christ, a symbol of modernity, foreign products, prohibited product and symbols of neo-colonialism. In this line of thought, this section examines the question of whether there was any need to use indigenous symbols of nourishment or food products well connected with Kikuyu people in the ACK.

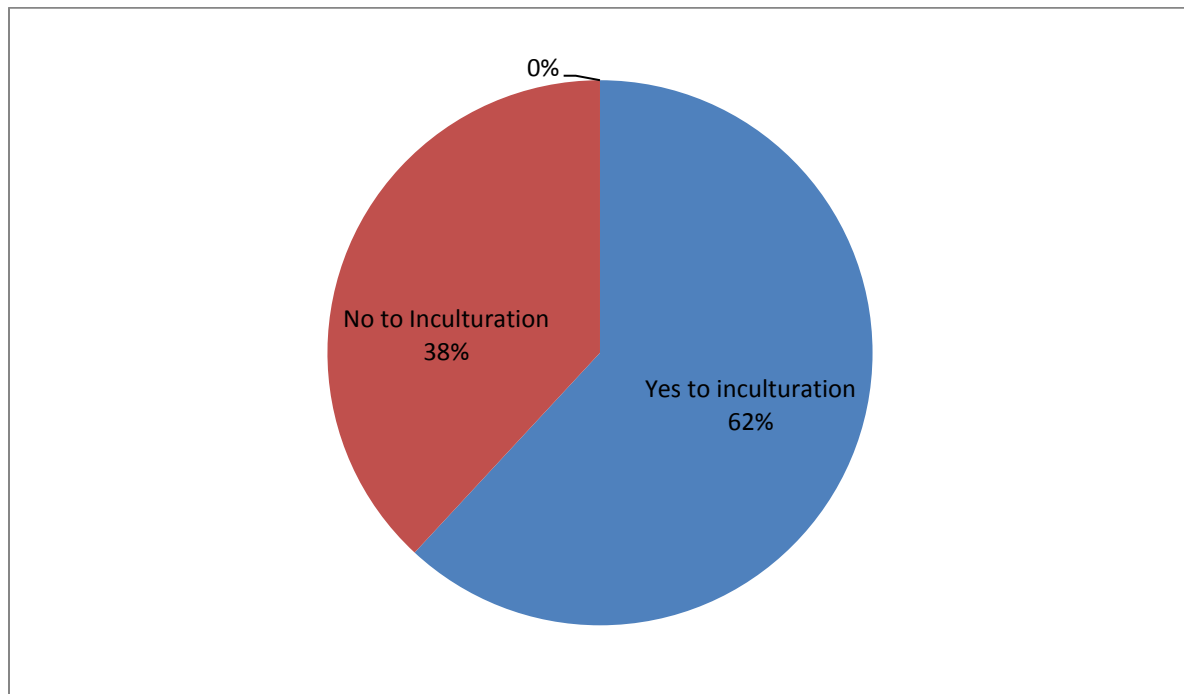
In order to establish the place of indigenous symbols in the Holy Communion rite in the ACK I conducted a research with ACK adherents (both clergy and laity) on this subject. These are the appalling results I was able to obtain. In in-depth interviews with twenty-one members of ACK, 62% of them supported the idea of using indigenous food products in the Holy Communion, while 38% objected as the figure below shows.

¹ Gibson, Paul. 2005. “Eucharistic Food and Drink: A Report of the Inter-Anglican Liturgical Commission to the Anglican Consultative Council.” <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/liturgy/docs/appendix%205.pdf> (Accessed on 23/05/2013).

² Gibson, Eucharistic Food and Drink, (Accessed on 23/05/2013).

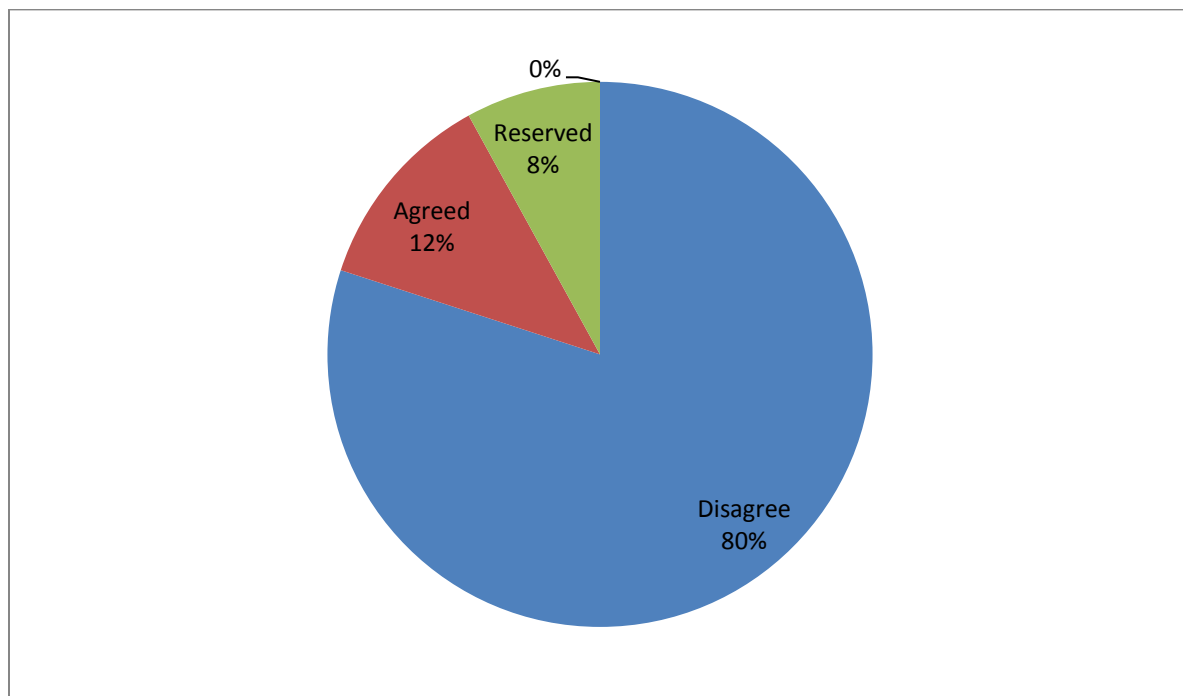
³ F. W. Dillistone. *The Power of Symbols*, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1986), 208-209.

Figure 1: Individual in-depth interview responses on use of Indigenous food in the Holy Communion.



In the focus group discussions, the laity agreed that it is not good while both clergy and laity discussions agreed 100% that there is a need to use indigenous food products, though they cautioned that care should be taken. However, with the clergy and laity combined, their group was sharply divided. In some questionnaires I disseminated to various ACK local congregations' leadership, these are their responses in the figure below.

Figure 2: Questionnaires response in regard to use of indigenous Kikuyu sacrificial food in Holy Communion, in percentage terms.



In view of the data findings summarized in the figures above, there is an apparent need to suggest that ACK Christians have varied views on use of indigenous food in the Holy Communion. Some of the responses are as follows: From Regina Kinuthia, she argued that “yes if the symbols are understood to signify the body and blood of Christ.”⁴ Kinuthia’s argument was that it was alright to use the indigenous symbols as long as they retain the initial meaning and significance as the body and blood of Christ. John Gitau is another respondent who agreed that it was worth using indigenous symbols of nourishment in the Holy Communion because he said:

I don’t see any problem with having our own symbols that will be more relevant. Let’s look at the ordinary person and we want to communicate to him/her the significance of Holy Communion, I think it will be so important to that particular person if he/she is shown the Holy Communion with familiar symbols and therefore I say it is possible.⁵

According to Gitau, he was persuaded that this exercise was acceptable as long as it was for conveying the message of Holy Communion in the language that was understandable to the people

⁴Regina Kinuthia. Interview, Ruiru Parish, 27th November 2013

⁵John Gitau. Clergy and Laity Focused Group Interview, 5th December 2013

in their own context. Such a thought was also captured by Solomon Thiga who maintained that “yes because this is what is more cultural to us.”⁶

However, there were dissenting voices from some ACK adherents who were of the view that the ACK ought to stick to the inherited tradition and Christ’s command. Their diverging point with others are illustrated here,

No, because if we say we can be using our traditional food people may take lightly the issue of Holy Communion and perceive Holy Communion symbols as ordinary things. So we need to be using those things of Holy Communion which have been set apart because Holy Communion needs to be followed in the right way.⁷

This is an idea from youth leader who fears that these symbols might be disrespected or lose their uniqueness and power, which they have in the life of believers. Another view was that

I think we may not be able to do that, first we have to know the source, because Holy Communion is something sacred. So we cannot come with anything from anywhere and bring it in the Holy Communion, it must be something that is well known its source and its preparation as Holy Communion is something that ought to be special.⁸

What emerged from Joseph Wanyoike, a lay reader in the ACK was that he was sceptical and suspicious of indigenous food. He was emphatic that Holy Communion symbols are so special and unique that any selection and choice should be carefully done. This argument was congruent with Peter Mburu’s view who maintained “no, because they are not the one that Jesus was likened with to represent his body and blood.”⁹ Another dissenting view on the use of local food products was those who perceive Holy Communion symbols as prestigious products for a civilized Church as Mary Njogu, Mother’s Union chairlady said “no, because we changed into modern ways.”¹⁰ Such an idea suggests that the use of locally available food products in Holy Communion was viewed by ACK Christians as a sign of primitivism and backwardness.

True theology is the attempt on the part of the church to explain and interpret the meaning of the gospel for its own life and to answer questions raised by the Christian faith, using the thought,

⁶ Rev. Solomon Thiga, Questionnaire, 21st January 2014.

⁷ Peter Gicharu, Interviewed, 18th November 2013.

⁸ Joseph Wanyoike, Laity Focused Group Discussion, 5th December 2013.

⁹ Peter Mburu, Questionnaire, 10th January 2014.

¹⁰ Mary Njogu, Questionnaire, 18th February 2014.

values and categories of the truth that are authentic to that place and time.¹¹ From the above responses by ACK Christians, it would be right to suggest that the Christians are divided between liberals and conservatives. The two positions cut across age, positions in the Church and parishes from urban and rural set up. According to the statistics these two groups are divided into approximately 37% and approximately 63% participants respectively. This affirms the characteristic of symbols to divide and unite, marking the borderline between distinct groups. In addition, these statistics postulate two points. One, the use of indigenous food products in the Holy Communion rite in the ACK is informed more by gender because males 64% appeared to be the majority of liberals when compared with females 36%. This is despite women being the minority due to the ACK being more patriarchal as the questionnaires demonstrate the ACK leadership positions are dominated by male. Two, the ACK is a conservative Province because 63% of all the participants in this study were persuaded that the Church in the local context should continue using the European imported food products as bequeathed by the first CMS missionaries.

Therefore, these two groups holding diverging views on Holy Communion symbols were influenced by two kinds of logic. Andrew McGowan in response to the Liturgical Commission in the Anglican Communion *on Eucharistic Food and Drink* describes these two types of logic that influence Christians and prompt some to be conservative and others liberal. He argues that some Christians are aligned to transmission. This means the diachronic logic of conscious tradition where the Church receives and imitates the actions of Jesus in specific ways it understands him to have given and intended them to be used. When translated, this means the synchronic logic of conscious inculturation where the Church seeks to re-enact the meaning of the actions of Jesus anew in each context.¹² Reflecting from these two types of logic, this study learnt that some ACK Christians are adamant to change the traditional symbols, for they would like to emulate what Christ used and did, meaning sticking to traditional symbols. Others perceived that there is *spermatikoi* in every culture and using this line of thought they can appropriate cultural food for use in the Holy Communion. Hence, these divergent views on inculturation of Holy Communion symbols depict polarization and compartmentalization in African theology according to John Brown Ndungu Ikenye, as the Africans are divided between those who idealized the West and

¹¹ Dean. S. Gilliland "Contextual Theology as Incarnational Mission, 10-11.

¹² Paul Gibson. 2005. "Eucharistic Food and Drink" (Accessed 23/05/2013).

others who perceive the West as imperialistic and exploitative.¹³ However, Ikenye concludes that it is worth noting that both the West and Africa have gifts to offer for cross-pollination.

Liberal Views on use of Indigenous Symbols

The liberals (which include both laity and clergy informed more by gender and educational backgrounds) influenced by the synchronic logic of conscious inculturation were at home with indigenous symbols of nourishment being used in the Holy Communion. They argued that as long as the ‘symbols used retain the original meaning’ of the traditional symbols, that is the body and blood of Christ, when this meal was instituted by Christ then indigenous symbols of nourishment are welcomed. This depicts that liberals were optimistic that culture has something to bring and offer to the Christian faith with the primary goal of effective communication and deeper understanding. Thus, there is a necessity for dialogue between the Christian faith and the host culture, as this affirms the words of John Mbiti how the gospel is naked yearning for clothing by the culture it encounters. This suggests that liberals saw Kikuyu culture as the guide to explore the right indigenous symbol of nourishment that must be reappropriated through re-interpretation of indigenous symbols of nourishment that are culturally and contextually relevant to people since inculturation as translation has to move beyond the superficial level to the reappropriation level. In support of this argument, J. Mose de Mesa in his work on *Inculturation as Pilgrimage* saw this fundamental role of culture as the guide in the inculturation exercise and proposed that inculturation should be movement from translation to reappropriation through the guidance of culture.¹⁴ He argues that “reappropriation or new interpretation requires fresh categories, new perspectives that the local culture can bring or offer.”¹⁵ In light of this, the Kikuyu symbol of nourishment (that is *ugali*) should be reappropriated and as delineated here below Christ become Jesus Christ *ugali* of life.

Moreover, those who support material inculturation continued to argue that it is long overdue for the Church to shift to indigenous symbols of nourishment that communicate to indigenous people in their particular context. K.P. Aleaz maintains that the Christian message becomes not only

¹³John Brown Ndungu Ikenye. *Pastoral Theology: Rediscovering African Models and Methods*, (Eldoret: Zapf Chancery, 2008), 93.

¹⁴J Mose de Mesa “Inculturation as Pilgrimage,” Pages 5-34 in *Mission and Culture: The Louis J. Luzbetak Lectures*, edited by Stephen B. Bevans, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 10.

¹⁵ J Mose de Mesa “Inculturation as Pilgrimage, 19.

intelligible to the local people but also becomes conceived because it is responding to their deepest aspirations.¹⁶ This means that when Holy Communion symbols are indigenous they will really communicate to ACK Christians and they will be relevant to them, unlike in the present state where Christians are still using the imported and foreign symbols that speak more to those who introduced them than to the indigenous people. John Gatu in support of indigenous symbols of nourishment concurs with the liberals and argues that in the Kikuyu worldview the symbol of meat, rather than bread, speaks and communicates deeply to the Kikuyu consciousness.¹⁷ For it indicates the presence of blood and the idea of offering and sacrifice that were so central in Kikuyu religious ceremonies, bringing home once again the hope of new life. This suggests that through inculturation, by using indigenous symbols of nourishment, Kikuyu Christians will experience their *Ngai* in a more revitalized way, since the primary goal of inculturation according to de Mesa is to make people experience their God within and through the instrumentality of their culture in a unique way.¹⁸

Conservative Views on the Use of Indigenous Symbols

Among the conservative respondents (including also laity and clergy informed by the educational background of the participants) influenced by diachronic logic of conscious tradition they stood their ground that the ACK needs to stick to and nurture the Anglican tradition inherited from the missionaries and never depart from this practice. Their stance was strengthened more by Christ the initiator of the traditional symbols as well as His command to be doing this in remembrance of Him. Their argument was rightly captured by Joseph Osei-Bonsu that “it is argued that the use of these elements all over the world ensures continuity between what Christ did at the last supper, what believers have done from time of Christ up to our times and what we do.”¹⁹ Since symbols play the role of preserving the community knowledge and passing it over to the next generation, using indigenous symbols according to conservative Christians will empty this cherished tradition. The implication of using indigenous symbols of nourishment is to delink them from what Christ used as well as from what missionaries taught them as ecclesiastical orthodoxy. Such discourse as ‘this is our culture’ depicts people holding fast to the inherited tradition without distorting it in

¹⁶K. P. Aleaz. “The Theology of Inculturation Re-examined” *Asia Journal of Theology*, (2011), .25/2, 244.

¹⁷ John Gatu. *Joyfully Christian Truly Christian*, 30.

¹⁸ J Mose de Mesa “Inculturation as Pilgrimage, 24.

¹⁹Joseph Osei-Bonsu. *The Inculturation of Christianity in Africa*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2005), 104.

spite of culture being dynamic and not static. With this static understanding it depicts that symbols reveal a particular understanding of theology and in this case evangelical theology as far as the Holy Communion sacrament is concerned in ACK.²⁰

The conservatives also argue that these traditional symbols are so unique in the life of the ACK Christians in that to change them and introduce indigenous symbols of nourishment will water down their uniqueness and result in these symbols being taken lightly by Christians. What may be deduced from conservatives is that these religious symbols – bread and wine- acquired a sense of sacredness and profound respect. Therefore, whatever happens to bread and wine has an intrinsic impact on them that may devalue the innate powers that symbols have and in return may cease to move people spiritually. In light of this, what prevails in conservatives, according to Rose Aden, is that the physical symbols of the bread and wine are very closely attached to their spiritual meaning, insinuating that what happens to these Holy Communion symbols happens to Christ who they represent.²¹ Because of this intimate relationship between the conservative Christians and the symbols of bread and wine, they perceived nothing else ‘comparable with them’ as well as to be ‘likened with Christ’. Consequently, any attempt to use indigenous symbols of nourishment rather than traditional symbols instituted by Christ will ultimately result in loss of power and significance of Holy Communion, since symbols lose power and meaning with time and change in encounter.

Another argument was being doubtful of the sources of these indigenous symbols of nourishment since they were convinced that their origin had to be established. However, Charles Wheatly discloses that in the Anglican tradition Holy Communion symbols were first provided by clergy and parishioners before it was resolved that the concerned Church to be providing these symbols.²² This depicts that in spite of conservatives’ stance of establishing the source of these symbols, there is a need to learn the simplicity of Jesus Christ, the initiator of this meal. As Charles Cumming rightly says:

²⁰Grace Davie. *The Sociology of Religion: A Critical Agenda Second Edition*, (London: Sage Publication Ltd, 2013), 123.

²¹Rose Aden. *Religion Today: A Critical Thinking Approach to Religious Studies*, (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2013),144.

²²Charles Wheatly. *Book of Common Prayer, An Administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church*, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1858).374-378.

In designating which food would contain his presence, Jesus did not choose something out of the ordinary. He did not insist on something exotic or imported, instead he was content to use the bread and wine of Passover meal - ordinary everyday items ... these were the staple food of the populace at that time, their common daily nourishment.²³

With this simplicity of Christ in initiating this meal, Christ welcomes the conservatives to Him so that God may be experienced again in every context through indigenous symbols of nourishment that would speak and communicate his reality.

Gerald A. Arbuckle, in his book *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for the Pastoral Worker*, makes a good distinction of symbols, where some are powerful and others powerless.²⁴ In the ACK, the imported Holy Communion symbols are viewed as powerful symbols in relation to indigenous symbols of nourishment. Though absolute power corrupts, everyone in the ACK aspires to be part and parcel of this power by using bread and wine. In light of this argument, this study drew from conservative Christians that they do not want to move away from bread and wine since they were a symbol of 'modernity', associated with western civilization that is admired by all. Thus they refute the use of indigenous symbols of nourishment in Holy Communion, due to their simplicity linked with powerlessness, despite Eugene La Verdiere indicating that these symbols were very ordinary among the Disciples of Christ when they gathered to eat and drink together in memory of Jesus Christ.²⁵

Choices for Substitutes for Bread and Wine in the Holy Communion

Following the diverse views by ACK Christians on the use of indigenous symbols of nourishment in the Holy Communion, the question now remains: if bread and wine were to be substituted, what would be used? In this section, I will explore the ACK Christians choice for substitution of bread and wine.

²³Charles Cummings. "Fruits of the Earth, Fruits of the Vine", Pages 156-162 in *Embracing Earth: Catholic Approaches to Ecology* edited by Albert J Lachance and John E. Carroll, (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 157.

²⁴Gerald A. Arbuckle. *Earthing the Gospel*, 33.

²⁵Eugene La Verdiere. *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 5.

A survey conducted in the Anglican Communion in twenty-nine Provinces indicated that the question for substituting bread and wine has arisen and this has taken place both officially and unofficially in some Provinces.²⁶ In Kenya, this is no different because Dickson Nkonge, commenting during an interview with Kenyan *Standard Newspaper* correspondent Lillian Aluanga-Delvaux, argued that, “there has a debate over what elements to use but it is not been a major point of departure within the Anglican Church.”²⁷ Perusing why there is this increase in substituting the traditional symbols of Holy Communion in the Anglican tradition within the Communion, Gibson cited that:

The following factors such as cultural adaptations. For some Anglicans their local culture reads very different meaning into bread and wine as these are ‘foreign’ imports. Other elements from the local culture convey the notion of celebratory meal far more than bread and wine, the unavailability of wheat bread or fermented grape wine. Some Provinces find themselves governed by Islamic governments who have outlawed all alcoholic drinks. In other Provinces wheat bread (wafers) and grape wine must be imported and this is far too expensive. In yet other places alcohol is associated with drunkenness and local Church teach (and insist on) total abstinence.²⁸

The above factors that prompt the rise for substitution of traditional symbols in the Holy Communion in the Anglican Communion were similar in the ACK, as Mary Mwangi summarized:

It is not one or two times we have gone to the bookshop, only to be told there is shortage of wine. Other Churches to buy a bottle of wine really cost them for it is very expensive. Another thing is about the availability of wafers is tedious, so if we have locally available elements, we will know to access them is easier and are readily available because some Churches do dilute wine with water to get much of it.²⁹

This response prompts ACK Christians conclude that due to the shortage of traditional symbols of Holy Communion in the ACK, indigenous symbols of nourishment can be substitutes in this rite. Kikuyus for instance cultivated food products such as bananas, sweet potatoes, arrowroots, yams, arum lily, millet, sorghum, *Njahi [dolichos lab lab]*, sugarcane, cowpeas, maize and beans. While I engaged the ACK Christians which Kikuyu food products they may use their responses are as

²⁶ Paul Gibson. 2005. “Eucharistic Food and Drink” (Accessed 23/05/2013).

²⁷ Lillian Aluanga-Delvaux. “Why there is a huge divide among Churches on Holy Communion,” *Kenya Standard Newspaper*, (August 2013) 31, 27.

²⁸ Paul Gibson. 2005. “Eucharistic Food and Drink” (Accessed 23/05/2013).

²⁹ Mary Mwangi, Clergy and Laity Focused Group Discussion, 5th December 2013.

follows: Naftali Maina suggested, “we use sweet potato, arrow roots and yams but for wine I have no idea what locally we can use ...”³⁰ For wine Gladys Wairimu suggests substitution with “the local brew and juice may be Ribena for it is closer to wine or soda.”³¹ Another suggestion was the use of “bread and juice or soda as long as prayer is made for the purpose of communion.”³² All these responses affirm the liberal and conservative views in regards to the use of indigenous symbols of nourishment. Among liberals they were at home with Kikuyu food products for use in Holy Communion, while conservatives suggest use of a loaf of bread and biscuits for bread while for wine to use juices available, Ribena and soft drinks specifically Coke soda.

Are there Benefits of using Indigenous Symbols of Nourishment in the ACK?

In light of the above discussion on use of indigenous food products in the Holy Communion rite in the ACK, the liberal Christians were found to be at home with indigenous symbols of nourishment. They expressed their views on the benefits of using inculturated indigenous symbols of nourishment in Holy Communion as follows:

Christ Becomes Closer to Communicants

The Christians in the ACK were of the opinion that when there is use of acceptable indigenous symbols of nourishment in Holy Communion Christ becomes closer to them. This thought was shared by Kinuthia who argues, “we own Christ in our culture that is see Christ closer home”³³, for he is incarnated in the local context of the people. To support this idea, I want to bring my personal encounter with a theological student at St. Paul University Mombasa Campus and a parish priest at Taita Taveta diocese. Humphrey Maina, in class discussion on inculturation of Holy Communion symbols, retorted that

The people in the Middle East or Palestine used bread because that what was available and that what was seen as food. So today what we see as food is *ugali*, so I remember once preaching to my Christians that ‘*Yesu ndiye ugali wa uzima wa milele*’ [that is Jesus is the *ugali* of eternal life].³⁴

³⁰ Naftali Maina, Interview, 18th November 2013.

³¹ Gladys Wairimu, Interview, 27th November 2013.

³² Stephen Irungu, Questionnaire, 18th February 2014.

³³ Kinuthia, Interview.

³⁴ Humphrey Maina, Class Discussion, 15 December 2013.

From this student one acknowledges that Christ has being inculturated as ‘*ugali* of life’ meaning He is the daily food of the people that nourishes and sustains them. This was no different in the ACK where maize is cultivated because if one is hungry *ugali* is the food that nourishes most ACK Christians. Meaning that *ugali* is the staple food in the ACK context and if Christ is to visit, *ugali* would be the likely meal to be given.

As religious symbols reveal the transcendence and immanence reality to humanity, it is right to conclude that reappropriation of Christ as *ugali* of life bring the immanence of Christ in the ACK context by becoming one of them in the form of physical and spiritual nourishment. Christ who became the bread of life to Jews, in the ACK context would become Jesus Christ *ugali* of life. This is possible because according to Charles Cumming “the Eucharist is the ultimate epiphany, or appearance of God as purely material reality in that world.”³⁵ Thus ACK communicants encounter Christ anew and his words “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20) become relevant and experiential to them, for they have been experiencing an abstract Christ in bread and wine for too long. However, despite this African Christology from below communicating more to the people in their context, Zablon Mutongu cautions on emphasizing more on immanence at the expense of transcendence; rather, he advocates for a balanced transcendence and immanence of Christ.³⁶

Through this theological incarnation of Jesus Christ as ‘*ugali*’ of life and His immanence evident in the life of participants in the Holy Communion, we affirm the WCC argument that “when faith is contextual there is recognition that the gospel speaks to Christians in their language, connects with their symbols, addresses their needs and awakens their creative energies.”³⁷ Besides Christ speaking to ACK Christians through their languages and symbols of nourishment as ‘*ugali* of life’, David Ngong observes that this culminates into piety, for the major purpose of Christian theological construction has been to influence piety.³⁸ In this case, Christ becomes closer home to

³⁵ Charles Cummings. “Fruits of the Earth, Fruits of the Vine” 157.

³⁶ See Zablon Bundi Mutongu. *The Royal Son: Balancing Barthian and African Christologies*, (Eldoret: Zapf Chancery, 2009).

³⁷ WCC, “On Intercultural Hermeneutics, Jerusalem, 5 – 12 December 1995,” Pages 185-195 in *New Direction in Mission and Evangelization 3: Faith and Culture*, edited by James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans S.B, (Maryknoll. New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 189.

³⁸David T. Ngong “Theology as Construction of Piety: A Critique of the Theology of Inculturation and the Pentecostalization of African Christianity,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, (October 2012) 21,347.

ACK Christians than before and vice versa, since inculturation should be ethno-centric and mission-oriented in order to challenge people to accept Christ and bring them closer to God.³⁹ Marc Boucher-Colbert also shares the same sentiment and concludes, “community-supported farming draws us close to the body of the Lord, the mysteries of the cosmic Christ in all its phases, so that our liturgies concentrate and make potent the Christic food we eat daily, physically and imaginatively.”⁴⁰

Instill Deeper Meaning to Indigenous People

John M. Waliggo notes that any inculturation must culminate in a deeper understanding of Christianity and the local culture.⁴¹ To this end, the use of culturally acceptable symbols of Holy Communion is supposed to give deeper understanding and meaning of these symbols to indigenous people. Jemimah Maina, a mother’s Union member contributing on the usefulness of using indigenous symbols of nourishment agrees with Waliggo when she suggest that

You know when you are teaching with something touchable, people seems to understand better than when you are just preaching. I think as we use those things people see they will see as if it is that time when Jesus was sharing that bread with his disciples. So it keeps us nearer to God than when we do not use those things.⁴²

The Coordinator of Christian Community Service Mount Kenya region, Peterson Karanja had a similar thought when he added that, “yes, it would give proper understanding, that we are not in any way bringing in something imported or that we do not understand or we do not grow in our land.”⁴³

Maina and Karanja’s point of view was that local symbols communicate clearly to the people, for they are socially constructed and socially acceptable to convey meaning to them. Maina cites Christ’s model of teaching that was exemplary in the Jewish society, where Christ used the Jewish symbols that were well-known to people, but gave those symbols new meaning that challenged the *status quo* of the day. Christ did this for he was aware that symbols and society are interwoven

³⁹George Mathew. “Whose Culture and Why?” Pages 144-155 in *The Identity of Anglican Worship*, edited by Kenneth Stevenson and Bryan Spinks, (London: Mowbray, Acassell imprint, 1991), 154.

⁴⁰Marc Boucher-Colbert. “Eating the Body of the Lord,” Pages 115-128 in *Embracing Earth: Catholic Approaches to Ecology* edited by Albert J Lachance and John E. Carroll, (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 127.

⁴¹John M. Waliggo. “Making a Church that is Truly African”, 26.

⁴² Jemimah Maina, Interview, 21st November 2013.

⁴³ Peterson Karanja, Interview, 25th November 2013.

into one another and each influences the other.⁴⁴ Since symbols stem from people in their culture, Stephen Bevans and Rogers Schroeder argue that culture become a hermeneutical tool that aids understanding Christianity more profoundly.⁴⁵ This result in ACK Christians having a deeper understanding of the Holy Communion symbols, for Arbuckle observes that symbols communicate and speak to human hearts and imagination.⁴⁶ If the connection between the symbol and the society does not exist, the cosmic connection becomes abstract and thus non-experiential to the people. It is unfortunate that this phenomenon has prevailed in Kenya and Africa at large, where imported symbols have been used. The consequences have been “the loss of such rich cosmology in the modern world has impoverished the Eucharist and robbed it a living connection to the cosmos, with which it might renew the world”⁴⁷, resulting in superficial understanding of Holy Communion symbols by ACK Christians. Therefore, it has become a false theology to the recipients of bread and wine because true theology as observed by Dean S. Gilliland answers people’s need in their own context.⁴⁸

Health

The other benefits attached to use of inculturated indigenous symbols of nourishment in the Holy Communion is health. Ngaruiya maintained,

Yeah for health reason, something like cassava is highly nutritious, it has some elements good for the body and of course it also bring to mind something unique. Banana has its own qualities and coconut, so all these things will benefits both the body but when we come to the spiritual aspect of it, theological aspect of it will need interpretation so that people can see the relevance.⁴⁹

The argument by Ngaruiya was that African staple foods are so rich nutritiously and if used in Holy Communion they will not only nourish us spiritually, but also physically. The example of cassava was a case in point; also the indigenous brew *Muratina* is rich in ingredients like honey.

⁴⁴F. W. Dillistone. *The Power of Symbols*, 16.

⁴⁵Stephen B Bevans and Rogers P. Schroeder. *Constant in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 60.

⁴⁶ Gerald A. Arbuckle. *Earthing the Gospel*, 29.

⁴⁷ Marc Boucher-Colbert. “Eating the Body of the Lord,” 123.

⁴⁸ Dean. S. Gilliland. “Contextual Theology as Incarnational Mission,” 10-11.

⁴⁹ Ven. Joshua Ngaruiya [retired] and was a member of Provincial Liturgical committee, Interview, 26th November 2013.

Therefore, use of these indigenous symbols of nourishment in the Holy Communion will leave ACK Christians stronger physically and spiritually.

Economic Empowerment

Mveng Engelbert observes that Africa in relation to other continents has been subjected for too long to ‘anthropological poverty’ and it is only through liberation that anthropological dignity can be restored.⁵⁰ In the process of liberating the ACK from this anthropological poverty to anthropological dignity, economic empowerment is a significant step. Lydia Wanjiru, a youth member in the ACK argued that if indigenous symbols of nourishment are used in Holy Communion there would be an economic empowerment since there is no need to import bread and wine. This study succinctly illustrates her arguments:

Yeah there may be benefit because again for example those of Kisumu using fish somebody will be told to come and bring them they will give as offering the way we do. I think they will get somebody get them from them, then sell it to the Church, and then that will tend to be like promoting business to them.⁵¹

In light of these insights by Wanjiru, she envisions that a Church that is using its food products without borrowing or importing elsewhere is a self-propagating, self-supporting self-governing and self-theologizing Church that does not need to be spoon-fed for it is self-reliant. Such a Church become self-theologizing for it can make meaning of the locally available food products the way the ACK Christians viewed Christ as ‘*ugali*’ of life. This self-theologization becomes a form of liberation theology that tries to help victims of oppression as Desmond Tutu observes to assert their humanity.⁵² In addition, through use of locally available food products the Church will be able to afford the Holy Communion symbols and this implies that these symbols will be within the means of Kenyan Churches and therefore facilitate regular celebration of this holy meal. Indeed, this will fulfil Gilliland’s projection of a true theology, because the Church is able to do self-theologization in order to address its own problems and find solutions.

⁵⁰Mveng Engelbert. “Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theology for Africa and the Third World,” Pages 154-165 in *Paths of African Theology*, edited by Rosino Gibelline, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 156.

⁵¹ Lydia Wanjiru, Interview, 21st November 2013.

⁵²Desmond Tutu. “The Liberation Theology in Africa,” Pages 162-168 in *African theology en route: A Paper from the Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17 -23, 1977, Accra Ghana*, edited by Appiah-Kubi, Kofi and Torres, S., (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 168.

Conclusion

In this article I have explore the place of the indigenous symbols of nourishment in the sacramental rite of the Holy Communion in the ACK. I established that this debate is timely in Kenya and Africa at large because the indigenous symbols communicate to the indigenous people in the language they understand best and they do encounter God anew within their cultural milieu. Thus the way Christ re-appropriated his indigenous symbols of nourishment and gave new interpretation, it is in the same breath the African Church need to do in her context.

Though this is a noble course for the Church in Africa, in the ACK conservatism is a stumbling block of making use of indigenous symbols a reality. However, when this exercise is embraced, this article argued that the immanence of Christ among the African will be a reality, the Holy Communion meal will be celebrating regularly because most Churches will afford these religious symbols and the African dignity will be restored since African will be liberated from anthropological poverty. In nutshell, the African Church will now take pride because it will come of age through self-theologization.

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