

**EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL PRACTICES ON  
DEATH ON THE ANGLICAN CHURCH, SOUTH RWENZORI DIOCESE**

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**UGANDA CHRISTIAN  
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## DECLARATION

I, Bwambale Zerubaberi, do hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is original and has never been submitted to the Higher Institution of Learning or any academic Institution for any Degree award or other award.

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**APPROVAL**

This is to certify that this Dissertation under the topic “Examining the impact of the African Traditional Practices on Death on the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese” was done under my supervision and is now ready for submission to Uganda Christian University Authorities for Examination purposes.

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**Date:**..... 13<sup>th</sup> April 2024

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to God Almighty, who has faithfully fulfilled His promises in my life. To Him be all the glory and honor for what He has done. I also dedicate this work to my beloved family, my wife, and my children who have been a source of great encouragement, prayer, and support throughout my three years of study at Uganda Christian University. Additionally, I dedicate this work to my siblings, whose constant love and support have been invaluable.

Finally, I dedicate this work to the Rt. Rev. Nason Baluku, Bishop of South Rwenzori Diocese, for being a tremendous support system in my academic journey.

May God bless you all.

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## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS:

a) **Gospel;** the Gospel is who God is in Christ Jesus and what he has done in Christ crucified to provide redemption for humankind from sin and guilt through forgiveness and new life/birth. According to Paul in I Corinthians 15:15:1-3, the Gospel is the life-changing message that Jesus Christ, in whom dwells the fullness of God, God's son became man, lived and died for sinners, and was buried and raised from the dead in fulfillment of scripture. In short, Christ is the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:15:1-3).

b) **African Traditional Practices;** these are practices of most of the people of Africa. Tradition is the practice whereby people hand down their beliefs and way of life from generation to generation to the present. What is common among Africans in their practice is the use of symbolic power(Ruddock, n.d.).

c) **Worldview;** this is the perception of reality or truth about the world we live in and how to live out about that reality. This reality determines values, what to believe, do, think, feel, etc.; it is a way of viewing the world as normal or right. It helps to explain experiences and brings security and comfort to people. The ATR worldview is at the center of how an African thinks and lives (Clement, Hassan, Ozodo, and Cornfield 18).

d) **Culture;** is a concept that encompasses the social behavior, institutions, and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in these groups(Tylor, 1871).

e) **Syncretism;** this is the process by which elements of one religion assimilate into another religion resulting in a change in the fundamental tenets or nature of those religions. It is the union of two or more opposite beliefs so that the syncretized forms a new thing. (S.R. Imbach in Eluel Concise Evangelical Theological Dictionary).

## **ABSTRACT**

This study explored the influence of African traditional death practices on the Anglican Church in South Rwenzori Diocese, Uganda, focusing on why these customs persist despite widespread Christian conversion. The research aimed to evaluate the implications of these practices on the church's theological teachings and Gospel communication.

The study contextualizes the rapid growth of Christianity in Africa, noting that this expansion has not always led to deep spiritual transformation. It argues that the unexamined blending of the Gospel with African traditions, particularly around death, creates syncretism, diluting the Christian message and altering core faith tenets.

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, data was collected from 90 Anglican respondents through pre-tested questionnaires and interviews. The findings indicated that many Anglicans in the region continue to observe traditional death-related practices such as widow inheritance, ritual head shaving, and beliefs in ancestral retribution. These practices persist due to deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and fears, even among Christians.

The study revealed that these practices challenge the church's efforts to teach a biblical understanding of death and the afterlife, leading to theological confusion. The blending of traditional and Christian beliefs has also perpetuated practices like polygamy and ancestor veneration, which conflict with biblical teachings.

To address these issues, the study recommended the Anglican Church implement more rigorous discipleship programs that promote a biblical worldview, contextualize the Gospel to confront traditional practices, and facilitate open discussions with congregants about the conflicts between these practices and Christian teachings.

The study concluded that addressing the mixture of the Gospel and African traditional practices is essential for ensuring that Christianity's growth in the region is not just numerical but also transformative in the lives of believers. The findings provide a framework for the Anglican Church to better communicate the Gospel and challenge cultural practices that contradict the Christian faith.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION:

#### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the study, definition of key terms, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, scope of the study, and justification.

#### 1.1 Background of the study

The growth of the church in Africa has been phenomenal in recent decades. This growth in numbers does not match growth in depth of spiritual life and transformation of lives and communities. Commenting on the rapid growth of the church in Africa, Reverend Phineas Dube, a Zimbabwean Christian leader, described the growth as "one mile wide and one inch deep". Affirming Dube's assessment (Chiatoh, 2010), Obed, 2008 "*Transformational Discipleship and the 21st Century church*", says that the reason for the "one mile wide and one inch deep" description is an eclipse of discipleship.

Besides the eclipse of discipleship, the researcher believes that another reason for this growth in numbers not matched by the depth of character is the result of the unexamined mixture of the Gospel and the African Traditional Practices.

This research argues that an unexamined mixture of the Gospel and the African Traditional practices on death (ATP) constitute a hindrance to the understanding and communication of the Gospel message.

Before Christianity was brought to Kasese district by the Christian missionaries, people used to engage in many African traditional practices on death. These cultural practices were performed immediately after the person had died, on the day of the burial, and after the burial function.

The grieving process was characterized by rituals such as; when a man died, the wife to the deceased (*Omukwakali*) tied a piece of cloth on her head (*Mbutha*), people also removed their shoes and walked barefooted to show their sorrow, and respect, and the love they had for the deceased but also to show that they are escorting the deceased to the next world (Buwembo, 2021).

The next day after burial, a meeting was held (*omughalhiko*), and in that meeting the widow (*omukwakalhi*) was usually passed on as a wife to one of the deceased's brothers(Buwembo, 2021).

The widow (*omukwakalhi*) was required not to bath for seven (07) days and the orphans were also required not to bath for three (3) days(Buwembo, 2021). The reason for not bathing was that death (*oluholho*) would be afraid of them because they were dirty. After the third day, the orphans were taken to the river in the wee hours and were brought back home they were made to sit on a mat from which their hair was shaved using a Razor blade leaving no hair on the head, to show their attachment to the deceased and that the new life of the deceased in the next world would also continue as the hair grows again.

The wife of the deceased would also be required to go and put/fix the undergarments such as knickers in a banana plant and speak words or phrases that informed her late husband that if he wanted to meet her again then he should meet in that particular banana plant where she placed her undergarments; it was believed that if the late husband re-appeared to her wife, it was a sign of bad omen (Buwembo, 2021).

They used to perform all these cultural practices on death because they had a belief that failure to act accordingly would result in calamities for those still living; in terms of dying at an early age, bad dreams, barrenness, and sickness among others(Perry, 2014).

When the Christian missionaries came to Kasese district with the Gospel of Christ, they began to preach against these cultural practices on death calling them unbiblical and satanic(Paul, 2019). Their preaching (the Christian missionaries) was aimed at enabling the people of Kasese District to understand that their ancestors could not in any way protect, punish, or even bless those still living; instead, they could preach that people's lives are in God's hands and not their relatives who have already died. Some of the Bible verses they used were; 1 Corinthians 15:55-58 "O death where is your sting? O death where is your victory? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law but thanks be to God He gives victory through our lord Jesus Christ. They also used historical factors to explain the resurrection of Jesus. This worked hard to transform people's understanding of death amongst the people of Kasese district to a large extent.

However, there is still to some extent a cultural practice of inheriting widows in case of death among others; a cultural practice that has been among the Bakonzo in Kasese District since time

immemorial(Paul, 2019). Among the Bakonzo, the widow(s) is part of the inheritance to be shared or distributed. The widow is usually passed on as a wife to one of the deceased's brothers. If the deceased was polygamous, the widows were shared amongst the deceased's brothers or among his relatives and friends. This act of widow inheritance among the Bakonzo was to ensure the continuity of the deceased's family. It was taboo for a widow to refuse another man given to her by the clan leaders.

The wife's inheritor was to have sex with the widow and have children with her. It was believed that if the wife inheritors refused to have sex with the widows, calamity could befall them. The children produced in this family were to be a continuation of the ones whom the deceased had left in the world(Paul, 2019). This has continued among the Bakonzo.

This cultural practice creates a situation of polygamy because in most cases the inheritors are people who already have wives. This challenges the biblical point of view that marriage has to be monogamy(Chiatoh, 2017).

Secondly, the persistence of these African traditional practices on death has in turn led to inadequate communication of the Gospel to these people (Chiatoh, 2017).

Thirdly, it has led to a situation where the ATP worldview on death is adopted uncritically leading to syncretism. Most Africans grow up in a cultural setting where one has to be obedient to these cultural practices for protection(Chiatoh, 2017).

### **1.3 Statement of the problem:**

South Rwenzori Diocese is one of the most Christianized Dioceses in the Church of the Province of Uganda with about 44.1% Christians (USAID, 2023); however, it is unimaginable that the Christians of South Rwenzori Diocese still resort to the cultural practices of death despite having heard the Gospel.

### **1.4 Purpose of study:**

This study aimed to determine the impact of the African traditional practices on death on the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese.

### **1.5 Objectives:**

This study focused on achieving the following objectives;

1. To assess the reasons why the cultural practices on death continue in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese.
2. To identify the impact of the African traditional practices on death in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori.
3. To suggest ways through which the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese should respond to the problem.

### **1.6 Research questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What are the reasons why the cultural practices on death continue in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese?
2. What is the impact of the African traditional practices on death on the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese?
3. What should the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese do to respond to this problem?

### **1.7 Significance of the study**

The following are some important findings from this study:

Anglican Church: this study shall create awareness in the Anglican Church about the unexamined mixture of the Gospel with the African traditional practices on death and its implication on the Anglican Church. It shall therefore be upon this study, that more forward; policies could be designed and formulated.

The study will give the Anglican Church (Church ministers) the information that will refresh their understanding of the negative impact of the African traditional practices on death on the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese, and provide a forum for discussion on how to provide a solution to this problem.

Library; future researchers shall benefit from the study in making more analysis and finding solutions to the problem. It shall add knowledge to the existing knowledge on examining the impact of the African

traditional practice on death on the Anglican Church. Future researchers in the field of study and other related fields will benefit greatly from this study's scholarly work and addition to their body of knowledge.

This study will assist the Anglican Church members of South Rwenzori Diocese in identifying their points of agreement and disagreement regarding the cultural practices performed on death in the Anglican Church by setting up symposiums, discussions, and tests that will foster the preaching and communication of the Gospel message without any hindrances.

This will serve as a resource for the theological seminary students who wish to engage in the study of the impact of the African traditional cultural practices on death on the Anglican Church. Other scholars, theologians, and church leaders will be enriched by this study.

### **1.8 Scope:**

The scope of this research was limited to exploring people's perspectives on death and how African traditional practices on death have negatively impacted the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese, and the people's perspective of the Gospel's power to transform the lives and the ways the Gospel can be communicated with clarity.

This research was restricted geographically to the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese, Kasese District in the western part of Uganda, which is an area with people from various cultures and traditional backgrounds; the mix of people from different cultural backgrounds in the Anglican Church among the Bakonzo in Kasese District was an added advantage to the researcher as people from the various cultural origins participated in the interviews.

### **1.9 Justification.**

The first reason this study is important is that Christians who come to faith through receiving the Gospel should transform themselves to embody the Christian faith despite their cultural backgrounds.

Second, the Christians of the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese will find a framework with which to communicate the Gospel effectively in the face of the multiplicity of cultural practices on death and challenge them.

Lastly, this study is important because it helps the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese to face the challenge of these cultural practices on death. This is an additional contribution to the community of those calling for an adequate understanding of the ATP worldview and the Gospel, consequently providing a healthy biblical response to the negative and African traditional practices on death on the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese.

## **1.10 Limitations and delimitations**

### **1.10.1 Limitations**

The following limitations were experienced by the researcher.

Transport to different Archdeaconries was high and expensive.

Limited funds for carrying out research activities such as writing, printing, photocopying, and binding services.

Some respondents like priests and Diocesan leaders were so busy that the researcher had to travel back several times to get their attention.

Bias by some respondents in various Archdeaconries was also another challenge but the researcher managed to handle them professionally.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This section represented a review of related literature on the subject matter of the study. This review was presented under the identified variables according to the study objectives. The literature review included textbooks, internet sources, journals, newspapers, and other articles with information related to the study.

#### **2.1 The causes of African traditional practices (rituals) on death in Africa.**

To ensure that the deceased is properly put to rest so that his spirit is at peace and he can take his place among the protective ancestors; the right burial ensures that the ancestor does not remain to haunt and exert power over the living, but instead rests in peace and protects the family (Wilma Ruddock, n.d.). This belief comes from a common African concept that life and death are on a continuum of existence; death is seen as just another state of being. In death, the whole person still exists but now inhabits the spirit world and he can be reincarnated into several people.

Widowers are not expected to sleep alone; another woman sleeps with him so that the dead wife will not come and sleep by his side (Wuraola, n.d.). It is believed by the Yoruba people of Nigeria that if the dead wife comes and sleeps by the side of the husband, it will result in calamities to the living like relatives dying at an early age. It is further believed that non-observance of this tradition will make the husband of the deceased become a night dancer.

Vigil (the Luo in South Nyanza); the close relatives of the deceased such as the spouse(s), parents, step-mothers, brothers and sisters, and first and second patrilineal cousins, must stay within the compound of the deceased throughout several nights until the burial day (SHIINO, 1997). This is based on the belief that they are giving company to the deceased. Non-observance of this tradition will mean to the deceased that the relatives have rejected him; it will therefore make the deceased angry and retaliate by causing death to the living.

Among the Igbo of Nigeria, the second burial takes place with a lot more elaborate ceremonies than the first (Okeke, 2017). If the second burial is not performed, the proper inheritance of the late father's property cannot be finally settled. The above-mentioned practice is still common in some Igbo communities such as Iwolo, Nenwe, and Nkanu in Enugu State, Ohaozaro, and Abiriba in Abia State. The second burial for the deceased is conducted purposely to make the spirit of the dead person reach the spirit world, join his ancestors, and enable him or her to reincarnate. Non-observance of this tradition will make the deceased's spirit linger around and cause calamities such as bad dreams to the living.

Among the Luo of western Kenya, the practice of cleansing the widow before the burial is still performed in some isolated places (Rabach, 2020). Although it is a fading practice, it is believed that there must be a symbolic or actual sexual act with the widow to cleanse her from the spirit of death. This is ingrained in the worldview that death brings a bad omen to the family that should be dispelled. Non-observance of this tradition will cause the deceased to come back and cause calamities to the living; like failure to have children.

To get guidance from the deceased; the Basoga maintain good relations with the dead since ancestors are viewed as custodians of the moral order. Ancestors protect and guide those in the material realm and therefore are highly respected, venerated, and very important to the community of the living (Isiko, 2021). According to the African belief system, life does not end with death but continues in another realm.

The firstborn of the deceased among the Yoruba people of Nigeria pours the first soil of the dug grave on the coffin in the grave before other family members (Wuraola, n.d.). With tears and more pouring of sand by other family members, they bid farewell to the deceased and ask they greet other late loved ones in heaven. This is based on the belief that the deceased has died when they still loved him and that he should stay comfortably among the ancestors. Non-observance of this tradition will mean to the deceased that the living people have rejected him; this will make the deceased angry and retaliate by causing calamities like poverty to the living.

A lamp is lit in the house where the body of the deceased is laid and the close relatives sit around the body (the Luo in South Nyanza). Inside the house of the deceased, stools are placed for as many relatives and close friends as possible (SHIINO, 1997). This is done to protect the body of the deceased from being eaten up by the rats. Non-observance of this tradition will mean to the deceased that the relatives have rejected him; it will therefore make the deceased angry and retaliate by causing bad dreams to the living.

Building a shrine for the deceased (Okeke, 2017); when a person dies, the Igbo people of Nigeria have a belief that his soul or spirit wanders around the bush, until his relatives perform the necessary and befitting burial rituals such as; the first male child in the family, erects a shrine and creates an *okposi* (*of*o like sticks) for venerating the spirit of the dead and sacrifices such that the spirit of the deceased can have a resting place. This is done to show that the deceased is still part of the family and that he is useful for the success of that family, and the living at large. Non-observance of this tradition will mean to the deceased that the living people have rejected him; this will therefore make the deceased angry and retaliate by causing calamities such as bad dreams to the living.

To stop the same type of death from occurring in the family; in Acholi, when a person has died by committing suicide he is buried in the bush but the head is placed facing the home (Labeja, 2001). After burial, the house or tree upon which the suicide has taken place is destroyed and burnt. A goat is sacrificed to expel the evil spirit from the family. This is based on the belief that, failure to perform the rituals other people in the family will also die in the same manner.

To have security over death; the deceased is taken out of the house through a hole instead of a door and seal the hole so he cannot find his way back in and cause death for those still living (Ruddock, n.d.). This also symbolizes that he is now part of the ancestral community. They also throw such obstacles as thorns, branches, or other barriers on the path, again to make it difficult for him to find his way home.

Accompanying the Spirit of the deceased to the former battleground (*teroburumatin*); among the Luo in South Lyanza, this ritual is always performed one or two weeks after the burial (SHIINO, 1997). To begin this ritual, several relatives take their cattle to the deceased's compound early in the morning around seven o'clock. This ritual is performed only for a man, and participants are also basically men. The cattle of the deceased are also taken there by the relatives. They kill a cock without using a knife and divide and eat pieces of the meat. This is done to remove the shadow (spirit) of the deceased.

Failure to act accordingly they have a belief that the deceased's spirit will keep on lingering around and cause calamities such as bad dreams to the living.

Giving names of the deceased to the newborn babies; the born babies are given the names of the deceased in the Igbo communities (Okeke, 2017). This is from the belief that sometimes the dead ancestor may reincarnate into their agnatic families; they believe that the dead ancestors do not come back in their original forms; rather, they come especially interested in the newborn child, who they say may inherit some of the ancestors' characteristics. The ancestor becomes the tutelary spirit of the child and sees to the well-being of the child. Non-observance of this tradition will mean to the deceased that there is nothing he can contribute to the living; this will make the deceased angry and retaliate by sending curses to the living.

Serving a meal to the deceased (*tedo*); on the day of the *tedo* the sons and daughters return to their natal home to cook for the dead mother or father (the Luo in South Nyanza). Children contribute a certain amount of various kinds of food according to their income (SHIINO, 1997). The firstborn, son or daughter, is the first person to open the fireplace, and the food he/she contributed should be cooked first. Non-observance of this tradition will mean to the deceased that the children had rejected the deceased; it will therefore make the deceased angry and retaliate by causing death to the children.

In some parts of Igbo land, some towns such as Ngor-Okpala in Imo state, Umuahia in Abia State, and many towns in Anambra State, when someone's wife dies, her corpse must be carried to her father's people before the first burial or a symbol of such corpse at the second burial ceremony will be carried to the husband's family (Okeke, 2017). Presently, the ambulance may stop over at the dead wife's paternal compound and the corpse saluted with many canon gunshots. This is done in most Igbo communities to certify that the dead wife has been brought to her people including the ancestors. This practice has persisted till today in all Igbo communities. This is from a belief that the ancestors should receive the deceased; non-observance of this tradition will make the spirit of the deceased linger around and complain to the living that she has never been received by the ancestors.

In the Yoruba land in Nigeria, before publicly breaking the news about death, the deceased is covered in white clothes, and their surroundings redone and prepared for mourners and comforters so that the corpse is met in a decent state (Wuraola, n.d.). The corpse is given a bath taking extra care with the soap and sponge to make it as clean as possible. The head of a male corpse is shaved and clothed; a female corpse gets a new hairdo and is also clothed. The corpse is then “packaged” in a variety of other clothes. This is done with a belief that the deceased should go to the next world when he/she is decently dressed and therefore he/she can be well received by the ancestors. Non-observance of this tradition will mean to the deceased that the living people have not wished for him/her a safe journey and a safe stay among the ancestors; this will make the deceased angry and retaliate by sending calamities like bad dreams to the living.

Visiting the widow’s natal home (*terocholla*); if a husband dies, the widow and her eldest son pay a visit to the home of the widow’s parents (the Luo in South Nyanza). They spend only one night there (SHIINO, 1997). The following day, before departure, a goat called Cholla is slaughtered. Part of its meat is eaten by the widow’s parents and the rest is taken by the widow to her home. The widow’s prospective inheritor sleeps in the widow’s house while she is visiting her natal home. When the widow returns, she cooks the meat she brought back. The widow and her inheritor eat the meat. They engage in sexual intercourse that night, and the man must prove that he is a real inheritor. It is taboo for a widow to refuse to be inherited by one of the deceased’s brothers.

To protect the living from constant sickness; in the Acholi clan, the wife of the dead, the mother, the elderly, sisters, aunts, and close relatives tie their abdomen with leather belts called “Langoya” (Labeja, 2001). The wife of the dead person is not allowed to eat food with salt until the third day. She is not to bathe, but expected to put on half a pair of shoes belonging to the husband. All these are done to appease the spirit of the dead that his wife and relatives are mourning him. Failure to do all the above they have a belief that it will cause the wife, the children, and the relatives to have constant sickness.

To get rid of a bad omen; the wife of the deceased is required to go and put/fix the undergarments such as knickers in a banana plant and speak words or phrases that inform her late husband that if he wants to meet her again then he should meet in that particular banana plant where she has placed her undergarments (Buwembo, 2021). It is believed that if the late husband has re-appeared to her wife, it is a sign of a bad omen.

In the Igbo communities, the funeral ceremonies of dead relatives that were not done in the past (due to one reason or the other) are organized before that of a relative who died recently (Okeke, 2017). Non-observance of this tradition will mean to the deceased that the living have rejected them; this will therefore make the deceased angry and retaliate by causing calamities to the living, such as dying at an early age.

Grave digging (*kunyo*); people prepare the grave at midnight before the burial day (the Luo in South Nyanza). Digging begins at around 9 p.m. and is completed at about 3 to 4 a.m. on the burial day (SHIINO, 1997). Men with pregnant wives are not allowed to participate in grave digging. If they did, their wives would give premature birth; nor are twins allowed to participate in digging the grave.

To have protection against the anger of the deceased; a nephew is charged with the responsibility of removing the bed of a head of the family, immediately after his death (Ruddock, n.d.). The removal of the bed is to prevent anyone from using the bed on which the deceased head of the family used to sleep. It is disrespectful to the deceased head of the family if anyone sleeps on his bed upon his death. It is believed that non-observance of this tradition can annoy the dead, who is capable of retaliating by sending disasters like barrenness or chronic diseases to the living.

If a wife dies, the parents of the dead wife must give one of their unmarried daughters to the husband as his new wife or choose from their clan relatives (the Luo in South Nyanza). The daughter normally comes over to the husband's home on the day of the *terocholla* (SHIINO, 1997). She begins to live in the house and inherit whatever her sister had before her death. If the husband marries some other woman, he should build a new house for her. Failure to build for the other woman he married, the spirit of the deceased wife will come back and cause death for both the husband and the new wife.

To scare away the evil spirit of committing suicide into the wilderness, never to come back in this family; a suicide victim faces fierce repercussions from society. The dead body is whipped by the clan leader with 12 strokes of the cane to cause anger upon the spirit of the suicide victim to run away from this clan because of the nasty thing done (Paul, 2016).

To get blessings from the deceased; Africans bury the dead near the homestead; this is based on the cultural belief that the dead are still part of the family and that they are a source of blessings to those who are still living (Komakech, n.d.)(Lanre-Abass1, 2016). Burying someone far away from the homestead would imply that the dead are unwanted and therefore being cut off from their family relations. The significance of ancestors and spirits of the dead in the affairs of the living means that they have to be kept near the living, such that they could bless them and also be consulted when it is required.

In the Igbo communities, the widowhood rites and practices are always being performed on the death of the husband (Okeke, 2017); these include among others the following: drinking water used in washing the husband's corpse, crawling over the husband's corpse, long mourning and restriction period, sitting on a bare floor during the period of mourning, a widow not having a bath until eight market days (28 days), and so forth. This is done to make the deceased husband rest peacefully with the ancestors and also to stop him from re-appearing to her wife; it is believed that if the late husband re-appears to her wife, it is a sign of bad omen.

When a woman becomes a widow, she mourns and stays indoors for between 40 days and three months; she also does not wear bright clothing or jewelry(Wuraola, n.d.). This is based on the belief of the Yoruba people of Nigeria that the widow is escorting the deceased husband to the next world. Non-observance of this tradition will mean to the deceased husband that his wife had rejected him; this will make the deceased angry and retaliate by causing death to the widow.

To ensure continuity of the deceased's family; among the Bakonzo, the widow(s) is part of the inheritance to be shared or distributed. The widow is usually passed on as a wife to one of the deceased's brothers (Paul, 2016). This act of widow inheritance among the Bakonzo is to ensure the continuity of the deceased's family. It is taboo for a widow to refuse another man given to her by the clan leaders

To stop the spirit of the dead mother and the fetus from complaining; in Acholi, a pregnant woman who has died before delivery is operated on by a local surgeon (Labeja, 2001). The operation is done in the grave and the dead fetus is removed and buried in its own grave. The operation is done to stop the spirits of the mother and the fetus from complaining to the living that they have been buried in one place.

To show that the dead is still part of those who are still living; immediately after the occurrence of death, termed as Kufa in the Lusoga language, the dead body is treated with utmost dignity and respect as though it were still alive(Isiko, 2021). This is based on the belief that the dead has not lost life but rather has changed into the form of a spirit and that he/she is still a member of that family. At the moment of death, the Basoga ensure that the body is straightened and cleaned. It is dressed in the best attires there are, then covered with bed sheets and other such elegant garments. It is disrespectful to expose the dead body's nakedness to mourners other than those who are entitled to do the cleaning and dressing.

To give light to the deceased while traveling to the next world; a bonfire is a very important aspect of mourning for the dead among the Bakonzo and the Luo of Kenya. The fire is believed to give light to the deceased while traveling to the next world. The Bakonzo also believed that the spirit of the dead person keeps wondering around the compound and therefore takes the opportunity to get warm on this fire (Paul, 2016).

Shaving the hair (*liedo*); is done by the spouse(s) and the children of the deceased, conducted one or two weeks after the burial (the Luo in South Nyanza). It is done to free the widow(s) and the children from the mourning taboos(SHIINO, 1997). After this, a widow can choose a man who inherits her. This is from the belief that when the hair begins to grow, the new life of the deceased will also grow. Non-observance of this tradition will mean to the deceased that both the wife and the children have rejected him; it will therefore make the deceased angry and retaliate by causing death to the living.

To protect other people from dying; in Acholi, when a person has died, the old people (men and women) sit near the bereaved people and console them (Labeja, 2001). Sitting next to the bereaved family members is done to ensure that none of them knocks his head with the head of the dead. It is highly believed that a person who knocks his head with the head of the deceased will die within a few days. Sacrifices are made immediately if such a thing has happened to appease the spirit that has caused death.

To prevent the spirit of the dead from complaining; dressing the dead body is primarily the work of the old women and men (Labeja, 2001). Only a few people are expected to attend the dressing. In some chiefdoms like Paire chiefdom, before dressing, the wife of the dead man is expected to lie over her dead husband and embrace him. While in some chiefdoms the woman lies beside the dead husband and embraces him. An elder present covers them with a duiker skin and gently strikes their heads with a

bread-making spoon (out-Kwon). All these are done to prevent the spirit of the deceased from complaining that he had been deserted and died without being cared for.

To cover the spirit of death from killing other people; in Acholi, the dead man's mouth is covered with a calabash, and the widow is given a roasted liver (Labeja, 2001). The head of the corpse is then shaved and smeared with oil. The mouth of the dead body is covered with a calabash with a belief that they are covering the spirit of death not to kill the widow and other close relatives.

Among the Paimol clan in the eastern side of the Kitugum district and the Pabbo clan in the northwestern side of Gulu district, the firstborn son is buried seated (Labeja, 2001). It is believed that by laying the corpse in the grave, the mother and other women in that clan shall never give birth to male children.

Among the Acholi and the Bakonzo people, twins are not mourned on the ground that mourning may cause the death of one of the twins that has remained (Labeja, 2001); it can even cause the death of one of the parents. Twins are not referred to as dead. They are known to have escaped, commonly referred to as "Olwii" in Acholi and "*erighulhuka*" among the Bakonzo which means that he has fled. By saying he has died, they have a belief that it may cause another death in the family.

To ensure that the soul of the deceased enjoys continuous existence in the ancestral paradise; the passage of death does not climax in normal burial or disposing of the body to the grave but also it includes the second burial. This second burial ensures that the soul of the deceased is enjoined with the ancestors, as well as securing reincarnation. The Basoga believe that upon death, one joins the spiritual realm either as an ancestor or a malevolent spirit.

Among the Luo of western Kenya, an unmarried woman or a young girl's body cannot be brought into the home through the gate (Rabach, 2020). Another opening through the fence is cleared to bring the body into the home for burial. Non-observance of this tradition will result in calamities to the living family members, for example, many other young girls will die.

Mourners' departure for home (*kee*); the members of the surviving family and other relatives return to their respective homes in order of age (the Luo in South Nyanza). The firstborn departs first, followed by the second, then the third, and finally, they all depart (SHIINO, 1997). This whole process may take

place in just one day, a few days, or even one week depending on the number of sons and daughters in the family of the deceased. This is done with the belief that they are escaping from the spirit of the deceased from following them. Non-observance of this tradition will mean that the spirit of the deceased will follow them in their respective places and homes and cause death to the living.

## **2.2 The impacts of the African Traditional Practices on death on the Church.**

It has led to a situation where the African Traditional Practices and worldviews on death are adopted uncritically leading to syncretism; this is against the first commandment “I am the Lord your God: you shall have no other gods but me”. This happens because of the absence of a proper understanding of the ATR worldview that lies subtly within the Church. Most Africans grow up in a cultural setting where one has to be obedient to the ancestors for security. (Chiatoh, 2017).

This cultural practice creates a situation of polygamy because in most cases the inheritors are people who already have wives. This challenges the biblical point of view that marriage has to be monogamy; “You shall not commit adultery” (the seventh commandment). Widow inheritance relationships center on fulfilling the goal of furthering the late husband's lineage and the continuity of his family. Sexual intercourse can function as a means of "cleansing" by bearing children for the husband's family, sexual companionship, and other sexual rituals that are associated with widows. This tradition is enforced in many African tribes including the Luo in Kenya and the Bakonzo of Kasese(Perry, 2014).

The cultural practice (widow inheritance) also creates a situation where the rights of the widows are systematically violated (Paul, 2019); in most cases, the widows are inherited against their will. Among the Bakonzo, the Luo in Kenya (Perry, 2014)and many other tribes in Africa, the widow(s) is part of the inheritance to be shared or distributed. It is taboo for a widow to refuse another man given to her by the clan leaders. This is against the biblical point of view that both men and women are equal before God, He created them in His own image; Genesis 1:26 God says “Let us make humankind in our own image”, Genesis 1:27b “male and female He created them”. The argument over this cultural practice is that, if the widower is not forcefully inherited why should a widow, then be inherited against her will? This is a clear violation of the rights of the widows; which practice is against the Bible.

It constitutes a hindrance to the understanding and communication of the Gospel message (Chiatoh, 2017); Christians will come to the Church because they were baptized and confirmed in it but when it

comes to matters of protection and blessings they will solely depend on their ancestors. This therefore creates a situation where the masses that come to church will not see Christ as an end in themselves.

### **2.3 Ways through which the Church should respond to the problem of African traditional practices on death.**

Church ministers should continuously encourage Christians to devote themselves to the word of God (Gospel) which is the only infallible source of Christian faith (Chiatoh, 2017). It is through devoting to the word of God that Christians will be in a position to have their roots deep in Jesus Christ.

Church ministers should continuously warn Christians against trusting their own evaluation of what is right or wrong rather than allowing God's word to define to them what is right and wrong (Chiatoh, 2017). This can be done by training and making more disciples who will ably go to all places and preach the Gospel of salvation; most especially in those areas where these cultural practices on death are still being performed. This in one way or the other will help the Christians to know what God requires of them in order to live a righteous life.

Church ministers need to preach to the Christians that God's wrath is revealed against all human ungodliness and wickedness for suppressing the truth (Chiatoh, 2017). When Christians act according to their own will, God will never be pleased with them for their act, and this will lead to a punishment from God to them. In this way therefore the church ministers must warn Christians of God's anger on those who still put their trust in their ancestors and not God.

Christians should be assured that there is only one Jesus who cannot be duplicated (Buitendag, 2013). In other words, the Jesus who is being presented by Africans is the same as the one Paul of Tarsus preached when he said "I preach Christ the one who was crucified". The old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17). This therefore means that all Christians should be encouraged to follow Jesus Christ and not their ancestors.

Christians should be encouraged that God is the originator and sustainer of all things, and this includes the living dead and the spirits (Buitendag, 2013). At the point of death, a person becomes part of the 'living dead' and joins other members of his or her household who have preceded him or her in the spirit world. This person would from time to time visit the family. Mbiti (1971:132) states that some may see

the person and some may not. Those who are lucky enough to see the person are the elderly. However, the revelation of God is not based on luck but on grace and is for all generations and age groups. Luck suggests that only a few can 'see', depending on how lucky they may be, but the grace of God is for all.

African Christians should be encouraged to communicate with their ancestors within the context of the Eucharist (Beyers and Mphahlele 2009). During the Eucharist, Christians should pray to the greatest of all ancestors who is none other than Jesus Christ. It is believed that human beings have Jesus as their ancestor and, similarly, Jesus has God. Christ and those who died are united as one family.

The church should improve on discipleship; the reason for the continuous use of the African traditional practices by Africans is the eclipse of discipleship (Uzodinma Obed, 2008). The church should therefore make disciples who will ably go and preach the Gospel of Christ, especially in areas where these cultural practices are still being practiced.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This Chapter highlights the research design the researcher used, the area and population of the study, data collection methods, data analysis, and quality control.

### **3.1 Study Design**

The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative methods during the study as he handled the results from the research tools, particularly the questionnaires.

### **3.2 Data Collection Methods**

The researcher used questionnaires and interview guides, to collect information. Here, direct questions were formed as a basis for logically finding out information about the impact of the African traditional practices on death on the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese. The responses were analyzed before recording them. All the data that was collected was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. A descriptive approach and statistics were also used. For qualitative questions, a descriptive approach was used to record the data, while for quantitative data, it was recorded numerically and statistically to determine its relationship with the variables.

### **3.3 Data Collection Instruments**

Questionnaires were used as the major data research tools. The researcher used open-ended questions to collect information from the Christians, religious leaders, and interpreters; those who could not read or write were assisted.

Interview guides were used. These were semi-structured items; they were administered to the respondents; these helped in collecting the information in detail.

### **3.4 Procedure of data collection**

The researcher requested for a letter of introduction from the Dean School of Divinity and Theology, authorizing me to go to the field to carry out this education study. All the respondents were contacted from their places of work or residence. The information collected was analyzed and used to write a final dissertation report.

### **3.5 Area of study**

The study was carried out on all Anglican Christians in, South Rwenzori Diocese, in the western part of Uganda.

### **3.6 Sample size and selection**

The researcher selected 90 participants for this research; Christians from the four Anglican Churches, in South Rwenzori Diocese. The selection of the participants was through purposive sampling that is, the researcher identified those who had an awareness of the situation and met the criteria and attributes that were essential to the research.

The selected participants for this study were those who had prior exposure to ATP on death and showed evidence of practicing ATR beliefs on death before becoming Christians. This was an important criterion to find participants who were knowledgeable in ATP on death. The researcher believed that the selection would represent a broad range of perspectives of ages, clergy, laity, gender, ethnicity, length of membership in the church, and education.

The participants were composed of persons from each selected Church chosen because of their background knowledge and involvement with the ATP on death as it was revealed by their responses to the general questionnaire that the researcher administered.

Criteria for the selection of the Participants; the selection of the participants that were interviewed considered the following:

Family background; the person who came from a family where there was reasonable exposure and involvement in the ATP on death.

Experience; the person who had personally practiced and believed in the ATP on death and now has become a Christian.

Culture; people were chosen deliberately from different cultural backgrounds to reflect the cosmopolitan nature of the Church membership.

Position; the Church minister and the head of laity of each Church were selected based on their positions irrespective of their previous family background and experience with ATP on death because the researcher assumed that they had read or learnt about ATP on death to be able to provide ministry in an ATR worldview context.

Education; while people of different educational levels were selected for the research, keen attention was given to the selection of people who were not educated to balance up the perspectives.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

The data collected from the study field through the use of questionnaires and interview guides was analyzed. This was scrutinized to check for the occurrence of any possible errors and weaknesses that could have occurred in the data collection process before confirming its occurrence.

To have organized data analysis, serial numbers were given to both questionnaires and interview guides for the data that was collected. That particular information was tabulated and percentages were established. This made it easy for the process of interpreting the data and finding out possible existing relationship(s).

### **3.8 Ethical consideration**

The highest degree of confidentiality was at the forefront of that study and the respondents were made aware that the information they gave, would not directly be attached to any of them.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATIONS OF THE RESULTS:**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This study was designed to examine the impact of the African traditional practices on death on the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese.

The research involved ninety (90) participants selected from the Churches/Archdeaconries that were studied and these include the following; St. Luke Ndongu Church of Uganda-Bwera Archdeaconry, Pro-Cathedral Church of Uganda-Nyamwamba Archdeaconry, St. Johns Church of Uganda Kisinga-Kisinga Archdeaconry, St. Peters Kabathunda Church of Uganda-Kabathunda Archdeaconry, South Rwenzori Diocese. The presentation and discussion of the findings were all made in line with the set research questions respectively.

The researcher employed a qualitative process of interviewing that included observation and listening to the participants' responses. The researcher read the documents repeatedly to identify emerging topics, patterns, themes, and categories for presentation in this Chapter. The participant selection process began with randomly administering a questionnaire to the respondents.

People were randomly selected from the four churches and answered the questions on the general survey. For the responses to the general questionnaire, thirty participants were selected based on evidence of their exposure to the African traditional practices on death. In each Church, the minister, head of laity as well as men and women were chosen for this research.

#### **4.1 Some of the cultural practices that are continuously being performed on death in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese.**

The below-mentioned points are the responses the researcher got from the respondents he interviewed about the cultural practices that are continuously being performed on death and the reasons why they are performed when people die.

Only the uncle of the deceased cleans, dresses up, and puts the body in the casket; the people I interviewed about this cultural practice said that it is because he is the only one regarded to be more

related to the deceased than any other person; there is evidence that the deceased's uncle and his mother came together from the same womb/uterus. (*nyokolhome ogho omuholhi niyo awithe obuhughu bunene okwa omuholhi kwilhaba abandu aboosi kusangwa alwa omwibunda lhighuma nanyinya wiwe*). Non-observance of this tradition will mean to the deceased that the uncle has rejected him; it will therefore make the deceased angry and retaliate by causing death to the family members including the one who volunteered to perform all the above-mentioned cultural practices on him.

All the harvests in the house of the deceased are consumed; when a person has died in a family, all the harvested crops in that family are not planted but instead, it is consumed. The Bakonzo have a belief that if you plant those harvested crops, you will have planted death in that family; such that as they germinate and grow, death will also germinate and grow; hence more people in that family will immediately die.

Walking bear footed; the reason for walking bear footed when a relative has died is from the belief that they are escorting the deceased to the next world where he is going to stay forever with other family ancestors. Failure to observe this tradition would mean to the deceased that the relatives hated him; this will make him angry and retaliate by causing calamities like bad dreams to the living.

The nephew erects the bed of the deceased; a nephew is charged with the responsibility of erecting the bed of the head of the family in his bedroom immediately after his death. The erecting of the bed is to prevent anyone from using that bed on which the deceased head of the family has been sleeping. It is disrespectful to the deceased head of the family if anyone sleeps on his bed upon his death. It is believed that non-observance of this tradition can annoy the dead, who is capable of retaliating through sending disasters like barrenness or chronic diseases.

A drowned body is not put in the house; this is based on the belief that the octopus has killed him (*endyoka yabirimulya*) and it will stay with the deceased up to the time he is buried. To put his body in the house according to them means that the octopus that killed the deceased will remain in the house and kill more people. For that reason therefore a drowned body is removed from the water and put in the compound until when it is buried.

A post-funeral party is usually conducted for the family head (*eribuna enyumba*); this party is always done after seven days when the deceased is buried. This is to show that the deceased has finally reached

the next world, has settled peacefully with the ancestors, and is no longer in charge of his family affairs physically. In this party, the wife inheritor is officially declared as the head of that family and is allowed to continue with it. A piece of the wall/brick is removed from the house which the deceased had constructed and it is thrown on his grave to show that he has gone with his house and now the wife inheritor can stay comfortably in it. Failure to perform all the above, the spirit of the deceased will remain in the house and cause bad dreams and chronic sicknesses to those staying in it.

A bonfire is lit; the bonfire is believed to give light to the deceased when he is traveling to the next world. The Bakonzo also believe that the spirit of the deceased keeps on wandering around the compound; therefore, it takes the opportunity to get warm on this fire and it is strictly lit by the nephew. Failure to light the bonfire, the spirit of the deceased would get challenges (stack) while walking to the next world because of the darkness; this will cause the spirit of the deceased to remain lingering around and cause calamities to the living.

The body is carried out feet first from the house; this is from the belief that his spirit could not find its way back to cause problems for the living. The other reason for this cultural practice is to show that the deceased is heading to the next world and therefore he will use his legs to travel to join the ancestors. To carry the body out from the house with the feet first is a way of escorting the deceased (*erikwamanisya omughende*) to the next world to go and stay with the ancestors forever and peacefully. This is from a common saying that “May the deceased’s soul rest in peace”.

Inheriting widows; the people I interviewed said that this cultural practice still exists in South Rwenzori Diocese among the Bakonzo though not very common. The wife inheritor however is not allowed to have sex with the widow until after seven days have elapsed since her husband was buried. The wife inheritor takes a physical goat to the parents of the widow together with her to prove to them that their daughter (the widow) has accepted him as her new husband and that they should accept him as well to be born in that family as their new in-law. After this ritual has been performed, the wife inheritor is now officially declared as the husband of the widow.

The nephew cleans/sweeps the house and the compound the day after burial (*eribirya omuyi*); this is because of the belief by these people that the nephew is the one that cleanses all the evil things that happen in her mother’s family and death is considered as evil. (*omuhwa niyo akakyindaghirira nerebugha amalholho owe ebunyokolhome wiwe*) It is also believed that when the nephew has swept the

house and the compound where the death has occurred, he has swept death from her mother's family. Failure to act accordingly, the spirit of the deceased will come back and cause death to the living.

Burying the deceased on the ancestral land; the people I interviewed said that it is a cultural practice that the deceased must be buried on the ancestral land. This is done on the belief that the deceased is still part of the family. Failure to act accordingly, the spirit of the deceased will always come back to the living complaining that he has been neglected which is a sign of bad omen to the living. It is for this reason therefore that if a person has died far away from home or even in another country the relatives must transport his body to his ancestral home for burial; if the deceased had already been buried in a foreign land, the relatives must exhume his remains and bury it on the family ancestral land.

The body of the deceased is not taken back into the house; the people I interviewed said that to put the corpse back to the house will mean that you have planted death in that family, this will therefore cause other people in that clan to also immediately die; the corpse is taken outside from the house to the grave such that the deceased is buried with death.

The deceased in the grave faces where the sun sets from; the people I interviewed said that burying a person and making his head face in a different direction, he will immediately come back to the living complaining that he has been buried facing in the wrong direction; this will compel the family members to immediately exhume his body and bury it properly. Failure to act accordingly will result in calamities for the living like constant bad dreams.

The fetus of the deceased pregnant woman is removed and buried separately; both the fetus and the dead mother are buried in separate graves however they must be buried at the same time. The operation is done to stop the spirits of the mother and the fetus from complaining that they have been buried in the same grave. Failure to act accordingly will cause calamities to the living such as; all other women who become pregnant in that clan will always die until the right thing is done.

A physical goat and some of the deceased's clothes are given to the uncle by the family of the deceased; the goat is slaughtered upon reaching home; its blood is poured on the ground, and the clothes are kept by his uncle. This is done to inform the ancestors that their nephew has died, so they should receive

him; but also, as a payment for the ritual the uncle performed on his nephew (putting his body in the casket). Non-observance of this tradition will mean disrespect to the ancestors from the uncle's side and also failure to pay his uncle for the ritual he performed on him; this will make the deceased angry and retaliate by causing death to the family members.

When a married woman passes away, her children are taken to the family where she was born. This is done to inform her ancestors that their relative, who gave birth to and cared for these children, has died. By doing this, the family ensures that the ancestors are aware of their responsibility to watch over and care for the children. If this tradition is not observed, it is believed that the deceased woman may interpret it as the family preventing her ancestors from blessing her children. This could anger the deceased, leading her to cause distressing dreams for the living as a form of retaliation.

A physical goat is given to the relatives of the deceased married woman; this goat is taken to her family, slaughtered and its blood is poured on the ground to communicate to her ancestors that their relative has died and therefore they should receive her in the next world. Non-observance of this tradition will mean that the spirit of the deceased will not have a resting place among the ancestors. This will make the deceased angry and keep on appearing to the living until the right thing is done.

A deceased woman, who has been illegally married to a family, is not buried by that family instead her body is taken and buried on the land where she was born, or else they are compelled to pay bridewealth for her before her family can allow them to bury the deceased. This is from a belief that the ancestors have never received bridewealth on her from that family. Non-observance of this tradition will make the ancestors angry and retaliate by making all their married daughters have no peace in their families until the right thing is done.

During the night, the uncle of the deceased sleeps on the mattress where the deceased's body was laying; this is from the belief that he is escorting the spirit of his nephew to the next world where he/she is going stay peacefully with the ancestors. Non-observance of this tradition will make the spirit of the deceased remain in the house and cause death to the living.

#### **4.2 Reasons why the cultural practices on death continue in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese**

The study findings from the respondents contacted concerning the above research question were presented in the table below;

*Table 1: showing the responses from the respondents on the reasons why the cultural practices on death continue in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese.*

<b>Responses from the respondents</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
To have security over death	27	30%
To get rid of bad omen	27	30%
To have protection against the anger of the deceased	18	20%
To get blessings from the deceased	18	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** *Primary data*

Thirty percent of the participants believe that cultural practices surrounding death are driven by the desire for security against death. They hold the view that in the Anglican Church, some Christians believe ancestors can cause death, especially if they feel neglected by the living. Additionally, these Christians think that ancestors have the power to determine how long a person will live. This belief reflects a natural fear of death, leading people to perform cultural rituals when someone dies to protect themselves and ensure that their lives are watched over by their ancestors.

The other group said that to get rid of bad omen causes cultural practices on death. This means that people have a belief that a dead person is not supposed to re-appear to those who are still living, they will therefore perform these cultural practices on his death such that he goes completely. It also means that, for the deceased to have peace in the next world the cultural practices have to be performed on his death. It further means that the cultural practices on death are performed such that the spirit of the deceased does not keep on wandering around.

The third group said that to have protection against the anger of the deceased causes cultural practices on death. This means that the cultural practices on death are performed such that the deceased is not annoyed. This also means that when the deceased is annoyed it will negatively affect the living; they

will have to perform those cultural practices to get rid of the deceased’s anger and its associated implications.

The last group said that it is to get blessings from the deceased which makes them perform the cultural practices on death. This means people have a belief that blessings can only come from the deceased and not from any other source. It also means; that people have a belief that to have a good life on earth and be successful you must perform the cultural practices on death. It means; that people have a belief that, failure to perform these cultural practices on death can attract the fury of the ancestors to cause sickness, death, business failure, and many others. Hence, success and freedom from these ills according to these people hinges on obedience.

#### **4.3 The impact of the cultural practices on death in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese**

The findings gathered from the contacted respondents were recorded below respectively;

*Table 2:* showing responses from the respondents about the impact of the African traditional practices on death in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese.

<b>Responses from the respondents</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
It has led to syncretism (belief in more than one God).	36	40%
It creates a situation of polygamy	27	30
It constitutes a hindrance to the understanding and communication of the Gospel message.	27	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** *Primary data*

The findings from the respondents indicated that 40% of them agreed that, the cultural practices on death in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese have indeed led to syncretism (the belief in more than one God). This means that some Christians will come to church because they were baptized in it and that when they die, they will be accorded a decent burial by the Church but when it comes to matters of protection and blessings they will solely depend on their ancestors. It also means that when people have succeeded maybe in business, in academics, and in many other areas they will attribute this achievement to their ancestors.

The researcher asked the respondents, the level to which people carefully examine the compatibility of the African traditional practices on death worldview and the Gospel; some participants interviewed thought that there was usually very little thought given to examine the compatibility of the African traditional practices on death worldview with the Gospel.

They said, most people think that Christianity and African traditional practices on death are similar. One of the participants said, “Most of them believe there are certain things (fear of living dead and blessings from them) that can only be handled using African traditional practices on death because the Gospel or the church cannot handle them. Many quote the Bible out of context "Give to Caesar what is Caesar' and to God what is God's" for them *"Ebyosi Bisosene"* implying that the cultural practices on death and the Gospel are all means to God or two sides of the same coin, meaning the two are compatible. Others think the Gospel and Christianity are white man culture and so they feel a duty to protect their ATR worldview and culture." hence leading to syncretism.

The next two groups both tallied at 30% with the first group of respondents contacted 30% said that cultural practices on death create a situation of polygamy because in most cases the inheritors are people who already have wives. This challenges the biblical point of view that marriage has to be monogamy.

The researcher asked the respondents why in most cases the widow inheritors are people who are already married and not choosing from those who are still single to inherit them. The response was that inheriting a widow is not easy in terms of taking care of her and the orphans left behind. They also said that staying peacefully with a woman who has just lost her husband in death calls for perseverance. That is the reason why a man who has had enough experience in marriage and is mature enough is chosen to inherit the widow.

Another respondent said that “in most cases, the wife inheritor is someone who has always been a close friend of the deceased. They have always been playing together, they have had their own secrets and therefore the widow can easily get used to him as her inheritor like she was used to her husband when he was still alive even though this man is already married”.

The other respondent also said that, in most cases, when a man who is still single is made a widow inheritor, he can only stay with her for a short time and eventually run away to marry a wife of his choice. Others start provoking the widows given to them for inheritance that it is their families that

imposed them on those widows against their will. People have a belief that such provoking statements in one way or another other can anger the deceased who will cause calamities to the living.

Another respondent said that, to other men, when he is sick and he feels that he may not heal from the sickness he makes a will on who he would want to inherit his wife and the family in case he dies. The words that the deceased said on whom to inherit his family are never challenged by the living. People have a belief that failure to act accordingly may result in calamities. This therefore means that, if the deceased had mentioned the one who is already married to be the one to inherit his wife, both the clan leaders and the person the deceased identified, would have to obey; hence causing polygamy.

The other group said that the cultural practices on death constitute a hindrance to the understanding and communication of the Gospel message. This is due to the reason that Christianity and the African traditional practices on death are fueled by confusion arising from the similarities/ differences between cultural practices on death and Christianity. This makes it difficult for many believers from ATR backgrounds to draw the line between Christianity and the cultural practices on death. This has created a situation where many just believe that ATR and Christianity are similar and consequently, for many ATR, is just another way to approach God.

**4.4 What should the Anglican Church do to respond to this problem in South Rwenzori Diocese?**

The findings concerning the above research question were presented below from different respondents respectively;

*Table 3: showing responses from the respondents on what needs to be done by the Anglican church to respond to the problem of cultural practices on death in South Rwenzori Diocese.*

<b>Responses from the respondents.</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Encourage Christians to devote themselves to the word of God.	36	40%
Warn Christians against trusting their own evaluation of what is right or wrong.	27	30%
Christians should be assured that there is only one Jesus who can save and bless.	18	20%
The church should improve on discipleship.	9	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** *Primary data*

The findings recorded in the table above indicate several ways by which the cultural practices on death can be reduced in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese. The first group (40%) advised that Christians should be encouraged to devote themselves to the word of God. This means that Christians must know the value and the power of the word of God (Psalms 19:7-11).

It will give them hope, and courage and also make them wise. The word of God will enable Christians to get advice and guidance which is valuable. Christians must therefore learn to value the word of God.

It also means that Christians must cultivate the discipline of engaging in God's word (psalms 1:2). When they read the word of God, they need to be attentive to it because only the observed word of God is helpful for them. They need to study and meditate on it and memorize the scriptures such that they can be in a position to get the right message but also to share what they have read with other people who are still struggling with these cultural practices on death.

It further means that Christians must bring their lives under the authority of God's word (Psalms 119:1). Mary the mother of Jesus replied, "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said". This will help Christians to know that they are under the authority of God who created them and not under the authority of their ancestors.

In Matthew 4:4 Jesus, while being tempted by the devil, rebukes him by saying "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." This means that to live by the word of God? Christians must eat the word of God to live by it: you must listen to and read it, meditate on it, and allow it to sink in until it becomes part of you and helps to form your thoughts and actions.

The second group also advised that there is a need to warn Christians against trusting their own evaluation of what is right or wrong. This means, that Christians should know that God's wrath is revealed against all those who act according to their own will, God will never be pleased with them for their act, and this will lead to a punishment from God to them.

The third group encouraged the Christians to be assured that there is only one Jesus who can save and bless them. This means that the teaching of the Bible should be emphasized to help many Christians in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese to shun ungodly practices on death which are often used for protection. The teaching and preaching of the Gospel should help Christians to have faith in God, knowing that they are safe in his hands.

This also means that the ignorance of the Christian security in Christ is another reason many Christians revert to cultural practices on death. They do not understand that Jesus is both Savior and Lord who has defeated the powers of darkness and in Christ, believers have victory over principalities and authorities as taught in Colossians 2: 10-15. This ignorance of security in Christ produces a lack of strong faith, unstable faith, or unbelief especially for people who come to church but do not have a clear salvation testimony or have not completely yielded themselves to Christ. Some might have been saved but are not growing, so they doubt and are not confident of who they are in Christ and hence are unstable.

The ignorance about security in Christ equally shows forth in fear of the Spirit world as some of the participants alluded to this. Some observations that captured and summarized the opinions of many were from ten participants. They commented, "From childhood, one is made to believe that everywhere are ancestors that can inflict curses, calamity if they are not appeased". One of them said, "The living dead are said to be part of the family and responsible for all evil; consequently, since no one knows who they are, each person or family needs protection". Another respondent, felt the living dead cause poverty and are greatly feared. Poverty is a deep thing and has to do with the inability to have children, a good harvest, and failure in school and/or business; so, people can do anything to beat this including being a Christian or in church yet doing these cultural practices on death for protection.

One of the participants noted that others have a belief that there are things that Jesus or God cannot do except their ancestors and diviners. Some people have a fear that since calamities befell on a particular group of people who did not perform these cultural practices when their relatives died, the same can surely befall the living if they do not act according. They therefore fail to understand that God is our protector and that Jesus paid it all on the cross.

This was challenged by a participant; (a church minister) who said "The Bible says, "fear not" 365 times, it means each day we are told not to fear. You do not need to be afraid because God is with you everywhere you go. Christians in the Anglican Church should therefore be encouraged to be more

specific, to understand that if you are a Christian there must be a distinction not just in name but in faith and practice. He encouraged (Church minister) Christians in the Anglican Church to depend on God for their protection and not their ancestors.

This also means that the testimonies of others should serve to encourage struggling believers as well as strengthen those who are still struggling to appease their ancestors by performing these cultural practices on death to believe that indeed it is only Jesus who can save them and not their ancestors.

This further means that biblical expository preaching should be used; where the preaching seeks to meet God in his word, using historical-grammatical tools to expose the text for life application and life transformation allowing God to speak through the text, would resolve this problem.

The last group advised that the church should improve on discipleship. This means that discipleship will help Christians to deal with the cultural practices on death. When the Anglican Church has trained and made these disciples, they will be in a position to ably go and preach the Gospel of Christ, especially in areas where these cultural practices on death are still being performed.

This means that the preaching, teaching (discipleship), and life examples of many Christians and Church leaders should be there to help a great deal to expose the cultural practices on death and compare it with Christianity so that people can see the truth. The objective of discipleship in the Churches should be to help Christians develop a Christian perspective on burials/funeral ceremonies. The teaching will help the believers to see that Christ has redeemed them from all evil powers.

It further means that intentional discipleship should be made strategic to resolve the problem of syncretism in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese. Intentional discipleship should focus more on the doctrine of the security of believers and the supremacy of Christ. Engaging in intentional discipleship will provide an opportunity for people to be engaged in the careful examination of the cultural practices and beliefs on death in the light of what the word of God teaches, compared to what they grew up doing.

## **4.5 The response of the Anglican Church to the Cultural Practices on Death**

### **4.5.1 Paul's letter to the Colossians:**

The Book of Colossians was written to a young church wrestling with what it means to believe in Jesus Christ and to follow him. To encourage the Colossians to treasure the Gospel and live accordingly. Paul alludes to the pagan past of the Colossian converts (1:12- 13, 21, 27, 2:13, 3:5-7). The references indicate that Colossae had a fair share of the variegated religious practices, which characterized the ancient Near East at the time.

The old gods of the classical Greek culture still had their adherents, as did the mystery religions that promised entry to a secret, higher world for those who submitted to proper initiation. With the passage of time and the movement of people from place to place, the line between different religious and cult ideas became blurred, and the phenomenon known as syncretism emerged- mixing religious ideas and practices from a wide range of sources (Koester 164-203).

Keener agrees that cultural diversity contributed to the problem in Colossae and goes further to say that this unexamined mixture of culture and Gospel (syncretism) seemed harmless and appears to have been a longstanding tendency taken over into the church from Judaism and other cultures.

This problem undermined Christ from his position of Pre-eminence. Paul writes to present the centrality of Christ (1:15-20 2:11-12, 13-15) and to encourage Christian maturity (2:6-10; 3:1ff). There is every indication that Colossae was a cosmopolitan city with different cultures and religions both of which blended and influenced the young growing church. This background is akin to the cultural background that exists in South Rwenzori Diocese with many who have come to faith with African traditional religious background and often adopt their previous beliefs and practices with the Gospel.

Paul knew that it struck at the heart of the Gospel message so he engaged it in this letter. There is no need to invoke other spiritual powers or intermediaries (Colossians. 2:8). Though Colossians was written to deal with a specific situation at a specific time, it is still relevant to the context of the churches in South Rwenzori Diocese because Jesus Christ is still the answer to man's questions about the universe as He is Lord of the cosmos.

Christians who tend to have a guilty soul and fall into the trap of feeling like we must appease our ancestors for protection from calamities; Colossians has the answer, “Jesus is all-sufficient. *Colossians 1:14, in whom we have redemption from all the worldly evil powers*”. In Him you are complete.” “Jesus is before all things. Jesus is supreme over every power and authority!” For those of us who quickly forget that Jesus is Lord of our lives, Colossians teaches, “Remember what you were rescued from and be thankful; live to please your Master He is your only Lord.”

Christians should know that it is in Jesus Christ the Lord that believers are to continue to "walk". *Colossians 2:6, “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so continue to walk and live in Him”*. Receiving Christ is a past-completed action that should have ongoing implications of walking daily. Those who have received Him must have a new sort of behavior. "In Him" is a prepositional phrase in an emphatic position indicating a command, implying that the only way to live a Christian life free of fear of ancestors is in connection with Christ, through walking and living in Him.

Christians should always be encouraged by what Paul says in his letter to the Colossians 2:6; Paul is rephrasing what he said about receiving Christ Jesus the Lord. Here he is emphasizing that there is no spiritual blessing lacking when we are “in Him.” Those blessings are lost when we are outside of Christ when we reject him, but in Christ, we have every spiritual blessing that he has won for us. In the man, Christ, all the attributes and the very nature of God were found. Jesus was fully God and fully human at the same time. Only in Him can fullness be found and when we are united with Him we are filled and complete we have everything that matters. Jesus is all-sufficient for our protection and salvation and not our ancestors.

Christians need to let Christ who is Lord and no other to establish their values, guide their thinking, and direct their conduct. Christ's Lordship has daily and life implications for the Believer. As the Bible tells us in Colossians 2:7, by being rooted and continuing to build up in him and by being strengthened in the faith, just as you were taught, by abounding in thanksgiving. (NIV) Paul uses four participles to enhance his description of the "life" or "walk" that should characterize believers who have received Jesus as their Lord by faith and are now to continue living as his people.

Paul wrote to the Colossians to persuade his audience to keep living according to the Gospel they heard in the beginning and not to fall into error by listening to false teachings. *Colossians 2:8“See to it that no one takes you captive through false philosophy, which depends on human tradition rather than on*

*Christ*". As we study Colossians, it should encourage and strengthen us to know that Jesus is supreme and we are in Him. The text itself exhorts us to follow our Lord's warning to watch out for deceptive teachings, that we need cultural/traditional practices on death in addition to Christ to be secured rather; in Christ alone we have complete security.

Paul's emphasis to us on the importance of the ongoing growth and nurture of our faith; he echoes Jesus' Great Commission recorded in Matthew. "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19- 20). Teaching is an indispensable part of the process of Christian growth and serves the transmission of Christian Tradition.

Christians should have complete trust in Christ that, the world was created, through him it is redeemed and he is the one who has decisively defeated all the hostile powers. As "the head," Jesus is also sovereign over every power and authority. Christians have a belief that ancestors still have power and if they are displeased, they can harm those who have caused them displeasure. Many will perform the cultural practices on death to please them; however, the good news is that in Christ we have the complete victory. No power can have a hold over us if we are united with Christ; we are freed from the dominion of darkness (ancestors).

When Jesus was stripped and nailed to a cross the Roman and Jewish rulers and authorities believed they had won a great victory. Here Paul says that the opposite was true. God stripped the rulers and authorities of their power when Jesus went to the cross. The image portrayed is one of God publicly humiliating these powers and having complete victory over them. Therefore, Christians do not need to fear their ancestors since we have the same victory over them in Christ.

In the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:24, the father says, "For this, my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Paul emphasizes that only God can make us alive. Romans 5:6 and 5:8 show the helpless state we were in: "For while we were still weak (powerless), at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.... but God showed his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God united us with Christ, forgave every sin, and breathed new life into us. Paul wants us to know that God has provided us with everything we need; therefore, there is no need to depend on our ancestors.

Hughes captures the implications of the teachings of Colossians 2:6-15 when he states: In the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, God the Father achieved a great victory over the evil powers of this world making a public spectacle of them and warns that though they still exist, they are defeated Satan's demons have been sentenced to be in the train of God's victory parade (HUGHES, n.d.). Consequently, we no longer need to fear the outcome of the battle with evil Christ has conquered, in him we have conquered and we will conquer.

Christians should have the courage that much as death is inescapable, there are glimpses of hope in resurrection. Job's statement (Job 19:25-27): "In my flesh, I will see God" points to the hope in resurrection in the Old Testament: For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. This passage hints at the possibility of bodily resurrection. It is reaching beyond the thought of God bailing Job out of his unfortunate circumstances. If so, according to Job there is hope beyond the grave: Job looks at his ravaged body, yet he states confidently that "his flesh will see his Redeemer".

God is our provider "*Psalms 23:1 the LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing*"; Christians should have total dependence and confidence in God as their sole provider and not their ancestors. He feeds them, and through Him, they shall not at any moment lack anything. Christians have a belief that non-observance of the cultural practices on death, calamities could befall them in terms of poverty and many other misfortunes. Christians should know that God is our source for everything we need and He cares about everything we care about. There is no need so small that He does not know about it and nothing too big that He cannot provide for us.

God is our only protector and not the ancestors; *Psalms 23:4, "Even though I walk through the darkest valley I will fear nothing, Isaiah 43: 2, when you pass through the fire I will be with you"*. This is an encouragement to every Christian today that God will be with you during your trying times and hard seasons; you may think He is not there but He always is. Christians should therefore trust in God's presence every day of their lives and rest in His comforting arms and not their ancestors.

The Bible assures us that God's love will always be with us; *Psalms 23:6, "Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life"*. There is no need to perform the cultural practices on death in the name of appeasing our ancestors for any good. God's abundant goodness and love are firmly

committed to us His flock. God is perfectly good in His character and flawlessly good in all His actions. He loves us with His sovereign love that can never be extinguished. Even when we are faithless, He remains faithful to us.

Apostle Paul in Romans 12:2 instructs believers to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, aligning their values and behaviors with God's word. To combat cultural pressures, Christians must exercise biblical discernment. This involves comparing societal norms with the timeless truths found in Scripture. Colossians 2:8 warns against being taken captive by "philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."

Christians should always be encouraged by what Joshua says in Joshua 24:15, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*". This is a reminder to check our hearts as Christians, it is a chance to check behaviors, actions, and attitudes to ensure that all of what we say, think, and do, align with Jesus and not with our ancestors; God who has brought us all this far is the same God who will make us succeed in all our endeavors if we only walk with him and stand on His promises and not on our ancestors.

Christians should learn that God is the only source of our success in life if we are truly obedient to Him and not our ancestors; as it is said in the book of Isaiah 1:19 "*If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land*". This clearly shows that we can fully expect this land to yield its goodness to us because our God is good. He created this earth to bring His creation pleasure and enjoyment. We can also live in His goodness, love, mercy, and peace because we are in Him. This challenges the belief of the many Christians of South Rwenzori Diocese (Bakonzo tribe) that non-observance of the cultural practices on death can annoy the dead, who is capable of retaliating by sending curses to the living.

Christians should also be encouraged that Jesus Christ is the only sacrifice, there is no need to sacrifice to our ancestors on death to appease them like it is done among some Christians of South Rwenzori Diocese, but rather we should believe that Jesus paid it all. A physical goat is given to the relatives of the deceased married woman; this goat is taken to her family, slaughtered and its blood is poured on the ground to communicate to her ancestors that their relative has died and therefore they should receive her in the next world. This cultural practice on death is challenged in the book to the Hebrews 10:1-18.

Christians should learn that it is only God who can answer their needs; whenever a person dies among the Bakonzo of South Rwenzori Diocese, the living send requests to their ancestors through the deceased. This belief is challenged by God in the Gospel according to St. John 10:11-18 “*I am the good Shepherd*”, and 1 Peter 5:7 “*Cast all your anxiety on God because He cares for you*”. Casting all our cares on Him means humbling ourselves and relying absolutely on God and His words. We are to move from trusting in our ancestors to resting in God and His provisions. God is willing and able to carry the heaviest burden for us.

The Bible is clear in asserting that created nature tells us of God (Psalms 19:1-4). Paul’s argument in Romans chapters 1 and 2 emphasizes God’s revelation in nature (1:18-22) and in the human personality (2:14-16). He makes the point that in the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed (1:16-17) but also that God’s wrath is revealed against all human ungodliness and wickedness for suppressing the truth (18). God has revealed all that is to be known about him since creation as perceived in what He has made hence all are without excuse.

#### **4.5.2 HYMN NUMBER 194. “IN CHRIST ALONE” (UGANDA YOUTH PRAISE)**

By Keith Getty and Stuart Townend:

The history of this hymn and its lessons to the Christians of South Rwenzori Diocese who still fix their hopes on their ancestors for blessings and protection; this hymn helps us as Christians to know that Christ is the only one who we should have our hopes fixed on for blessings and protection, and not our ancestors.

“In Christ Alone,” the hymn has a strong Christological focus. The scriptural foundation implied in the incipit (the first phrase) is John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (NIV). The first stanza is replete with biblical allusions: Christ is “my light” (Psalm 27:1), “my strength, my song” (Exodus 15:2; Psalm 118:14; Isaiah 12:2); “Cornerstone” (Isaiah 28:16; 1 Peter 2:6); “solid ground” (Psalm 40:2); “Comforter” (John 14:16, 26); “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Stanza 2 begins with references to Christ’s Incarnation: Christ “who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless babe.” Drawing upon the paradox of faith, “The gift of love” was “scorned by the ones he came

to save.” “Till on the cross as Jesus died / the wrath of God was satisfied.” This means that Christ’s suffering was a substitute for human sin and, as such, satisfied God’s wrath against the transgressions of humanity. This is a view that Christ, by choosing a sacrificial death, was punished or penalized in the place of a sinful humanity.

Stanza 3 recounts the Resurrection in expressive language, including “bursting forth in glorious day” and “he stands in victory.” The result was that “sin’s curse lost its grip on me.

Stanza 4 expresses the doctrine of eternal security, often described as once-saved-always-saved, in a powerful assertion echoing the spirit of Romans 8:38-39: “Till he returns or calls me home, / here in the power of Christ I’ll stand.

1. In Christ alone my hope is found,  
He is my light, my strength, my song;  
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace,  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  
My Comforter, my All in All,  
Here in the love of Christ I stand.
  
2. In Christ alone! Who took on flesh,  
Fullness of God in helpless babe.  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
Scorned by the ones He came to save:  
Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
The wrath of God was satisfied –  
For every sin on Him was laid;  
Here in the death of Christ I live.
  
3. There in the ground His body lay,  
Light of the world by darkness slain:

Then bursting forth in glorious day  
Up from the grave He rose again!  
And as He stands in victory  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,  
For I am His and He is mine –  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

4. No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
This is the power of Christ in me;  
From life's first cry to final breath,  
Jesus commands my destiny.  
No power of hell, no scheme of man,  
Can ever pluck me from His hand:  
Till He returns or calls me home,  
Here in the power of Christ, I'll stand.

*By Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, 2001:*

Christians who have a guilty soul and fall into the trap of feeling like we must appease our ancestors for blessings and protection from calamities; the above hymn "*In Christ alone*" has the answer, "Jesus is all-sufficient. In Him you are complete." "Jesus is before all things. Jesus is supreme over every power and authority.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, therefore, Christians should always be encouraged that there is no spiritual blessing lacking when we are in Christ and He alone is in charge of our security and protection. There is no reason therefore for Christians to appease the ancestors because of the belief that they will bless and protect them from calamities. The one who rose from the dead (Jesus Christ) is in charge of our security and blessings; because He lives our lives are safe and secure in his hands.

In Christ, we have every spiritual blessing that he has won for us. In the man, Christ, all the attributes and the very nature of God were found. Jesus was fully God and fully human at the same time. Only in

Him can fullness be found and when we are united with Him we are filled and complete; we have everything that matters. Jesus is all-sufficient for our protection and salvation.

We value our ancestors because we are connected to them by the relationship we have; but, we must always trust only in God. We no longer need to go through the spirits of the dead because Jesus is our hope and protector. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life, as Jesus says in John 14:6.

"The Church of Uganda condemns syncretism; therefore, Bishops and clergy should continuously proclaim the sufficiency of Christ crucified to meet all our needs, and to work pastorally with Christians to apply this glorious truth practically in their lives" (Ntagali, 2016).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This study entirely focused on examining the impact of the African traditional practices on death in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese. The discussion, conclusion, and recommendations made in this study are all based on the set research questions on which this study rested.

#### **5.1 Discussion**

##### **5.1.1 Reasons why the cultural practices on death continue in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese**

The study findings revealed that it is mainly to have security over death from the ancestors and the deceased and get rid of bad omens that influence people to continue doing cultural practices on death. For example, a deceased woman, who has been illegally married to a family, is not buried by that family instead her body is taken and buried on the land where she was born. This is from a belief that the ancestors have never received bridewealth for her from any family. Non-observance of this tradition will make the ancestors angry and retaliate by sending calamities like death and bad omen to the living; it is therefore from the above-mentioned beliefs among others that the living performs the cultural practices on death such that their lives are spared.

Responding to the above statement, it is Biblical and a custom that a man has to present a dowry or substantial gift to the family of the wife he intends to marry. This is to compensate the family for the loss of the girl. For example, in the book of Genesis 29:18-27, Jacob's dowry was not a material possession, for he had none to offer. Instead, he agreed to work seven years for the father-in-law to qualify to marry Rachel as his wife. Even when he was not able to get Rachel as his wife instead, he was given Leah, he went ahead and worked for more than seven years so that he could get a wife of his heart. Therefore, every man should pay a dowry to the relatives of the wife he intends to marry; paying the dowry should not be done in avoidance of calamities but rather as an obligation that is biblically justified.

### **5.1.2 The impact of the cultural practices on death in the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese**

The findings from the respondents indicated that the cultural practices on death on the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese have indeed led to syncretism (the belief in more than one God); this challenges the Biblical point of view (the first commandment) that we must worship only one God “you shall have no other gods but me”. From the respondents’ point of view, this happens because of the absence of a proper understanding of the ATR worldview that lies subtly within the Church; they (Christians) think that Christianity and African traditional practices on death are similar.

Other Christians quote the Bible out of context "Give to Caesar what is Caesar' and to God what is God's" for them "*Ebyosi Bisosene*" implying that the cultural practices on death and the Gospel are all means to God or two sides of the same coin, meaning the two are compatible." This is not true because the darkness cannot mix with the light.

The research findings also confirmed that the cultural practices on death create a situation of polygamy because in most cases the inheritors are people who already have wives. This challenges the biblical point of view that marriage has to be monogamy. The respondents said that, in most cases when the head of the family is sick and he feels that he may not heal from the sickness, he makes a will on who he would want to inherit his wife and the family in case he dies. The will the deceased has left behind is never challenged by the living. People have a belief that failure to act accordingly may result in calamities. This therefore means that, if the deceased mentioned in the will the one who is already married to inherit his wife, the clan leaders will have to obey; hence this causes polygamy.

In the Gospel according to St. Matthew 22:23-30, the law said that when a woman’s husband died without having a son, the man’s brother had a responsibility to marry and care for the widow (Deuteronomy 25:5,6); the seduces asked Jesus what marriage would be like in heaven. Jesus said it was more important to understand God’s power than to know what heaven would be like. Jesus answered that these faulty ideas are caused by ignorance of God’s word. Therefore, we must not make up our own ideas about what is good or bad but rather we should concentrate more on our relationship with God. Eventually, we will find out, and it will be far beyond our greatest expectations.

### **5.1.3 Ways through which the Church should respond to the problem of African traditional practices on death.**

The study tasked all Christians to always devote themselves to the word of God; Christians must know the value and the power of the word of God (Psalms 19:7-11) because it will give them hope, and courage and also make them wise; the word of God will give Christians advice and guidance which is valuable. Christians must cultivate the discipline of engaging in God's word (psalms 1:2). When they read the word of God, they need to be attentive to it, because only the observed word of God is helpful for them. They need to study and meditate on it and memorize the scriptures such that they can be in a position to get the right message but also to share what they have read with other people who are still struggling with these cultural practices on death.

### **5.2 Conclusion**

The realization of this research work has been a tremendous blessing for which the researcher gives God credit. The opportunity to study at Uganda Christian University-Mukono has been unique as God has used every contact the researcher had with my lecturers to enlarge his heart, vision, and passion towards heuristic learning and the importance of "Context" in ministry. During this research, the researcher realized that an understanding of context is critical for any lasting and successful ministry. He learned that the ATR worldview provides the pre-understanding that constitutes the basis for religious dialogue. This implies that no effective ministry can happen without an adequate understanding of context (ATR worldview in this case).

At the end of this project and program, the researcher has gained skills and insights to continue to research, think reflectively, and do ministry in his present context and wherever the Lord would lead him subsequently. The research experience and learning have transformed the researcher's approach to ministry from being judgmental to being more deliberate and courageous in engaging in contextual discipleship.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Culture is a gift from God to people. There is no such thing as primitive people whose culture is to be despised. Therefore, Christians, Church leaders, missionaries, and Christian workers must be good

students not only of the word but of the culture of the people which informs their worldview and constitutes the hermeneutical frame for making meaning out of life. It is only when the word of God is rightly understood, communicated, and applied to culture that meaningful and healthy transformation of lives and societies, including the culture itself, can happen.

There is also a need for the Anglican Church to contextualize the Gospel in the Bakonzo culture; those involved in contextual mission need to recognize that they can only begin with the doctrinal interpretations learned from their own culture and church tradition (Haslev, 1997). Alert to this they begin a dialogue between the mission culture (its people, history, and symbols) and Scripture. This should continue to ensure that the result is both true to Scripture and meaningful in the culture.

In Jesus' ministry, we see his encounter with spiritual forces. The presence and activity of demonic powers is a reality in the world. The work of the Holy Spirit in spiritual conflict is an important Biblical reality. Christian ministry sometimes has tended to ignore this facet of Biblical teaching and social concern. We need Biblically legitimate and culturally appropriate approaches to such issues as prayer; deliverance from demons, healing, and blessing Christians.

Post-funeral prayers (memorial services) are being conducted by the Church purposely to thank God for having continuously protected the family of the deceased and to continue requesting Him to take care of it amidst any challenges they may experience. This is done by the church to show that in Christ alone we have enough protection against all calamities. There is no need therefore to conduct a post-funeral party for fear that the deceased will retaliate by sending calamities to the living if we have not conducted it, but rather we should know that the church has a solution.

As a church, we celebrate the day of the death of a Christian because it puts away the pain of the loss of a relative; it also shows that death is not the end of life, instead there is hope for resurrection. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever”.

Therefore, Christians should not fear, for there is life beyond this physical death (eternal life).

In the Anglican Church, the burial service ends with a prayer and a blessing from the priest in the house of the deceased and finally with a hymn. The prayer and a blessing are said to request God to protect the family of the deceased from any calamities. Therefore, Christians should not live in fear of the deceased and their ancestors because God is in control over their lives; Jesus paid it all.

The problem of syncretism is a rift in the Anglican Church in South Rwenzori Diocese as most participants attested to the fact that syncretism is a serious problem in the churches. To resolve this problem of syncretism created by the uncritical adoption of the Gospel and the ATR worldview practices, most especially on death, there is a need for intentional and contextual discipleship to facilitate effective communication; intentional discipleship should majorly focus on the doctrine of demons, the security of believers and the supremacy of Christ over all authorities would be useful and helpful as well.

There is a need for people to understand their culture or worldview as it is without prejudice. The impression often is that culture is bad and should be discarded (Heibert, 2010). Heibert calls for critical contextualization that should not deprive the Gospel of its prophetic voice: The Gospel must be contextualized, but it also must remain prophetic, standing in judgment on what is evil in all cultures as well as in all persons. Both the Gospel and theology need to be contextualized in local cultural forms critically.

It is the responsibility of the local Christians (church), to engage in Bible study to learn, decide, and implement together the Gospel message in a new and needed way in their culture. The Church minister or leader's job is to help the Christians focus on God's word, examine their ATR worldview practices in the light of what scripture teaches, and make decisions by themselves.

Testimonies of other Christians who have successfully handled similar challenges should be shared. Support groups should be created for such people to share such testimonies to encourage Christians who still find it a challenge to do away with the African traditional cultural practices on death for the reason that if they do away with them calamities can befall them. In addition, organize prayer and counseling sessions in the church for believers with problems to help them.

Christians should be encouraged that, in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, God the Father achieved a great victory over the evil powers of this world making a public spectacle of them, and warns that though they still exist, they are defeated; Satan's demons have been sentenced to be in the train of God's victory parade. Consequently, we no longer need to fear the outcome of the battle with evil, Christ has conquered, and in him we have conquered and we will conquer (Hughes 71).

Ever since Christianity came to our shores, it was seen by many of our people as a foreign religion coming to replace African culture. However, there has been a newfound pride in African culture; People are happy to have traditional wedding ceremonies instead of white weddings, having worship liturgy in a language the congregants are familiar with, worshiping God with hymns translated into the local language, and many others. All these have been made to help African Christians to understand God better in the African perspective.

As African Christians, we should use our Indigenous cultures to celebrate them as an expression of us being made in the image of God (Ntinga, 2021). There are many good and Godly qualities that we learn from our African cultures. We learn the value of human life, the value of community, and respect for elders; our cultures give us a sense of belonging and identity, and those are all gifts from God. However, Christians should not exchange the glory of God for things that challenge the Gospel of Christ but rather they should be encouraged to seek direct access to God through His son Jesus Christ knowing that He is sufficient for our blessings and security from any calamities and not their ancestors.

The Lord Jesus was clearer when He spoke about how to access God. John 14:6 reads, "I am the way and the truth and the life. John 14:6 gives us hope because God knew that we and our cultures have fallen short of His glory (Ntinga, 2021). He knew that death was an enemy we could not defeat, so He provided a way for us to be saved, and that through His Son Jesus who died for us, He was resurrected physically and now mediates on our behalf. We therefore no longer have to fear anything because our King has overcome death.

As Christians, we are to be renewed by the word of God into the image of Christ; Colossians 3:10-11 "and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (Ntinga, 2021). Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all". This should therefore become our dominant identity and the lens through which we view and assess all our other identities and cultures that we fall under.

#### **5.4 Areas of further research**

This study focused on examining the impact of the African traditional cultural practices on death on the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese. Therefore, more research should be conducted on the area highlighted below;

First and foremost, more research should be conducted on the same topic but the focus should be on the other Dioceses in Uganda since different places and people in these places have their unique way of life.

Second and final, more research should be conducted on the role of the Anglican Church in solving the problem of the cultural practices on death on the Anglican Church.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: General questionnaire to the Christians of the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese:

Dear respondent,

My name is Zerubaberi Bwambale a student at Uganda Christian University Mukono (UCU), pursuing a Master Degree of Divinity. I request you to fill this questionnaire, it is only academic and it will be confidential. Thank you, may God bless you.

Do not put on your name, telephone number, or area of residence.

1. African traditional practices on death are common. Is it true?
  - A: Yes it is.
  - B: No it isn't.
  - C: I don't know.
2. What are the causes of African traditional practices (rituals) on death in this area?
  - A: To have security over death.
  - B: To get rid of bad omen.
  - C: To have protection against the anger of the deceased.
  - D: To get blessings from the deceased.
  - E: All the above.
3. What do you think is the impact of the African Traditional Practices on death on the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese?
  - A: It has lead to syncretism (belief in more than one God).
  - B: It creates a situation of polygamy.
  - C: It constitutes a hindrance to the understanding and communication of the Gospel message.
4. In your own opinion, what do you think the Anglican Church should do to respond to the problem of African traditional practices on death in this area?
  - A: Encourage Christians to devote themselves to the word of God.
  - B: Warn Christians against trusting their own evaluation of what is right or wrong.
  - C: Christians should be assured that there is only one Jesus who can save.

- D: The church should improve on discipleship
- E: All the above

**Appendix 1I: Interview guide**

1. The African traditional practices on death look to be common on the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese. Do you agree/ disagree?

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2. Why do you agree/ disagree?

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3. What do you think must be the cause of such? .....

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4. The practice I believe leaves a big damage on the Church; could you please give how the Anglican Church South Rwenzori Diocese is being affected by the cultural practice on death?

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5. In your own view what advice can you give to the Church leaders in order to reduce this practice on the Anglican Church, South Rwenzori Diocese?

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## Appendix III: Plagiarism certificate



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EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL PRACTICES ON  
DEATHS IN THE AMERICAN CHURCH (MITHO BRENWORO BANGERE)

BY  
BWAMBALE ZERUBABERI  
MEMBER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO BISHOP URSULINE SCHOOL OF  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF THEOLOGY OF EGANGA  
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