

**THE CONCEPT OF SIN AND FORGIVENESS AMONG THE JOPADHOLA OF
UGANDA**

**BY
KELEBU MOSES**

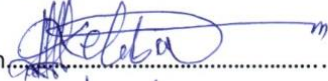
M23MO5/062

**A RESEARCH PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO BISHOP TUCKER
SCHOOL OF DIVINITY AND THEOLOGY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF
DIVINITY OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY MUKONO**

July 2026

DECLARATION

I Kelebu Moses do declare to the very best of my knowledge that this research report is my original material and has never been presented to any institution of learning for any award.

Sign.....

Date.....7/07/2026.....

APPROVAL

This research report has been under my supervision and is now ready for submission to Uganda Christian university.

University Supervisor

Prof. Christopher Byaruhanga

Sign.....

Date.....7/07/2020

DEDICATION.

This research is dedicated to my Beloved wife, Mercy, My Doughters, Divine, Arabella, and Arielle. My parents Kabongo Patrick and Adikin Kevin ,My siblings and all others whose love, prayer and encouragement have formed the greatest source of my inspiration.

This research is also dedicated to all CTM Pastors and Neuma Church for mentorship and vision of theological education has led me into this venture with dedication and determination.

Most importantly, this research is dedicated to the glory of the almighty God, who has called, sustained and equipped me for his service.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

With deep appreciation, I thank our God and the Almighty Father who has been Faithful to me during this research, Wisdom and Grace otherwise this dissertation would not have been completed.

My sincere gratitude goes to my Supervisor, Prof. Christopher Byaruhanga for his intellectual input, patience and critical comments. This is because through his guidance and motivation, this dissertation has benefited.

With sincere appreciation, I thank the members of the Faculty and Staff of Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology, Uganda Christian University for their cooperation and creation of a favorable learning environment.

I am deeply grateful to my loving wife and family members (including my parents and siblings) for their encouragement, strength and positive response to the call of ministry

My colleagues and fellow students deserve appreciation for increasing my knowledge and motivating me to excel.

Table of Contents

THE CONCEPT OF SIN AND FORGIVENESS AMONG THE JOPADHOLA OF UGANDA.....	i
DECLARATION	ii
APPROVAL	iii
DEDICATION.	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE	1
1. 0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.	5
1.3 Purpose of the Study	6
1.4 Objectives of the Study	6
1.5 Research Questions	6
1.6 Scope of the Study.....	6
1.7 Justification	7
1.8 Significance of the Study	8
Literature review	9
2.0 Introduction.....	9
2.1 Biblical and theological background to sin and forgiveness.	9
2.3 Forgiveness and Sin in ATRs	11
2.4 The Jopadhola Cultural Context	13
2.5 Christianity and Indigenous Beliefs.....	13

2.6 Integration and Conflict Between Worldviews	14
2.7 Research Design	15
2.8 Area of Study.....	15
2.9 Population of the Study.	16
1.9.4 Sampling Techniques.....	16
1.9.5 Data Collection Methods.	17
1.9.6 Data Analysis.....	17
1.9.7 Reliability.....	18
CHAPTER TWO	20
SIN AMONG THE JOPADHOLA BEFORE THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY	20
2.1 The Communal Orientation of Sin	20
2.2 Offense against Ancestral Spirits	21
2.3 Categories of Sin.....	22
2.4 Consequences: Spiritual Pollution and Misfortune	23
2.5 Atonement and Ritual Purification.....	23
2.6 Theological Assessment.....	24
2.7 Conclusion	24
CHAPTER THREE.....	25
SIN AMONG THE JOPADHOLA AFTER THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY	26
Missionary Contact and the Reshaping of Indigenous Moral Categories.....	26
Atonement and the Christological Resolution of Sin.....	28
CHAPTER FOUR.....	32
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS.....	32
4.1 Introduction.....	32
4.2 Sin as Relational Rupture: Jopadhola and Biblical Convergences	33
4.3 The ontological dimension: Sin, defilement, and the breakdown of order.	34

4.4 Guilt: Collective and Individual Dimensions	35
4.5 Ancestors, Mediation, and the Question of Christ	37
4.6 Repentance as Transformation and Communal Reintegration.....	39
4.6 Repentance as Transformation and Communal Reintegration.....	41
4.7 Forgiveness as Restoration: Towards a Jopadhola-Informed Soteriology	42
4.8 Justice and Mercy: The Christological Resolution	44
4.10 Eschatological Horizon	46
4.11 Conclusion	47
CHAPTER FIVE	48
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	48
5.1 Introduction.....	48
5.2.2 Summary of the Study.	49
5.2.1 Summary of Jopadhola worldview and Biblical vision of harmony, guilt and community restoration.	49
5.2.2 Summary of the traditional practices as theological language for sin and forgiveness.	49
5.2.3 Summary of the Christian teaching as affirmation and challenge.....	50
5.4 Recommendations.....	52
5.4.1 Recommendation to Church of Uganda	52
5.4.2 Recommendation to Theological Education.....	53
5.4.3 Recommendations to Theologians and Scholars	53
5.5 Conclusion	55
References.....	57

CHAPTER ONE

1. 0 Introduction

In this essay I investigate the knowledge and understanding of sin and forgiveness in the Jopadhola people of Eastern Uganda as well as how traditional notions of sin and forgiveness can intertwine with the theological teachings of Christianity. In what is an essay, it considers how native cultural lenses make sense of moral failure, communal renewal, and reconciliation, and in what ways they, and their imaginations, have been recalibrated in the historical light of Christianity. From an African Traditional Religion/Christian theological perspective, the research tries to shed light on what different systems of belief can and cannot align and how that is made possible within a global framework. The study therefore adds to the larger debates in African theology, contextual theology and moral theology on the interaction between culture and Christian instruction. In this section we outline the literature review as well as the theoretical framework for the study. In particular, it analyzes literature debates on African notions of sin, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. It also addresses the scholarship gaps related to the Jopadhola context and situates relevant theories in the review of the literature. In this way, the chapter contextualizes the findings of the current research within the wider academic discussion and establishes a conceptual framework for the research.

1.1 Background

Jopadhola also known as the Adhola is an ethnic group mostly composed of Luo speakers and their main population is in the Tororo District in eastern Uganda. Linguistically and culturally part of the Luo ethno-linguistic group in Eastern Africa, the Jopadhola are thought to have migrated from southern Sudan and northern Uganda into today's territories between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Such migration formed their social organization, religious beliefs, moral values, cosmological understanding of life (Ogot, 2017; Doyle, 2020). The Jopadhola, like other African societies, retained a view of reality that is largely through oral tradition, ritual life, and the community, and continues to shape modern life even amid modernity and Christianisation (Gifford, 2016; Ranger, 2018).

A core tenet of Jopadhola worldview is a world-system view with a holism that does not have a clear line separating religion from mundane. The world is experienced as a single integrated whole made up of God (Lubanga), the ancestors (jogi), spirits, people, and the natural world. This worldview is similar to what John Mbiti famously called the African view of reality: that “religion permeates all departments of life” and that existence is ultimately relational, not individualistic (Mbiti, 2015; Nyamiti, 2019). In this context, moral behavior is not simply an individual ethical issue, but a collective and spiritual obligation that maintains peace between visible and invisible stakeholders in the community (Gyekye, 2019). Thus wrong moral action has a ripple effect, not just for the one individual who commits it, but throughout the whole society. The morality of the Jopadhola consists upon consideration for elders, observance of social duties/obligations, veneration of ancestors, reverence for lineage and respect for culture, tradition or taboos which is the cornerstone part of the Jopadhola moral system.

These social norms are social norms that determine what is normal or acceptable as moral boundaries that protect the life (piny) and social unity of the community (Magesa, 2018). All breaches to these norms result from a serious moral and spiritual blunder. Thus, as Placide Tempels’ influential text *Bantu Philosophy* reminds us, in much of Africa, a sense of wrongdoing does not exist exclusively in juridical terms, but rather in relation to life-threatening evil, the undermining of vital power (Tempels, 2019). Tempels’ critique is condemned, yet his insights remain important for an understanding of African moral ontology, including that of the Jopadhola (Bujo, 2017) where sin can be read not simply as breaking rules but rather in terms of ‘a breach of relations’ (Bujo, 2017; Magesa, 2018). The Christian theological tradition does not, however, handle sin and forgiveness in fundamentally different (but still entirely related) ways, but in distinct and in fact related ways. In biblical terms, sin is humanity’s rebellion against God, beginning by the primordial disobedience in Genesis 3 (Wright, 2019). On this basis, then, as understood through the lens of history sin is a transgression of the relationship with God set for a covenant (Deuteronomy 28) and a universal condition that condemns all human beings to alienation from God’s holiness (Romans 3:23) (Grudem, 2020). Augustine’s original sin, as well as later Protestant theology, emphasized the severity and universality of sin, often focusing on individual guilt and moral responsibility to God (McGrath, 2021). But biblical theology acknowledges that sin may be social and communal (e.g., Israel's corporate accounting and

common culpability in the Old Testament (Goldingay, 2020)). Forgiveness in Christianity is understood as God's gracious restoration as a work of redeeming, redeeming redemption in Jesus, whom God intended. Forgiveness is found here, in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, reconciling God and the world (Ephesians 1:7; 2 Corinthians 5:18–19), according to Paul (Wright, 2019). This reconciliation is characterized by vertical and horizontal aspects: reconciled relation to God and reconciled relationship to human beings (Grenz & Olson, 2019).

In Miroslav Volf's terms, forgiveness and reconciliation are not merely private (individual) experiences, but social events that reorient communities and empower healing in brokenness and conflict (Volf, 2016). Christian forgiveness has fundamental moral and communal consequences. Moral and religious frameworks such as the African Traditional Religions (ATRs), which also include African faith-based spiritualities like Jopadhola, deal with wrongs and repair. But these frameworks are located on a relational context, which is community-oriented, focuses on balance, and has continuity in existence (Mbiti, 2015; Magesa, 2018). In particular, moral breaches are defined as taboos or offences against ancestors, debts to kin or neglect of ritual duties. In African faiths, Mbiti adds, "sin" is not only the violation of some impersonal moral code, but "that which breaks relationships." (Mbiti, 2015). For this reason, an offense is perceived to be an act that disrupts the moral and spiritual harmony of the community. Hence, forgiveness and reconciliation practices in the Jopadhola are communal processes, not independent of each other. Elders play a central mediating role, transmitters and holders of moral authority and custom to others (Gyekye, 2019). Confession, cleansing, sacrifice or compensation are regularly needed in order to redress the imbalance between the offender and society, offenders and their ancestors, and offenders and spirits (Magesa, 2018). These are consistent with Kwame Gyekye's vision of African communitarian ethics where everyone has a stake in morality and is value-based, with the desire to reconcile the society back into its correct pattern (Gyekye, 2019). Forgiveness, which not in this sense is an emotional purgatory but instead a material process of reintegration into a community.

Thus, it is worth noting that although these systems of social and moral justice converge conceptually, there historically has been a conflict between Christianity and traditional African moral systems, with tensions between Christianity and the dominant social systems of Christianity always being represented as a misinterpretation. Early missionary approaches

regarded much African religious thought on the concepts of sin, sacrifice and forgiveness to be at odds with biblical faith (Sanneh, 2016).

Indigenous practices were often derided as “pagan,” “primitive,” or morally deficient. The result was a theological dualism in that African believers were to relinquish their cultural morality and embrace Western theological categories of morality (Bediako, 2018). Consequently, not only Christianity itself but also Christian teaching as a whole seemed incompatible with a worldview of lived morality in African Christianity (Gifford, 2016). African theologians have vehemently contested this line of reasoning. John Mbiti asserts that Christianity in Africa has to embrace African worldviews as a serious act, if Christianity is to be fundamentally African and not merely an alien import of the faith (Mbiti, 2015). Kwame Bediako also noted that traditional African religious consciousness acts as a critical prelude to the reception of the Christian gospel message (Bediako, 2018). Bediako said terms like communal responsibility, mediation, and reconciliation in African religions can be used as intermediaries to understand Christian concepts of sin and forgiveness. Yet others, including Charles Nyamiti and Laurenti Magesa, have proposed a contextual theological attitude that critically appropriates African moral wisdom and yet remains faithful to biblical revelation (Nyamiti, 2019; Magesa, 2018).

Theologically, it is especially important in the context of the Jopadhola. This seems to suggest that many Jopadhola Christians carry on reading sin and forgiveness through a dual lens (Gifford, 2016) in the fact that traditional moral categories are still in evidence alongside Christian beliefs. Common problems of ill health, misfortune, social strife, or moral failure, for example, are commonly construed as being Christian and typical explanations (Ranger, 2018).

Such intermingling, without theological pause for reflection, may also leave confusion, or syncretism, or pastoral inadequacy. An interpretation with a contextual theology of sin and forgiveness that takes up sin and forgiveness seriously as aspects of Jopadhola morality would provide a more substantive pastoral interpretation for issues of guilt, reconciliation, and communal healing (Magesa, 2018).

Uganda's socio-political context is equally characterized by historical conflict, land disputes, and social transformation, which make forgiveness and reconciliation crucial theological and ethical

resources (Branch, 2017). As Desmond Tutu, for example, has taught in the South African context African concepts of reconciliation founded in community restoration can be useful for Christian praxis (Tutu, 2015). Thus, probing Jopadhola ideas of sin and forgiveness can inform both local pastoral ministry and the overarching African theological dialogue on reconciliation and social regeneration. Thus, this article aims to assess the understanding and practice of sin and forgiveness among the Jopadhola of Uganda and the implications of these concepts in their traditional worldview and in light of Christian theological teachings. By critically dialoguing Jopadhola moral categories alongside biblical and theological wisdom, the study aims to contribute to the emergence of a contextual African Christian theology grounded in cultural and theological reality. It is also of interest not only in terms of theological research, but also from the perspective of pastoral issues and contemporary culture in the context of the Church in Africa exploring authentic gospel expressions on moral and spiritual issues faced by African communities (Bediako, 2018; Magesa, 2018; Nyamiti, 2019).

1.2 Statement of the Problem.

Eastern Uganda's Jopadhola people have an indigenous cultural system that traditionally governs moral behaviour, community harmony & spiritual health, where sin (kweno) is seen as not just personal sin, but a disturbance of the social and cosmic order that needs to be resolved and reconciled through ritual restoration as well as ancestor appeasement, while forgiveness (konyo) is a process for reintegration into the moral and spiritual community. But with the growth of Christianity in the region, a different theological pattern has developed and an understanding of sin primarily as an offense against God and a dependence on forgiveness through divine grace, personal repentance and reconciliation in Jesus Christ. The meeting of these two paradigms has created tension, ambiguity, and tension in the heart of the Jopadhola around their moral authority, ritual, right definitions of sin and forgiveness. This often brings parallel or competing practices, uncertainty among youth and, in the process, the disintegration of community mechanisms indigenous people have relied on to heal themselves. Yet, there has been scant scholarly work, particularly for theology and pastoral practice, which critically addresses the ways in which traditional Jopadhola understandings of sin and forgiveness either relate to, conflict with or synthesise with Christianity in theological and pastoral disciplines. This puts a void of contextual theological reflection for which this study is attempting to fill.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the concept of sin and forgiveness among the Jopadhola of Uganda and to analyze how these traditional beliefs align or conflict with Christian theology.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the Jopadhola's definition of sin
- ii. To examine traditional mechanisms for addressing sin and seeking forgiveness.
- iii. To evaluate the influence of Christianity on Jopadhola beliefs and practices.
- iv. To formulate a model that leads to dialogue between Christianity and Jopadhola's understanding of sin and forgiveness.

1.5 Research Questions

- i. How do the Jopadhola define and understand the concept of sin within their traditional worldview?
- ii. What traditional mechanisms are used by the Jopadhola to address sin and to seek forgiveness?
- iii. How has Christianity influenced Jopadhola beliefs and practices regarding sin and forgiveness?
- iv. How can a contextual model be formulated to foster dialogue between Christianity and the Jopadhola understanding of sin and forgiveness?

1.6 Scope of the Study.

The study was geographically restricted to the community of Jopadhola (Adhola), which mainly resides in Tororo District, Eastern Uganda. It primarily analyses selected rural and semi-urban regions in the district with the aim of elucidating differences in cultural practice, religious experience and social transformation in the community. It looks at how the concepts of sin and forgiveness are understood and enacted in diverse social environments among the Jopadhola people in different local contexts. For demographic scale, the study involves different members of the community who are perceived as custodians, or interpreters, of the moral and religious knowledge the community offers. They consist of elders, Christian clergy and church leaders, traditional healers or ritualists, and lay communities. Their viewpoints are invaluable for

appreciating the mainstream cultural understanding of sin and forgiveness and, by extension, how this perception relates to Christian teaching in contemporary Jopadhola culture.

In a historical as well as contemporary perspective, this research studies, temporal in nature. It discusses existing moral systems before the development of Christianity and contemporary attitudes developed at the time of missionary work and the expansion of Christianity in this area. The diachronic perspective allows the research to explore when definitions of sin and forgiveness have changed and how traditional interpretations continue to negotiate or account for Christian theological content. More generally, the study focuses on sin and forgiveness as they appear in traditional Jopadhola belief systems and Christian theology. While the investigation is primarily confined to the Jopadhola territory, there are relatively few comparisons with other African societies, or with African theological literature, from where applicable to give an overview of the general aspects of African moral and religious concerns. The study does not attempt at providing a comprehensive study of such an attitude as that common in Jopadhola culture and African Traditional Religion; rather it aims to study the moral, theological, and communal dimensions of sin as well as forgiveness.

1.7 Justification

This study is morally justified because it aims to comprehend and respect the indigenous moral worldview of the Jopadhola concerning human conduct, wrongdoing, reconciliation and restoration. Moral terms like sin and forgiveness are not just religious concepts, they lie in cultural systems which shape the acceptable way of doing things, social responsibilities, and interpersonal relationships, between the community and the spiritual world. Africans scholars have pointed out that African traditional moral systems often consider wrongdoing to be a violation of the harmony of the community, that this violation must be redressed by acknowledging the wrong, repenting for it, and restoring the harmony (Mbiti, 1969; Awolalu, 1976). It is, therefore, important to examine the concepts of sin and salvation among the Jopadhola so that one can have an ethical basis for either understanding their own sense of moral or imposing an extraneous sense of right and wrong upon them.

The study is also morally appropriate since the documentation of the understanding of sin and forgiveness among the Jopadhola people helps in the recognition of indigenous knowledge systems which have been overlooked by the mainstream religious and academic discourses in the past. The Padhola people have unique cultural and religious practices that influence their conception of social order and human relationships, as mentioned by Ogot (1967). In a dynamic society where globalization and the new interpretation of the old religion are affecting the indigenous values, it is important to sustain and study the indigenous moral values from an ethical perspective. The study respects the experiences and beliefs of the Jopadhola community, affirming the principle that each cultural group is free to define and interpret its own moral realities.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The theological importance of the study on “The Concept of Sin and Forgiveness among the Jopadhola of Uganda” lies in the contribution to the understanding of interpretation of the concepts of sin, guilt, reconciliation and forgiveness in an indigenous African religious context. Theology is interested in how human beings relate to God; their moral obligations and the ways in which human relationships are restored. The study looks at the Jopadhola worldview to explore the different beliefs of indigenous people regarding sin, spiritual responsibility, cleansing and restoration from sin in relation to the other theological issues discussed: human failure, divine justice, mercy and redemption. Mbiti (1969) believes that African religious thought offers a comprehensive view of life in which moral activities are related to the relationship between people, spirit and community. The study of the Jopadhola perspectives is thus useful in enriching theological reflection since it reveals the historical perception and understanding of moral failure and restoration among African communities.

The study is also of theological importance as it helps to develop contextual theology by examining how Christian theological ideas relate with indigenous African beliefs and practices. With Christianity so entrenched in the lives of the Jopadhola, an examination of their traditional understanding of sin and forgiveness offers a foundation for reflecting on the way in which the teachings of Christianity related to repentance, reconciliation and grace are received, interpreted and lived by them culturally.

Literature review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the literature which is related to the topic under research.

2.1 Biblical and theological background to sin and forgiveness.

Christian theology defines sin as a moral defect and rebellion against God's will. Sin, both as a universal condition impacting all of humanity (Romans 3:23) and as a barrier to divinity (Isaiah 59:2), is presented in scripture. Forgiveness is the theological response to sin, made possible through God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9). In the biblical conception of atonement, it is the act of sacrificial mediation which is called to remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22), while divine mercy is framed as constitutive of the essence of God (Psalm 103:8–12). These biblical themes collectively focus on the restorative and relational aspects of forgiveness that lie at the heart of Christian theology (Wright, 2019; McGrath, 2021; Green & McKnight, 2017).

Sin in the Old Testament relates back to the covenant relationship between God and Israel. Collapse of the covenant was not only a moral failure but also acted as a rupture in the relationship between God and the covenant society (Goldingay, 2020). Sin in both private and corporate terms is often presented in prophetic literature as a violation of God and social injustice, oppression, and spiritual alienation results from sin (Brueggemann, 2018). When true repentance happens, forgiveness is seen as restoration of covenantal relationship (Jeremiah 31:31–34), while the latter is an act of divine grace (as we see here) that acts upon the former. In the New Testament, reconciliation is mediated through Jesus Christ. In his death and resurrection, Christ is the ultimate gift of forgiveness and restoration of God from man (2 Corinthians 5:18–19; Colossians 1:13–14). The apostolic scriptures stress the importance of forgiveness as both a divine act and an ethical call for followers to seek to forgive (as God has done) one another; this would seem to be illustrated by Ephesians 4:32 and Matthew 6:14–15 (Grudem, 2020; Wright, 2019). Therefore, Christian theology of forgiveness both looks vertical (between humanity and God) and horizontal (between people and communities).

Christian theologians, through history, have developed various interpretations of sin and forgiveness. Augustine of Hippo explained the doctrine of original sin: human beings inherited a sinful nature from Adam and so need divine grace for grace to rescue them (Augustine, 2006; McGrath, 2021). The Reformation continued to emphasize human sinner, as well as the need for salvation alone by grace. According to the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity, sin is destructive, it permeates every aspect of human existence and the only way toward forgiveness is by the saving work of Jesus (Calvin, 1960; Horton, 2018).

Nowadays, theologians have broadened the concept of sin and consider the social and structural aspects of it, in addition to individual sin. N. T. Wright (2019) contends, 'sin operates not merely in terms of individual evil but in forms of injustice that enable the maintenance and the strengthening of broken relationships and social suffering'. Christopher Wright (2010) notes the same in his work, demonstrating, for instance, that biblical forgiveness includes a restoration of justice, reconciliation and community healing. Modern theologians have increasingly made a point to stress the social and relational dimensions of forgiveness. Miroslav Volf (2016) writes that forgiveness is necessary if we are to escape violence and exclusion in divided societies. In *Exclusion and Embrace*, Volf suggests that it is through forgiveness that a community transcends enmity and progresses into reconciliation.

Desmond Tutu (2015), also in his discussion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, holds that forgiveness is required in order to restore human dignity and in recovering societies that have become fractured by injustice. Indeed, these views speak to the communal and restorative character of forgiveness in Christian theology. New and emerging theological studies have pointed to the importance of locating Christian doctrines of sin and forgiveness within different cultures. According to Bevans (2016) and Schreiter (2018) theology should, therefore, “interconnect with its cultural location with the aim of making the text relevant to its people”. This contextual perspective forms the basis of a theological conversation among Christianity and African morality.

2.3 Forgiveness and Sin in ATRs

The traditional black religions in Africa suggest a social and relational moral compass according to which sin and forgiveness have been understood as a relational and collective category in African Traditional Religions (ATR). While Western individualistic ethical systems center on Western personal/spiritual ethics, ATRs are focused on harmony and balance in community and in religious and spiritual realms (Mbiti, 2015; Magesa, 2018). For instance, John Mbiti (2015: 7) points out that religion permeates every aspect of African people's lives, moral behavior, social relationships and cultural institutions.

In African communities, wrong conduct is regarded not only as an offense against an abstract moral code but also as an attack on the relationships between people, their surroundings and the ancestors. Thus, sin is primarily understood as a violation of relationship rather than a legal offense. Indeed, as Laurenti Magesa (2018) elaborates, African moral systems are life-centric at their core. Actions are also evaluated according to whether they enhance life or diminish it in community. Sin, then, involves conduct that undermines collective cohesion, including dishonesty, injustice, disrespect and disrespect for elders, as well as offenses against respect for cultural mores. Benezet Bujo (2017) also contends that African Ethics focus on preserving life and social harmony with a responsibility to living and ancestors. Forgiveness in ATRs is usually through collective efforts to restore concord. These are often confessional, reconciliatory, compensatory and sacrificial (Gyekye, 2019).

In addition, there is a belief that ancestors supervise moral order and act as mediators who uphold the law. Elders and ritualists aid in fostering reconciliation. According to anthropologists like Victor Turner (1967), these ritual techniques are a type of "social drama" that communities use to resolve conflicts and rebuild community. Offenders are reintegrated into their communities and their systems through ritual cleansing, symbolic acts of sacrifice, and community reconciliation ceremonies. Such a focus on rehabilitation as opposed to punishment is very similar to current restorative justice models (Murithi, 2016).

The flexibility of African religious systems has also been highlighted by recent research. According to Gifford (2016), African religion is dynamic, with its spiritual traditions constantly

changing in response to globalization, modernization, and Christianity. However, the communal orientation of African moral thought continues to be a distinguishing characteristic of all ATRs in spite of these developments.

2.4 The Jopadhola Cultural Context

The Jopadhola, a Nilotic-speaking people of Eastern Uganda located in Tororo District, also have a long tradition of moral and community values underpinned by ancestral responsibility and respect (Ogot, 2017; Doyle, 2020). This framework, grounded in the fusion of the visible and the invisible worlds, is consistent with more widespread African cosmological systems. Jopadhola culture views sin as *kweno*, meaning behaviours that defy social norms or may generate conflict in the community. Incest, theft, dishonesty, disrespecting elders, breaking ritual taboos, amongst other things. Such attitudes, which are believed to manifest in other spiritual consequences, like disease, bad luck or interpersonal conflicts.

Oburu and Omalla (2019) elaborate that in a Jopadhola society, there is a reconciliation through ritual cleansing, restitution, and symbolic sacrifice for ancestral spirits. Elders play an intermediary role mediating mediation and leading the reconciliation, interpreting moral wrongs and prescribing the right remedy. Seniority is a virtue as well as a spiritual value in Jopadhola society. They are seen as the custodians of cultural knowledge and intermediaries between the living and ancestors. They have perceived legitimacy of tradition and their spiritual beliefs that gives them authority to address the conflict (Gyekye, 2019). Ancestors also play a prominent role in Jopadhola moral thought. They are also thought to see the lives of the living and intervene when the harmony of a collective begins to unravel. If proper rituals are not used to correct wrongdoing, ancestral displeasure may be caused, resulting in spiritual or social consequences

2.5 Christianity and Indigenous Beliefs

New theological perspectives of sin and forgiveness were associated with the introduction of Christianity into Eastern Uganda via missionary activity. Christian teaching defines sin as an offense against God and forgiveness as a gift of divine grace obtained through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (Sanneh, 2016; Walls, 2018). Missionary contact frequently brought tensions between Christian doctrines and indigenous religious practices. Traditional rituals were perceived by many missionaries as being incompatible with the Christian faith and thus discouraged converts from observing them (Gifford, 2016). Consequently, there was often a struggle between the old cultural worldview followed by their new Christian faith and that of African Christians. African theologians have responded by arguing for contextual theology that positively incorporates African cultures.

Kwame Bediako (2018) contends that African traditional religious consciousness offers a useful context for Christian theology. In a like manner, Charles Nyamiti (2019) argues that African understandings of mediation and communal responsibility may also help to light the way in Christian beliefs and practices like reconciliation and forgiveness. Contemporary African theologians such as Mugambi (2020) and Maluleke (2017) also highlight the importance of theological reflection which acknowledges African specificities. They argue that Christianity in Africa must go beyond missionary paradigms to produce theological frameworks that are sensitive to African cultural contexts.

2.6 Integration and Conflict Between Worldviews

Traditional Jopadhola beliefs and Christian theology intersect in a phenomenon with tension and integration. As others have pointed out, African Christianity in many instances is a re-reading or bringing into being of Christian teachings through indigenous categories of thought through which it is known. (Bediako, 2018; Sanneh, 2016) Sin, in the traditional Jopadhola thought, is a crime against the community and calls for visible forms of reconciliation. Christianity, on the other hand, emphasises individual repentance and a kind of divine forgiveness through Christ. And that difference can be a source of tension when Christian communities see it as natural to shun traditional rituals (Walls, 2018).

However, integration can be attained through hybrid forms of integration between Christian and traditional practices. Such instances could be reconciliation ceremonies that serve at the prayer and even conventional symbol-based ritual stage. Turner (1967) calls these reactions ritual adaptation, i.e. the process by which new religious significances insert them into an already existing cultural structure. Meyer (2018) suggests that these hybrid modes of practice may produce ambiguity, and are not different among younger generations who negotiate between competing orders of moral authorities. However, such integration also shows that religious identity among African societies is dynamic. Schreiter (2018) notes that a constructive dialogue between the two is needed in developing contextual theological frameworks that address African moral realities.

2.7 Research Design

The research employed a library approach to a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is about understanding meanings, interpretations, beliefs and experiences in their social and cultural contexts, rather than just collecting quantitative data or statistical measures. This approach is particularly important for theological and cultural studies as it allows the researcher to deal with the basic beliefs and practices in the area of sin and forgiveness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The library-based qualitative research design is appropriate for the analysis of sin and forgiveness among the Jopadhola because the question of sin and forgiveness among the Jopadhola relates to theological interpretations, cultural traditions and historical developments. All of these are best explored by close reading or writing existing literature such as books, journal articles, dissertations, and church documents. Therefore, this study is more of a secondary data based study than a pure field based data. The library-based qualitative method allows the researcher to engage in dialogue with and read scholarly interpretations, cultural accounts and theological thought about the Jopadhola people's views on sin and forgiveness.

Also, a similar analysis of the relationship between these traditional beliefs of the Jopadhola people and the Christian teachings, especially their differences, similarities, and fusion, can equally be done. In addition, the qualitative research in library sources makes it possible for the researcher to analyze literature critically and hence helps the researcher in understanding sin and forgiveness from the perspective of both traditions. In addition, qualitative research is flexible and makes it possible for the researcher to analyze historical literature, theological literature and even ethnographic literature. This is very important because this particular research intends to analyze the evolution of sin and forgiveness among the Jopadhola people.

2.8 Area of Study

This research work is of a library type of nature; however, from a conceptual point of view, it deals with Tororo District and mainly Paya Subcounty located in Eastern Uganda. The area is known historically as that of the Jopadhola people. This aspect forms the foundation of literature that will be used in this study and does not neglect the cultural and historical reality of the Jopadhola society. Tororo District constitutes an important cultural center of the Jopadhola people. Traditional and modern elements are both dominant.

Currently, social and moral life of the Jopadhola people in the region is influenced by the culture and morals. Christianity has definitely had its impact on the formation of moral teachings and rituals in the region. For this reason, the study will rely on the literature concerning the Jopadhola people of the Tororo District and surrounding areas in the Tororo District. It includes ethnography, history, missionary records, theology, and the African traditional religion.

In addition, the study takes advantage of the literature from the region to ensure that the results of the study will be pertinent and consistent with the region in which the study has taken place. Moreover, the conceptual framework regarding the Tororo District can prove to be useful as it provides the researcher with an idea of the interaction of the Jopadhola beliefs with Christianity historically.

2.9 Population of the Study.

As this study is qualitative and library-based, the population is both published and unpublished written matter pertaining to the concept of sin and forgiveness among the Jopadhola people. This allows these materials to become the main data sources for the research. Populations of literature: The literature contained these categories: Books about African Traditional Religion , Books on Jopadhola culture and history, Journal articles on Christianity in Africa, Theological writings on sin and forgiveness, Research theses and dissertations, Church historical documents, Missionary reports, Cultural and ethnographic studies They are thus rich in available materials that allow the researcher to investigate the traditional beliefs and Christian teachings and changes in moral values of the Jopadhola people. Literature has been selected that contain historical and contemporary sources to address the topic comprehensively. The population also comprises writings of African theologians and researchers of African traditional religion and Christianity.

1.9.4 Sampling Techniques.

This research used purposive sampling to choose for analysis the appropriate literature. The purpose of the study is to discover the patterns within the literature. Because of its capacity to select sources which can be understood in terms of what it will say, purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). In this study, literature was selected based on its relevance to the concept of sin and forgiveness among the Jopadhola people. They chose sources

based upon the following criteria: Relevance to Jopadhola culture and traditions, Relevance to African Traditional Religion, Relevance to Christian teachings on sin and forgiveness, Scholarly credibility and academic reliability, Historical and theological significance. In addition to purposive sampling, the study also uses snowball sampling.

This method consists of searching for extra sources via references and bibliographies from the included literature. This way the researcher finds some books and articles that may not have been seen, in fact, they can choose them. Snowball sampling is important in library-based research as it helps researchers broaden the scope of sources and collect all-encompassing information (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017). Purposive and snowball sampling complement the study with a range of academic perspectives and credible sources. It enhances the veracity and depth of the research results.

1.9.5 Data Collection Methods.

All data for this study are obtained from document analysis. Document analysis is a qualitative research method, which considers or interprets a piece of written information in order to develop insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher gathers information from a range of written sources such as: Academic books, Articles in peer-reviewed journals, Research theses / dissertations, Church historical records, Cultural documents, Theological writings

These sources are carefully reviewed to discover the pertinent information concerning sin, wrongdoing, forgiveness, reconciliation, or moral considerations in the Jopadhola community. The researcher reads through the materials thoroughly and extracts core themes and ideas related to the study objectives. Using various sources increases methodological triangulation and hence results are more significant to credibility. By comparing data of different authors and perspectives, the researcher guarantees findings to be soundly supported by the research (Flick, 2020).

1.9.6 Data Analysis

The study uses thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the qualitative approach that can be applied to analyse textual data to find patterns, themes and meanings or themes (Braun & Clarke,

2019). Data analysis follows a procedure. The first step of the research is to read and re-read literature and get familiar with the content. This is a phase for the researcher to grasp key ideas and recurring categories of sin and forgiveness. Second, the researcher identifies and codes relevant information from the literature, identifying key statements and ideas. Coding is useful in order to arrange the data and make it sub-categories. Third, the researcher organizes similar codes into larger themes. These themes are patterns in the literature about sin and forgiveness of the Jopadhola. The following are among some of the main themes noted: Definition of sin within the Jopadhola cultural context, Types of moral offenses, Traditional methods of forgiveness, Christian teachings on sin and forgiveness, Integration of traditional and Christian understanding. Finally, cultural and theological perspectives of the researcher are used to make sense of the themes. This step contributes to developing a full view concerning sin and forgiveness within the Jopadhola.

1.9.7 Reliability.

Reliability and validity are defined in qualitative research as credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Multiple scholarly sources are utilized to enhance credibility for this study. Different materials employed help the researcher of information to compare and contrast data points and cross reference across resources. Reliability is guaranteed by selecting reliable academic sources and keeping consistent analysis. The researcher also reviews the sources critically to check for accuracy and reliability. Proper citation, proper interpretation, and transparent research processes all contribute to maintaining trustworthiness. The researcher also properly and responsibly cites all sources and makes sure that interpretations are representative of the original author.

3.8 Ethical Considerations. The ethical principles of this library-based study consist of academic integrity and the appropriate use of sources. All sources are cited and credited according to a researcher. The above prevents plagiarism and guarantees academic honesty. Furthermore, not least through its documentation method the researcher also ensures that the ideas of authors are accurately reflected and without distortion. Throughout the study the use of proper citation style serves to raise both your academic reputation and professionalism. Also, ensuring that the researcher sources all credible, research-quality materials is crucial to the overall process. The

study follows accepted academic standards and research ethics at all stages of the research process.

CHAPTER TWO

SIN AMONG THE JOPADHOLA BEFORE THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY

The Jopadhola who lived in eastern Uganda had rich religious traditions that predate Christianity, which arrived at this part of Uganda towards the end of the nineteenth century. They, like other Africans, inhabited a spiritually complex world in which religion, morals and everyday life were a seamless whole. As John Mbiti once observed, "the Africans are notoriously religious."¹

To comprehend sin from that angle, one ought to look at the big picture and examine the broader dimension with reference to African Traditional Religion (ATR). Morality for Africans, writes Laurenti Magesa, is all about improving life as a whole: human beings, society, and the cosmos. Sin is in that sense any action which depresses the life force and the vitality. Bolaji Idowu also remarks of there exists a deep sense of spiritual responsibility in African communities, where it is clear that nothing can be concealed from the ancestors and God Supreme.² This chapter addresses the Jopadhola conception of sin with reference to its communal, ancestral, categorical and ritual dimensions and places its local evidence in the context of scholarship concerning ATR.

2.1 The Communal Orientation of Sin

Sin, in the Jopadhola sense, was primarily seen as a corporate action, not as an individual moral failing. In the same tradition of the majority of Luo groups, the Jopadhola believed that there was a strong bond between the community members who were still alive, those who had died recently, and those who were not yet born. Magesa's analysis of African communal ethics sheds light on this dynamic well.³

In the African moral universe, the individual is always a person-in-community, and sin brings a rupture not only to an individual relationship but also to the network of relationships that form

¹John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 1–2.

²Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 148.

³Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 106–109.

the social life, he argues.⁴ That idea very well resonates in the Jopadhola community when the conduct of any one person can be a subject of shame or pride for the rest of the clan. When misdeeds occurred, they were considered destructive not merely to the individual, but to their relatives and kin. Okot P'Bitek provides an important comparison of the religion of the Central Luo community. Sin in Luo communities was perceived as rupturing social peace which needs a collective plan of action, P'Bitek says.⁵ This holds true with respect to the Jopadhola situation. The elders came together to reflect on misdeeds, and their major preoccupation was that of restoring harmony rather than punishing the culprits. This is stated in as many words by John Taylor when he says: "The African view of evil is more about broken relationships"⁶

2.2 Offense against Ancestral Spirits

The second key aspect of Jopadhola hamartiology involves offenses against the ancestral spirits. It is important to note that the Jopadhola, just like other communities that embrace ATR, believed firmly in the moral responsibility of their dead relatives. According to Magesa, ancestors are custodians of community morality who punish disobedience in one way or another.⁷ Idowu similarly documents how ancestral veneration across West African societies reflects a conviction that the moral order is sustained by powers that transcend the visible world.⁸ Among the Jopadhola, ancestral spirits—known as *jok* or *balongo*—were believed to observe the behavior of the living and to respond to moral failure with illness, infertility, crop failure, or persistent bad fortune. Mbiti notes that this pattern of ancestral punishment is widespread across African societies: "The spirits react to human behavior, especially to what is wrong or what violates the accepted customs and taboos."⁹ This observation applies directly to the Jopadhola, where misfortune was rarely interpreted as accidental but as a purposeful response to wrongdoing.

⁴Magesa, *African Religion*, 78–82.

⁵Okot p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971), 54–58. *The Jopadhola, a Luo-speaking people of Eastern Uganda, share significant linguistic and cosmological features with other Luo groups studied by p'Bitek.*

⁶John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 72.

⁷Magesa, *African Religion*, 68–70.

⁸Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 165–168.

⁹Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 206–210.

'Bitek's ethnographic work among the Luo further documents how ritual consultation with spiritual specialists followed any unexplained misfortune, as the community sought to identify the ancestral grievance requiring redress.¹⁰ The Jopadhola *ajwaka*, or traditional diviner, performed an analogous function, diagnosing the spiritual cause of suffering and prescribing the appropriate ritual remedy. Idowu's general observation is apt: "Man must seek to make peace with the spirits who have been offended."¹¹

2.3 Categories of Sin

In the Jopadhola morality framework, there is a detailed categorization of wrongdoings, with certain transgressions deemed serious due to their potential to disrupt familial or kinship stability. Magesa's interpretation of sin as it relates to its detrimental effects on communal well-being is particularly relevant here. The gravest offenses are those that inflict the most significant damage on community vitality.¹²

Incest is considered very crucial as it creates conflict in family ties that control marriage and reproduction. Murder leads to a permanent loss of life and causes a lot of enmity between clans. Adultery brings a risk to the sanctity of marriage, which forms the basic fabric of society. Theft poses a risk to the much-needed trust in the community. Moreover, deception of the elders is considered a grave mistake as the judicial process of Jopadhola largely depends on honesty.

Taylor's analysis of the moral framework in primal religions provides valuable insight: fundamental prohibitions typically revolve around life, sexuality, and truth, which are central to communal existence.¹³ Jopadhola classification of sins also fits into this framework. Another sin occurs as a result of dishonoring the elders, who are carriers of the wisdom of the entire community and act as mediators between the living people and their ancestors; hence, dishonoring them is a sign of both dishonoring the governance and spiritual world of the community.

Another type of sin involves pollution, which is defined as breaking the taboos through violating the sanctity of places, neglecting certain rituals, and getting into contact with polluting objects.

¹⁰P'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 61–65.

¹¹Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 172.

¹²Magesa, *African Religion*, 90–95. Magesa's framework of 'vital force' ethics is directly applicable to the Jopadhola context, where moral offenses are understood as attacks on communal vitality.

¹³Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, 80–84.

Although Evans-Pritchard did not mention Jopadhola while discussing the phenomenon of pollution among the Nuer, he considered pollution to be an objectively existing moral defect, which is independent of personal intention.¹⁴

2.4 Consequences: Spiritual Pollution and Misfortune

An essential feature of the sin concept held by the Jopadhola is the idea that sin leads to spiritual defilement or pollution (*chieno*). The pollution is not limited to the person committing the sin but can spread through the family, community, and wider society like an infection. Mbiti states that in African religions, sin is quasi-physical in nature; it defiles and needs to be cleansed.¹⁵ The defiling sin thus results in an overall situation in which the community becomes vulnerable to various forms of calamities such as epidemics, infertility, drought, or even sudden death. According to Magesa, this perspective reflects not superstition but moral cosmology, where spiritual and physical worlds are intimately linked..¹⁶ The urgency of addressing wrongdoing was therefore not merely moral but existential: unresolved sin threatened the survival of the community.

2.5 Atonement and Ritual Purification

Jopadhola devised elaborate systems designed to deal with transgressions and create more harmony amid tribal members of society. They incorporated elements of public repentance, collective discussions, restitutive processes, and sacrifices. This system, according to p'Bitek, was carried out by the Luo who not only demanded that an offender repent, held a meeting on repair of the breach, but also performed ritual sacrifices.¹⁷

Idowu's broad conception of sacrifice in ATR as a means of "maintaining harmony with spiritual forces" is directly applicable here.¹⁸ In the Jopadhola people, goat and chicken slaughter was a means of purification and reconnection of the transgressor with the spirits of his ancestors. This process was genuine, and led to changes perceived to have taken place in the spiritual status of

¹⁴E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 157. While Evans-Pritchard's work focuses on the Nuer, his analysis of sin as 'pollution' (*nueer*) is structurally analogous to Jopadhola concepts of ritual impurity.

¹⁵Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 212.

¹⁶Magesa, *African Religion*, 101–104.

¹⁷p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 68–72.

¹⁸Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 179–182.

the transgressor. So, in *African Religions and Philosophy*, John S. Mbiti claims, “in Africa, the individual is part of the whole; the whole is part of the individual.”¹⁹ Restoration was never simply personal; it was communal, restoring the offender to right relationship with the living, the ancestors, and the cosmic order simultaneously.

2.6 Theological Assessment

Moral theology in the Jopadhola pre-Jesus is highly advanced in the sense that it is based in a relational ontology. Sin is defined as the interruption of relationships that come into being and that God has provided between people and other beings such as between people themselves, between the living and the dead, or humans and the cosmos. Kwame Bediako, who proposed that primitive religions are *praeparatio evangelica*, offers this perspective.²⁰

Taylor recognizes the presence of an awareness of moral failure, along with the requirement for reconciliation to forces that transcend humankind, in primal religion.²¹²²

When viewed from a Christian perspective as well, the Jopadhola system is similarly characterized by great theological limits. The human and Creator (Were) connection is indirect, the whole of the connection primarily through the medium of ancestors’ spirits; second, the nature of sin is social, not in relation to violation of the laws of God; thirdly, although sincere, reconciliation does not correspond with redemption for sinning before God. Regarding the concern of over-Christianizing cultural religious beliefs for the Luo, I totally agree with the observations from P’Bitek.²³

2.7 Conclusion

Regarding theological limitations regarding Christianity, the Jopadhola religion also shows some limitations. First and foremost, there is an indirect connection between humans and Were

¹⁹Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1970), 97–99.

²⁰Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 93. Bediako's concept of 'primal religion' as a 'praeparatio evangelica' has direct relevance here.

²¹Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, 85–88.

²²Magesa, *African Religion*, 115.

²³P'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 74–78.

through the ancestors' spirits. Second, sin as an issue has been viewed through a society-dependent lens, not so much in terms of sin breaking God's commandments. Finally, although the process of reconciliation does have meaning, it does not follow the Christian principle of forgiveness of sins committed against God. And as far as the danger of over-Christianization of Luo religious beliefs is concerned, I completely agree with P'Bitek.

CHAPTER THREE

SIN AMONG THE JOPADHOLA AFTER THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity arrived in the land of the Jopadhola in eastern Uganda and marked a radical shift in the standards of guilt, moral responsibility, and spiritual forgiveness. The Church Missionary Society and the Mill Hill Missionaries, who introduced Christianity to the area at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, brought new aspects of education and church centers, causing gradual influence on the local religions.²⁴ The mission movement in East Africa revolutionized the criteria of moral judgment, Roland Oliver notes, while the case of the Jopadhola illustrates this trend.²⁵ The current study examines the impact of Christianity on the definition of sin through Biblical teaching, moral duties from community to individual levels, introduction of new theological consequences from wrongdoing, and the establishment of an era of perennial competition between Christianity and traditional local religion.

Missionary Contact and the Reshaping of Indigenous Moral Categories

Prior to the Christian encounter, the Jopadhola located sin primarily within a communal and ancestral framework. John Mbiti's broad survey of African religious thought demonstrates that in most Bantu and Nilotic societies, wrongdoing was understood as a rupture in the relational fabric of community and cosmos rather than as personal rebellion against a transcendent deity.²⁶ Eboussi Boulaga and E. B. Idowu similarly argue that African traditional religion organises moral life around communal harmony, corporate identity, and the maintenance of relationships with the living dead.²⁷ Among the Jopadhola, taboo violations, clan transgressions, and offences against neighbours provoked ancestral displeasure and required communal ritual resolution.

²⁴Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 3–15.

²⁵J. V. Taylor, *The Growth of the Church in Buganda* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 44–47.

²⁶Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, 1965), 28–35.

²⁷Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 112–14.

When missionaries arrived, they carried a biblically grounded understanding of sin as personal transgression against a holy God. As illustrated by Andrew Walls, the missionary venture continually brought into play what Walls calls the “indigenizing” and “pilgrim” principles, whereby the gospel became part of indigenous cultures and at the same time impelled them towards change.²⁸ Sanneh takes this observation further by arguing that Bible translations into local languages ensured democratization of access to the Bible and hence enabled local communities to evaluate their own culture according to biblical standards.²⁹ The translation process made it possible for the Jopadhola people to think of their sins in relation to God, which had been impossible through oral instruction alone.

The Redefinition of Sin through Biblical Teaching

The most important force for moral change was systematic engagement with the Bible. Christian teaching offered a broader ethical frame in which sin extended beyond merely sinning against social norms. Sin was defined not only as an outward breaking of the law, but also as a violation of the heart. The theological foundations for this kind of teaching even in its vernacular form are given by the exegesis of *chata’*, meaning sin as failing to satisfy the demands of God, and *pesha’*, the rebellion against God in an Old Testament work of Gerhard von Rad.³⁰

New Testament teaching further elaborated on this internal emphasis. The missionaries were on mission after the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21–28) where moral guilt applies both to actions and thoughts. As G. C. Berkouwer says, it is this intrinsic sinfulness that is fundamental to the Bible’s analysis of human beings sin is not so much a sociological problem as spiritual pollution of the whole being.³¹ The Pauline notion that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23) with the statement that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23) introduces an eschatological view which is totally alien to Jopadhola morality. The practical ritualism of the traditional setting was consequently replaced by the theological paradigm. Sin was a problem that needed to be worked through not so much by what the elders had to do as by the forgiveness

²⁸E. B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 136–38.

²⁹John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 200–202.

³⁰Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 203–5.

³¹Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009), 157–61.

of God. But perhaps the most significant one socially was the change from corporate to personal moral responsibility. Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed point out that Protestant missionary education consistently emphasized personal conversion, individual conscience and direct access to God without the mediation of priest or elder.³² It constituted a significant departure from traditional Jopadhola, where the evildoers were punished by lineage elders and communal ritual and conversation with the ancestors, not personal repentance to God alone.

Kwame Bediako has argued that the introduction of personal accountability into sub-Saharan African Christianity had a fundamental growth in moral identity which allowed the individual to orient his or her personal life and responsibilities toward a universal God not just clan and lineage. Among the Jopadhola this appeared in the use of private confession and intercessory prayer as their main means of dealing with sin, and what this did was to confirm that all people were personally responsible to God for their own moral life.³³

Atonement and the Christological Resolution of Sin

Christian teaching was not just a diagnosis of some new understanding of sin but a new solution. Missionaries depicted the atoning work of Jesus Christ as the answer to human sinfulness. The Jopadhola traditional ritual sacrifices were categorically different from a divine initiative of redemption announced in biblical texts like John 3:16 and Romans 5:8. Unlike the intermittent and communal propitiation of the ancestors, Christ's atonement occurred once-for-all and was personally appropriated by faith.

Aylward Shorter contends that if missionaries wish to convey atonement in African contexts, they should be willing to engage with already existing notions of sacrifice and reconciliation, rather than simply dismiss them.³⁴ Baptism and Holy Communion served as sacraments in the Jopadhola that both met and displaced ancestral purification rites. Baptism represented a symbol of entrance into a new community and repudiation of sin; the Eucharist was a memorial of Christ's self-offering and a revitalization of a believer's relationship to God. This sacramental

³²Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 162–64.

³³P. A. Welbourn, *East African Rebels: A Study of Some Independent Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 18–22.

³⁴Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 70–73.

framework appealed to the Jopadhola's previous sense, which felt that ritual action could mend broken relations, but directed this sense towards Christ.

Cultural Tensions and Syncretism

The encounter of Christianity with Jopadhola culture was no clean break but rather ongoing negotiation. As indicated by David Barrett in his pioneering study of African Independent Churches, the coexistence of local religions alongside the Christian confession was a widespread process resulting from the tensions between biblical moral theology and ancestral religion..³⁵. This also applies to the Jopadhola where many of those who have embraced Christianity continue to believe that diseases, bad harvests, and family problems arise due to the wrath of their forefathers and seek help from both the church and traditional healers.³⁶ Sanneh, by contrast, stresses that vernacular translation itself provides communities with the tools to adjudicate between indigenous belief and biblical revelation, and that the long-term trajectory of African Christianity is toward greater, not lesser, biblical fidelity.³⁷ For the Jopadhola, the tension between these poles remains unresolved, as church leaders continue to challenge consultations with diviners while lay Christians negotiate dual religious allegiances.

Shorter's theology of inculturation offers a constructive middle path. He argues that the church should distinguish between cultural elements that can be baptised into Christian use and those that are incompatible with biblical teaching.³⁸ When applied to the case of the Jopadhola people, the cultural practice of reconciliation and the high value accorded to harmonious relationships becomes a culturally positive good which Christian ethics should commend, while the practice of relying on mediation by the ancestors for spiritual reconciliation should be challenged by the gospel. Such an approach rather than one of outright condemnation or blind acceptance remains theologically most defensible path for Jopadhola Christians.

Conclusion

³⁵Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 1:262–67.

³⁶G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin*, trans. Philip C. Holtrop (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 32–36.

³⁷Berkouwer, *Sin*, 230–34.

³⁸Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 88–92.

The introduction of Christianity among the Jopadhola changed the understanding of sin from a communally managed disturbance of ancestral and social harmony to a universal human condition of spiritual rebellion against God, whose definitive remedy is the atoning work of Jesus Christ. This transformation, made possible by missionary contact, Scripture translation, catechetical instruction, and sacramental practice, reconfigured moral accountability, spiritual practice, and community identity. But, as Walls observed in the missionary movement more broadly, the result was not the erasure of indigenous culture but its ongoing negotiation with the demands of the gospel. The tensions between Christian doctrine and traditional belief that persist in Jopadhola religious life today are not evidence of failure but of the living encounter between Scripture and culture that characterises authentic Christian mission in every age.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is a theological meditation on sin and guilt and repentance. And this chapter is a sustained theological reflection on sin, guilt, repentance and forgiveness, engaging the Jopadhola context in an ethical and systematic dialogue with biblical and systematic theology. The previous chapters have established that the Jopadhola thought about sin in relation to the community and that Christian missionary contact has given life to a scripturally-based understanding of sin as personal transgression against a holy God. This chapter moves beyond description to theology of what Christian doctrine confirms, qualifies or changes about the Jopadhola moral attitude and also what that Jopadhola view is able to tell us about the larger biblical witness.³⁹

The focus is critical correlation, as developed in African context theology. Instead of dismissing indigenous moral categories as theologically irrelevant or uncritically celebrating them, this chapter looks for a real theological conversation. African traditional religion is not merely a preparation for the gospel in a negative sense, John Mbiti has argued, but a genuine struggle with the deepest questions of human existence, including the question of moral failure and its correction. The Jopadhola are no exception to this pattern and their moral tradition deserves to be critically appraised as far as religious history is concerned in the world.

This theological engagement is also missiologically vital. The Church of Uganda (Anglican), and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tororo, two institutions whose missionary history in Padhola is most directly in question in this study, both have inherited practices of Christian life as the result of missionary thinking that indigenous moral categories were deficient or inert. Lamin Sanneh has shown that the translation of the gospel into vernacular languages and cultural scripts is not an accommodation that dilutes the message but the very mechanism by which it takes root and flourishes. A theology of sin and forgiveness that is true to the Jopadhola must start where the

³⁹John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 204–210.

Jopadhola themselves have always started: in the web of relationships human, ancestral, and divine within which life is lived.⁴⁰

4.2 Sin as Relational Rupture: Jopadhola and Biblical Convergences

The Jopadhola view of sin as a breach of the relationships people have to community, ancestors, and the spiritual order is a strong model for biblical theology based on John Mbiti's intuition that African moral life is built on the principle of vital force and the obligation to sustain and promote life in all its relational dimensions. The Jopadhola moral universe is very relational: one sins not only by violating some abstract rule but by breaking the living bonds that produce the integrity and prosperity of a community.⁴¹

E. B. Idowu goes on to say that African traditional ethics is theocentric at its heart, even if the divine is mediated through ancestral relationships, so that breaches of social harmony have always a sacred aspect. In the Jopadhola, wrongfulness against a neighbor is also an offence against the ancestral order that governs the community and, ultimately, against Were, the supreme God who is the root of that order.⁴² And this theocentric moral logic foreshadows the biblical claim that all sin is an attack against God at the deepest level. The prophet Isaiah says: But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (Isa. 59:2)⁴³

G. C. Berkouwer argues that the vertical dimension of sin in which the human-divine relationship crumbles: it is this vertical part of sin which is where all other relational disruption comes into play. The horizontal brokenness revealed in Genesis 4:8, when Cain kills Abel and the social consequences of sin are made manifest, is based on this vertical disorder. And for the Jopadhola who place sin in the web of communal and ancestral relationships, the biblical

⁴⁰Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009), 55–62.

⁴¹John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 108–112.

⁴²E. B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 136–140.

⁴³All biblical quotations in this chapter are taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise indicated. The use of Isaiah 59:2 as a paradigmatic text for the vertical dimension of sin has a long tradition in biblical theology; see John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 534–537.

assertion that all relational disorder is a symptom of a damaged relationship with God is both a moral intuition and a way to keep it in check, in their own mind.⁴⁴

Laurenti Magesa's analysis of sub-Saharan African moral theology demonstrates that the African insistence on sin as communal disturbance is not a deficient morality but a genuine moral anthropology that Christian theology should engage rather than dismiss. Magesa argues that the life-force framework in African moral thought is a culturally specific expression of human interconnectedness and divine order that the religious tradition has in hand. Where the Jopadhola framework needs to be supplemented is in its theological grounding: the relational order it seeks to safeguard is found not in the tradition of the ancestors, but in the person of God himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and in which humans are inherently relational.⁴⁵

Mercy Amba Oduyoye's feminist analysis of African Christian theology adds to this understanding. Oduyoye points out that African traditional moral systems, from Eastern Uganda to Ghana in particular, understand deeply the social damage that is caused by sin, how wrongdoing propagates through families, clans, and generations and diminishes the very existence of the whole community. This insight, she argues, is closer to the biblical conception of sin as a force that changes the formation of the world than the individualistic theories of Western Protestant theology would have been. The Jopadhola moral tradition is also an essential resource not only for Padhola's contextual theology but also for the church's global contextual theology.⁴⁶

4.3 The ontological dimension: Sin, defilement, and the breakdown of order.

In addition to the relational side of the problem, sin in the Jopadhola context also takes on an ontological dimension: sin, by its nature, is the defilement of people, objects, and spaces which renders them spiritually unhealthy and morally unclean. Murder, adultery, incest, and even the violation of ancestral prohibitions was considered to be polluting things (cham in the Luo moral

⁴⁴G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin*, trans. Philip C. Holtrop (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 32–36.

⁴⁵Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 162–165.

⁴⁶Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), 74–79.

sense) that spread to others and needed ritual purification before the normal life of the community could begin again.⁴⁷

This understanding of sin as defilement is directly related to the Levitical purity systems of the Old Testament, with sin producing uncleanness which needs to be addressed through ritual acts before the defiled person can return to the community's holy and social life. The psalmist's plea 'Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin... Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow' (Ps. 51:2, 7) reflects the same ontological view of sin as a condition that needs to be purified, rather than just morally decided.⁴⁸

This character is confirmed in the theology of the cross when we read the New Testament. The letter to the Hebrews describes Christ's atoning work in terms of priestly purification, 'How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!' (Heb. 9:14).

The Jopadhola intuition that sin is a real defilement whose purpose is to be cleansed, not just as a change of moral mind but as an objective purification is not mere superstition but a real moral belief that the theology of atonement ought to be concerned with. Berkouwer's dogmatic analysis of sin in its multiple dimensions (act, guilt, power, pollution) provides a lens through which the Jopadhola ontological understanding of sin can be integrated. Berkouwer contends the Protestant tradition has at times reduced sin to guilt before a juridical God, where sin is seen as a corrupting activity that distorts the whole created order. The Jopadhola tradition, with its passionate sense of sin as a defiling power that needs to be actively neutralized, harbors these neglected aspects of a fully biblical hamartiology.⁴⁹

4.4 Guilt: Collective and Individual Dimensions

The Jopadhola view of guilt as being a collective responsibility extending to the offender's family, clan, and future generations in general is a departure from the Western perspective of

⁴⁷Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 230–235.

⁴⁸Berkouwer, *Sin*, 230–234.

⁴⁹Berkouwer, *Sin*, 154–160.

moral responsibility which is so much more about the individual. A man who commits adultery does not only cause himself personal shame but also adds a pollution to the health of his fields and the good fortune of the ancestors towards him and his whole household. This corporate moral logic is a social epistemology in which people are organized in networks of relationship, not moral atoms.⁵⁰

Berkouwer's dogmatic analysis demonstrates, however, that the biblical tradition holds both poles in tension. Corporate confession is a recurring feature of Israel's penitential literature. Nehemiah prays: I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. (Neh. 1:6)⁵¹ Daniel similarly identifies himself with the collective guilt of his people: We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. (Dan. 9:5)

Yet the biblical tradition simultaneously insists on personal moral accountability. Ezekiel's polemic against the proverb 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge' (Ezek. 18:2) asserts that each person bears responsibility for their own sin. The Apostle Paul universalizes this: 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23). Wolfhart Pannenberg argues that these two dimensions corporate solidarity in sin and individual accountability—are unified in the Pauline concept of sin as a power that enslaves all humanity collectively while being personally appropriated by each. Neither pole can be dissolved into the other without distorting the biblical witness.⁵²

The Jopadhola moral tradition, with its communal understanding of guilt, thus illuminates biblical dimensions of corporate responsibility that have been under-emphasized in Western Protestant individualism. Andrew Walls has observed that African Christianity, precisely

⁵⁰Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 55–60. See also Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 42–48, which develops the social-ontological framework of African moral accountability in conversation with contemporary political theology.

⁵¹The corporate confessions of Nehemiah 1:6 and Daniel 9:5 are paradigmatic texts for the biblical theology of collective guilt. For exegetical analysis, see H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary 16 (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 164–170; and John Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary 30 (Waco: Word Books, 1989), 248–254.

⁵²Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–1998), 2:231–236.

because of its communal social structure, has been better positioned than Western Christianity to receive and embody the corporate dimensions of the gospel the church as a genuine community, the restoration of right relationship not only between individual and God but between peoples and clans. The Jopadhola understanding of guilt as communal is thus not a theological deficit but a potential gift to the global church.⁵³

At the same time, the biblical insistence on personal accountability before God qualifies the risk, present in any communal moral system, of diffusing responsibility to the point where no individual bears genuine guilt. The cross of Christ addresses each human being personally: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16). The call to repentance is directed to persons by name, as the stories of Zacchaeus (Luke 19), the woman caught in adultery (John 8), and the dying thief (Luke 23) all illustrate. A contextual Jopadhola theology of sin must hold both the communal and personal dimensions in creative tension, refusing to collapse one into the other.⁵⁴

4.5 Ancestors, Mediation, and the Question of Christ

One of the most theologically significant dimensions of the Jopadhola understanding of sin and forgiveness concerns the role of ancestors as moral guardians and mediators of restoration. In the Jopadhola worldview, the ancestors are not merely the honored dead but active participants in the moral life of the community, enforcing the ethical norms they established during their lifetimes, punishing violations through affliction and misfortune, and being appeased or invoked through sacrificial ritual. Sin, understood as the violation of ancestral norms, thus requires not only interpersonal reconciliation but propitiatory address to the ancestral realm.⁵⁵

This ancestral mediation raises a question that is both historically significant and theologically challenging: how does Christian mission engage a moral system in which the dead play an active role as enforcers of order and channels of restoration? Lamin Sanneh argues that this is precisely the kind of question that arises when the gospel is translated into a new cultural context—not a

⁵³ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 22–27.

⁵⁴ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 225–228.

⁵⁵ Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 148–152.

question that can be settled by simple substitution (replacing ancestors with Christ) but one that requires careful theological discernment about what the ancestors represent in Jopadhola moral experience and how Christ fulfills, challenges, or transcends that function.⁵⁶

Kwame Bediako's Christological reflection on ancestor veneration in African theology offers a productive framework here. Bediako argues that Christ can be understood as the supreme Ancestor—the one who embodies all that ancestors are meant to be: the guardian of life, the enforcer of moral order, the mediator of divine blessing and human need—but infinitely surpassing them by virtue of his divine nature and atoning work. This is not a capitulation to traditional religion but a legitimate contextual Christology that takes seriously the questions the ancestral framework was answering. For the Jopadhola, the message that Christ stands as the living ancestor who has entered death and overcome it, and who now mediates between the living and the God who is the source of all life, is not alien but speaks directly into the moral and spiritual architecture of their world.⁵⁷

The Letter to the Hebrews, which develops the most sustained New Testament theology of priestly mediation and atonement, provides the fullest biblical basis for a critical engagement with the Jopadhola ancestral mediator framework. The author of Hebrews argues from within the typological structure of Levitical priesthood to demonstrate that Christ's high-priestly ministry is both continuous with and decisively superior to every prior form of mediation: 'Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them' (Heb. 7:25). Unlike the Jopadhola ancestors, who mediate within the created order and whose authority is bounded by death, Christ mediates from beyond death, having himself passed through it and emerged as the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18). The apostolic witness in 1 Timothy 2:5 distils this claim into its most concise form: 'For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.' The precision of this formulation is theologically significant: the one mediator is simultaneously "the man Christ Jesus"—fully sharing human nature, including mortality—and the one whose self-giving ransom achieves what no ancestral sacrifice could accomplish. The

⁵⁶Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 107–113.

⁵⁷Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 88–92.

Jopadhola expectation of ancestral mediation is not false—it reflects a genuine human need and a genuine theological intuition—but it finds its ultimate and sufficient fulfillment not in the spirits of the departed but in the one who, as Hebrews 9:15 declares, is ‘the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.’

4.6 Repentance as Transformation and Communal Reintegration

In the Jopadhola tradition, what functions as repentance is a socially visible process: the offender acknowledges wrongdoing before elders, makes restitution, and is ritually reintegrated into the community. This public dimension of moral repair reflects the communal nature of moral identity in African societies. Repentance, in this framework, is not primarily an interior spiritual experience but a social event a rupture acknowledged, a wrong repaired, a person restored. The community witnesses and participates; the restoration is collective, not merely private.⁵⁸

Robert Schreiter's theology of reconciliation argues that this pattern acknowledgment, accountability, restitution, reintegration is in fact closer to the biblical model of repentance than the purely private, interiorized confession that dominates much Western Protestant piety. The Reformation's emphasis on the individual conscience before God, while recovering crucial biblical truths about personal accountability, tended to detach repentance from its communal context in ways that the African church has reason to resist.⁵⁹

Biblical repentance is the Greek *metanoia*, a total reorientation of mind, will, and life toward God. Peter's Pentecost sermon commands:

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. (Acts 2:38)⁶⁰

⁵⁸Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 188–193. Shorter's analysis of East African communal penitential structures is directly applicable to the Jopadhola context.

⁵⁹Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 18–23.

⁶⁰The Acts 2:38 text on repentance and baptism is exegetically treated in I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 79–82. On the communal dimensions of *metanoia* in Acts, see David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 148–154.

Paul's description of the new creation underscores the transformative scope involved: 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!' (2 Cor. 5:17). Repentance is thus not mere remorse but what Walter Brueggemann describes as a decisive reorientation toward the sovereign purposes of God a turning of the whole person toward the one who is the source and ground of all life.⁶¹

A helpful lens to understand ancestor veneration in African theology is Kwame Bediako's Christological analysis. This is not a surrender to traditional religion but a legitimate contextual Christology that takes seriously the questions the ancestral framework had been answering. For the Jopadhola, the message that Christ is the living ancestor who has gone to death and lived again and now mediates between the living and the God who is the source of life (and not just of them), is not alien but a direct reflection of the moral and spiritual structure of their world.⁶² The Letter to the Hebrews, which provides the most robust New Testament theology of priestly mediation and atonement, is the basis for critical engagement with the Jopadhola ancestral mediator model. The writer of Hebrews challenges the typology of Levitical priesthood to say that Christ's ministry, in the end, is continuous and definitively superior to all the mediations of the past: 'Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them' (Heb. 7:25). Whereas Jopadhola ancestors are in the midst of the created order and their power is limited by death, Christ mediates from outside the sphere of death, having passed through to be the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18). The apostolic witness in 1 Timothy 2:5 puts this fact in the simplest terms: 'For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all people.' The precision of this statement is crucial: the one mediator is "the man Christ Jesus" (who is perfectly human and he has mortality), and he is the one who gives the ransom, knowing that no ancestral sacrifice would be able to do. Jopadhola expectation of ancestral mediation is not false, and it is a real human need and a true theological intuition, but the real reason for this is the one who is the mediator of a new covenant which in Hebrews 9:15 is 'the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance'.

⁶¹Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 450–455.

⁶²Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 88–92.

4.6 Repentance as Transformation and Communal Reintegration

Repentance in the Jopadhola tradition is a socially visible thing: the offender is at once apologized before elders, has restitution and is brought back into the community. This public moral repair is one of the most communal aspects of moral identity in African societies. Repentance in this light is not simply an internal spiritual experience but a social one: a rupture acknowledged, a wrong corrected, a person made right. The community witnesses and participates; the restoration is collective, not merely private. Robert Schreiter's theology of reconciliation makes it clear that this pattern of acknowledgment, accountability, restitution, reintegration is closer to the biblical model of repentance than the more private, interiorized confession that most Western Protestant piety is based on. The Reformation's emphasis on the individual conscience before God, and recovering fundamental biblical truths about personal accountability, has tended to distance repentance from its communal setting in ways that the African church has reason to resist. Biblical repentance is the Greek *metanoia*, a total reorientation of mind, will and life towards God. Peter's Pentecost sermon puts it simply: Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. (Acts 2:38) Paul describes the new creation: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Cor. 5:17). Repentance is not remorse but what Walter Brueggemann describes as a decisive reorientation toward the sovereign purposes of God a turning of the whole person toward the one who is the source and ground of all life.⁶³

The communal and public dimension of repentance affirmed in the Jopadhola tradition finds explicit expression in the New Testament epistle of James: 'Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed' (Jas. 5:16). This verse, frequently marginalized in Protestant practice, reflects the Jopadhola intuition that genuine moral repair has a communal face. Healing from the wounds of sin requires not only divine forgiveness but human witness, accountability, and restoration. Aylward Shorter further argues that the African church's inheritance of public penitential practices from traditional religion may in fact equip it

⁶³Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 450–455.

to recover aspects of early Christian reconciliation practice including communal confession, penitential liturgy, and the ministry of reconciliation that have been lost in the West.⁶⁴

It is important, however, to note the limit of this convergence. Biblical *metanoia* is not merely social repair but a transformation of the inner person by the Spirit of God. The prophet Ezekiel's vision of restoration 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh' (Ezek. 36:26) and the Pauline theology of the Spirit as the agent of moral transformation (Gal. 5:16–25) together insist that true repentance involves a renewal that no human community or ancestral ritual can affect. The Jopadhola cycle of communal reintegration is a genuine analogue to biblical repentance but not its equivalent; only the Spirit of the risen Christ can bring about the interior transformation that the gospel requires and promises.⁶⁵

4.7 Forgiveness as Restoration: Towards a Jopadhola-Informed Soteriology

The most theologically generative contribution of the Jopadhola tradition concerns the nature of forgiveness. In the Jopadhola moral framework, forgiveness is not a discrete juridical act the cancellation of a debt recorded in a divine ledger but a process of relational restoration and communal reintegration. In the Jopadhola moral framework, forgiveness is not a discrete juridical act the cancellation of a debt recorded in a divine ledger but a process of relational restoration and communal reintegration. The goal is not merely that the offender be declared innocent but that the broken fabric of community life be repaired and the offender be reincorporated into the network of relationships from which sin had excluded him or her. Aylward Shorter argues that this restorative logic is, in fact, more consonant with the biblical vision of *shalom* than the predominantly forensic models that have dominated Western atonement theology.⁶⁶

The Hebrew concept of *shalom* peace, wholeness, and flourishing captures the goal of the divine redemptive project far more holistically than any single juridical metaphor. Sin is the disruption

⁶⁴Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 198–204.

⁶⁵Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 455–460.

⁶⁶Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 203–208. On the *shalom* framework as a corrective to purely forensic models, see also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 302–308.

of *shalom*: the fracture of right relationships between humanity and God, among human beings, and between humanity and the created order. Forgiveness, in the fullest biblical sense, is the restoration of shalom an effort that includes the individual conscience, the community and ultimately the whole universe.

Pauline theology of reconciliation is in line with that reading. Paul writes: "God was reconciling us to himself through Christ and giving us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them." God's saving action is not just the disappearance of a legal record but the restoration of *koinonia* (communion). Colossians 1:20 expands the scope to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Paul's vision of cosmic reconciliation resonates with the Jopadhola perspective that sin breaks down an order that is rooted in the ancestral realm and the entire community of the living and dead. Forgiveness is an honest acknowledgment of wrongdoing in both the Jopadhola tradition and in the biblical witness.⁶⁷

The Psalmist writes, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long... Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity" (Ps. 32:3, 5). Zacchaeus (Luke 19:8), where the restoration is an actual restitution, is similar to the Jopadhola belief that forgiveness is only possible if it is accompanied by material repair of the damage done. Grace does not end the moral obligation to do right what has been done; it helps and makes it possible.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye's look at forgiveness in African Christianity brings us to a new front: the community as an agent of forgiveness, not only a witness. In traditional African practice forgiveness is done communally: the elders, family members and ritualists are all involved in the process of restoration. This communal agency of forgiveness, Oduyoye argues, is a gift to the church which has often reduced forgiveness to a transaction between the individual and God mediated by the priest or pastor. The Jopadhola tradition demands that the church become what it

⁶⁷Schreiter, *Reconciliation*, 43–47.

is always meant to be: a community in which forgiveness is a reality and is lived out and made public.⁶⁸

4.8 Justice and Mercy: The Christological Resolution

The relationship between justice and forgiveness is a theological issue that the Jopadhola tradition and Christian theology must deal with. In the Jopadhola moral framework, forgiveness is not possible without some form of restitution: the offender must acknowledge the wrong, apologize and undergo ritual purification. Forgiveness that does not seek justice that allows the wrong to be done without any consideration of what it means for the community is not restoration but a dangerous moral evasion that leaves the community to suffer further and ancestral anger.⁶⁹

That's what the Bible says. Micah 6:8 places justice and mercy alongside each other as twin demands of the covenant God: 'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.' The Psalms also affirm the justice of God as the bedrock of all moral order (Ps. 97:2). Forgiveness which ignores justice is not the mercy of the biblical God but a moral sentimentality that fails both the offender and the victim.⁷⁰

The cross of Christ is where this tension comes to a head with a definitive resolution. Paul says in Romans 3:25–26 that God gave Christ a propitiation, a sacrifice of atonement to demonstrate his righteousness; 'in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.' God does not leave justice aside when he forgives; he does it. The moral debt for human sin is not just cancelled but is absorbed in the body of the Son so that those who are united to him by faith are genuinely and fully acquitted.

Kwame Bediako says that the cross speaks with particular power in African settings because it addresses the question of how guilty people can recover to a community not by ignoring the wrong but by bearing its consequences. The sacrificial logic of the Jopadhola purification ritual

⁶⁸Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 88–93.

⁶⁹Magesa, *African Religion*, 55–60.

⁷⁰Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 465–470.

that an animal is sacrificed to get rid of the moral and spiritual pollution of sin is not replaced by the cross so much as it is fulfilled and transcended; it is the ultimate sacrifice the one that actually takes away sin, not just ritually displacing it, but that's given once for all rather than requiring repeated enactment. The theology of the cross also addresses the victim's point of view and that's what the Jopadhola tradition does through compensation. The cross does not just clear the offender; it vindicates the one who has been wronged. Romans 12:19 calls to forgiveness in the confidence that divine justice will ultimately address every wrong. Robert Schreiter's theology of reconciliation argues that genuine forgiveness is only possible when victims are assured that their suffering has been acknowledged and that justice will be served.⁷¹

4.9 Forgiveness in the Community: Liturgical and Pastoral Implications

The theological analysis conducted in this chapter has significant implications for liturgical practice and pastoral ministry in the Jopadhola context. If forgiveness is, as both the Jopadhola tradition and the biblical witness affirm, an inherently communal and restorative event rather than merely a private transaction, then the church's liturgical and pastoral practices must embody this communal character. Pannenberg argues that the church, as the eschatological community of the new creation, is called to be a visible sign and instrument of the reconciliation that God has accomplished in Christ not merely to announce it but to enact it.⁷²

The development of contextually appropriate liturgies of confession, reconciliation, and restoration drawing on both biblical tradition and Jopadhola communal practices is therefore not a concession to syncretism but a missiological imperative. Andrew Walls' observation that the gospel must be clothed in the cultural forms of each people in order to be received and embodied by them applies directly here: the church in Padhola must find forms of penitential practice that resonate with Jopadhola moral experience while remaining grounded in the biblical narrative of sin, atonement, and new creation.⁷³

⁷¹Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 55–60. The victim-centred dimension of reconciliation theology has been developed more recently in Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, revised and updated ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019), 120–131, and in Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2008), 88–97, which applies these insights to the African context.

⁷²Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:258–264.

⁷³Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 55–60.

In practice, this suggests that the African church in Padhola might create communal confession and reconciliation procedures that involve elders, family members, and the gathered congregation in acknowledgment, restitution, and rebuilding, for which the New Testament itself praises (Jas. 5:16; Matt. 18:15–17) and that the early church practiced in penitential discipline. And such practices would not replace private confession before God but would complement and bring it to life, giving social and communal expression to the interior transformation the gospel makes.⁷⁴

4.10 Eschatological Horizon

Forgiveness in the present is a foretaste of an ultimate restoration still to come. Berkouwer's eschatological perspective on sin and forgiveness insists that while forgiveness is real and complete in Christ 'There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:1) the full experience of its effects awaits the consummation of all things. The believer lives in the tension between the 'already' of forgiveness received and the 'not yet' of full restoration anticipated.⁷⁵

Jürgen Moltmann argues that Christian eschatology envisions not merely the survival of individuals but the renewal of creation: 'the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come' encompasses the entire relational and social order that sin has disrupted. The scope of eschatological restoration is cosmic: Revelation 21:3–4 promises not merely personal salvation but the dwelling of God with his people in a new creation from which all the consequences of sin mourning, crying, pain, death are permanently banished.⁷⁶

The eschatological vision resonates strongly with the Jopadhola feeling that there is not yet complete harmony between people of the living, dead and the spiritual order. The traditional practices of ancestral propitiation and communal reconciliation are a human path back to a wholeness that is slipping away. The Christian gospel affirms this desire as real and its purpose

⁷⁴Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 240–246.

⁷⁵Berkouwer, *Sin*, 498–506.

⁷⁶Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 257–263.

as real, and the way to achieve it is not in human ritual but in the risen Christ who always lives to intercede for his people (Heb. 7:25) and who will meet them at their end time.⁷⁷

Colossians 1:22 proclaims believers 'seen... holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation' a complete restoration of the right standing before God that sin destroyed. For the Jopadhola Christian, the eschatological hope is that the harmony their traditional worldview always had but were unable to achieve through ancestral mediation or communal ritual will finally materialize in the new creation when God will be 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28) and every broken relationship with sin will be healed.

4.11 Conclusion

The theological discussion in this chapter shows that there are significant similarities and divergent views of the Jopadhola moral tradition and Christian theology. The Jopadhola view of sin as relational rupture, guilt as communal, sin as defilement that needs to be purified by ancestors, forgiveness as a public act of restoration and not a form of justice as is often the case throughout Western theology. The Jopadhola tradition is not a preparation for the gospel in a purely negative sense; it is a genuine moral and theological tradition that the African church ought to listen to and consider when it is theological in nature.

Meanwhile, the Christian gospel deepens, completes, and in some ways corrects the Jopadhola moral vision. It is the relational order that is not rooted in ancestral tradition but is rooted in the character of the triune God. It identifies the ultimate resolution of sin's defilement, guilt and power in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It opens the door of forgiveness and restoration not only to clans themselves but to all beings and in particular to creation. And it points to an eschatological new creation in which the harmony that the Jopadhola have always sought will finally be realized and irrevocably achieved. A contextual theology of sin and forgiveness that incorporates both the biblical witness and the Jopadhola tradition will be better able to propagate the gospel in communities where the Jopadhola church ministers with integrity, cultural depth, and pastoral power.

⁷⁷Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 270–275.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we summarize, conclude and make recommendations from the above study on sin and forgiveness in the Jopadhola of eastern Uganda, and conclude what we have seen in the previous two chapters, give conclusions to which we have come to conclusions, and make recommendations for the church, theological educators, scholars and Christian witnesses to the Jopadhola. I have been driven by my conviction that a theological discourse with regard to the Jopadhola moral tradition is not a sideline study but, in fullness of heart and soul, a matter of the church and missiological necessity. What I have learned from this study is that the struggle between the gospel and cultures of Africa is not one-way travel in which Western theological concepts are translated into African idioms; it is a generative theological process in which the Christian tradition is developed, challenged and deepened.

5.2.2 Summary of the Study.

5.2.1 Summary of Jopadhola worldview and Biblical vision of harmony, guilt and community restoration.

The first and most foundational insight of this study is that the Jopadhola worldview has a strong structural connection with the biblical vision of created harmony, the nature and consequences of moral disorder and the nature of restoration. The more I engaged with the Jopadhola moral approach, the more it was clear to me that its conception of the moral world as a network of relationships: the living to one another, the ancestors to the family and were, the Supreme God, is in line with the relational ontology of the biblical history from creation to new creation. Sin in both frameworks is a break of right relationship: what Jopadhola means as *bal* and what the Old Testament means by *pesha* and *avon* and *hatta't* and all these words together, are about the destruction of the bond of relationship that human beings were made to.

I was equally struck by the communal nature of guilt and restoration in the Jopadhola tradition. In this tradition guilt is not only the private burden of the individual transgressor but also a defilement that takes place in the household, the clan and ultimately the community as a whole. When I read the corporate confessions of Nehemiah and Daniel, great figures of faith who identify themselves with the sin of their entire people, I found the same moral logic. This led me to question how deeply the individualism of Western theological formation influenced my previous understanding of sin and forgiveness and how much depth I had been missing. The intersection I found in restoration was perhaps theologically exciting part of the study.

In the Jopadhola lens, forgiveness is not the suspension of moral consequences, but their transformative resolution: the wrongdoer must pay restitution, the community must reintegrate the offender and public healing must take place before harmony can be declared restored. As I traced this logic through Paul's theology of reconciliation and Johannine's view of life as participation in the trinitarian communion, I came to the conclusion that the Jopadhola tradition had been quietly preserving aspects of the gospel that the Western church had allowed to fall into neglect.

5.2.2 Summary of the traditional practices as theological language for sin and forgiveness.

A second important insight from this research is that the traditional practices of the Jopadhola kwer (cleansing), sacrificial restitution, communal confession before elders, and the reintegration ceremonies that return the offender to full standing are indeed a set of legitimate theological language for sin and forgiveness. This was not immediately apparent to me when I started this study. I had to break up the idea that theology is textual and propositional before I could see these practices with their own theological weight. But when I did, they were so rich. The Jopadhola practice of sacrificial slaughter at the point of moral rupture, for instance, already articulates the theological idea that the restoration of the relationship between the offending party and the offended (human or divine) requires an offer; an all-out sacrifice of self-giving. On this view, when I read the Letter to the Hebrews, I discovered that Christ's high-priestly self-offering can be seen as fulfilling and surpassing all of the past kinds of sacrificial mediation.

The Jopadhola sacrificial imagination was not something to be resisted by the cross but a door. Indeed, the Jopadhola public confession before a communal gathering of elders was my way with which I was able to hear this biblical call for forgiveness, even in experience and community, to work its way through and complete the restoration. I was reading James 5:16 and Matthew 18:15–20 for the first time in a long time, and I could see what the Jopadhola people had been doing for generations, and it was very much part of their internal system of moral accountability. I came away from this part of the study with a deep respect for the theological wisdom embedded in these traditions and the conviction that the church has much to learn from them.

5.2.3 Summary of the Christian teaching as affirmation and challenge.

The relationship between Jopadhola moral tradition and Christian teaching, as I have learned through this study, is not one of constant continuity or straightforward rupture. It is critical and transformative dialogue, and I have found that keeping both sides of that dialogue together is one of the most challenging and rewarding things in this research. On the side of affirmation, I've been touched by how much the Christian gospel confirms and deepens what the Jopadhola tradition already knows: that sin is relational, guilt is communal, forgiveness is a real cost, and restoration must be visible and social. I have also been deeply moved by the Jopadhola belief that ancestors matter that the dead have not departed and they are still here to claim people that were killed and now are living.

When I thought about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as Lord of the living and the dead, I felt I was not imposing any new category on the tradition but fulfilling a longing that it had always held. In the world of challenge, though, I have had to contend with the fact that the Jopadhola tradition, like all human moral traditions, is not fully fulfilling the gospel. A belief that moral harmony is only possible through human ritual work, the restriction of moral community to the clan and ethnic group, the this-worldly horizon of moral aspiration - these are real limitations of Christian theology that we can never take for granted, yet that it makes it possible to name in our tradition. I am trying to keep affirmation and challenge as much as possible and I know that this is still a work in progress.

5.3 Conclusions of the study.

First, I think that a contextually African theology for Jopadhola has to be Christ-centred and culturally grounded. It is not sufficient for the church in Padhola to take the cultural values of Jopadhola in general and to keep the theological content of its proclamation unchanged; nor is it sufficient to insist on doctrinal orthodoxy without caring about the cultural context in which that orthodoxy has to be received and carried out.

I have come to believe through this study that the method of critical correlation - engaging the Jopadhola tradition in a serious and intellectual way and subjecting it to the normative judgment of the biblical witness - is not in any way a methodological compromise but a theological necessity. It is the logic of incarnation itself and theology which does not follow that logic into the particularity of Jopadhola culture is not yet incarnational theology.

Second, I believe forgiveness as it is rooted in the Jopadhola tradition and the Biblical witness is interrelated and restorative, not just legal or transactional. The dominant Western missionary perception of sin in terms of guilt before a holy judge and forgiveness as its judicial cancellation is based on truth and is in fact an oversimplification of the New Testament's far richer and more pluriform soteriology.

Paul's theology of reconciliation, Johannine theology of mutual indwelling and the Letter to the Hebrews' theology of priestly cleansing and access to God all speak to dimensions of atonement that are much more intimately tied to Jopadhola moral experience than the forensic metaphor. A gospel well-suited for the Jopadhola context will need to be written in the full canonical breadth of the New Testament witness. Third, I believe that the church, the Church of Uganda (Anglican) and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tororo in Padhola, is to be an arena of genuine healing, theological dialogue and incarnational mission.

The church should resist two opposite temptations: the temptation to domesticate the gospel by swallowing uncritically whatever the culture offers and the temptation to alienate the gospel by not engaging with the culture itself. And it is in this space between these two temptations -- the space of critical, prayerful, scripturally accountable dialogue -- that authentic African Christian theology is formed. The church in Padhola has the cultural resources, the theological tradition and the pastoral capacity to model what such dialogue feels like in practice, and I hope this study will make a little difference towards that.

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 Recommendation to Church of Uganda

The Church in Padhola must develop liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral practices for sin and reconciliation which align with Jopadhola moral thought. Many concrete directions are to be taken.

. Communal confession and reconciliation in both Anglican and Catholic liturgical traditions should be enhanced with communal dimensions that are consistent with Jopadhola practice. Public acts of communal repentance and forgiveness as in the corporate confessions of Nehemiah 1 and Daniel 9, in a way that is recognisable to Jopadhola theology and culture, will be incorporated into the regular liturgical life of the congregation in Padhola.

- Catechists and pastoral leaders should be able to articulate clearly the points of convergence between the Jopadhola tradition and Christian teaching and at what points in time the gospel takes a decisive deepening and correction.
- The church should create cultural models of pastoral care on guilt, shame, and ancestral retribution as pastoral realities that are prevalent in the Jopadhola community but that Western

models of Christian counseling often fail to address. The church as a community of ‘new creation’ practice gives us a platform to consider this pastoral ministry as a communal witness to the reconciling power of the gospel.

5.4.2 Recommendation to Theological Education

Those in charge of the formation of church leaders in the Padhola region should ensure that theological education is truly oriented towards the African context and not merely in the reproduction of Western theological categories.

- The curriculum of diocesan training colleges and Bible schools that were established and run for the Jopadhola community should include a deep engagement with African theology and the theology of inculturation, drawing on the canonical works of Mbiti, Bediako, Oduyoye, Sanneh, Magesa, and Shorter.
- Leadership training in pastoral theology should involve the critical correlation and theological ethnography of the people in the community in order to engage the reality.
- Theological education institutions in Uganda should be encouraged to engage with documenting and theological analysis of Jopadhola and other Nilotic moral traditions and contribute toward the growing research on East African contextual theology. The Handbook of Theological Education in Africa (Phiri and Werner, 2013) provides a good pedagogy for this kind of contextually relevant theological learning.

5.4.3 Recommendations to Theologians and Scholars

This study has raised more questions than it has answered, and there are some potential areas for future research.

- Further research is needed into the African theological anthropology of the Jopadhola, particularly the understanding of the human person as a moral and spiritual being embedded in networks of relationships that extend across the boundary of death. Such research would benefit from sustained engagement with the methods of theological ethnography.
- The experience of women within the Jopadhola moral tradition, particularly the different ways in which the categories of sin, pollution, and restoration are applied to women and men, represents a significant gap in the existing literature. The feminist African theology of Mercy

Amba Oduyoye and the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians offers both a methodological model and a critical conversation partner for this work.

- The moral experience of young people in Padhola, who navigate a complex space between traditional Jopadhola moral frameworks and the disrupting influences of modernity, urban migration, and digital culture, requires dedicated theological attention. Research into how the gospel of sin and forgiveness is received, appropriated, or resisted by Jopadhola youth would make a significant contribution to the practical theology of the church in eastern Uganda.
- Comparative studies examining the hamartiology and soteriology of neighbouring Nilotic peoples, the Langi, Acholi, and Alur, in relation to the Jopadhola findings of this study would illuminate both the distinctive features of the Jopadhola tradition and the broader patterns of Nilotic moral theology, contributing to the larger project of an East African contextual theology.

5.4.4 Recommendations to the Christian Witness

Those engaging in Christian witness among the Jopadhola, whether as ordained ministers, evangelists, lay leaders, or Christian professionals in community settings, are urged to embrace an approach to mission that is both faithful to the gospel and genuinely attentive to the culture.

- Christian witnesses should cultivate habits of humble, sustained listening to the moral and spiritual world of the Jopadhola, resisting the temptation to begin with pre-packaged answers before they have understood the questions the culture is genuinely asking. Every cultural translation of the gospel both enriches and is enriched by the encounter, and this conviction should serve as a standing orientation for all who engage in Christian witness in Padhola.
- Christian witnesses should be equipped to engage explicitly with the tradition of ancestral veneration, neither dismissing it as superstition nor accommodating it without theological critique, but presenting Christ as the one who fulfills, surpasses, and renders unnecessary every other form of ancestral mediation. The ancestor Christology developed by Bediako and others offers a framework for this engagement that is both theologically rigorous and culturally intelligible. The church in Padhola is called to embody, not merely announce, the reconciliation that the gospel proclaims. This means that congregations must themselves be visible communities of restored relationships, places where the broken are healed, the guilty are forgiven and reintegrated, the excluded are welcomed, and the cycle of shame and rejection that

sin perpetuates is interrupted by the grace of God made concrete in community life. A church that preaches the gospel of reconciliation while itself manifesting unresolved conflict, ethnic division, or social exclusion will lack the embodied authority to speak the word it is called to proclaim.

5.5 Conclusion

As I approach the end of this course, I am more convinced than ever that the encounter between the Christian gospel and the Jopadhola moral tradition is not a theological encounter with cultural noise but a theological encounter with both traditions in productive and mutually illuminating relationship. The Jopadhola people have been grappling for generations with the same questions that the gospel is also struggling to answer: what went wrong with human community, how can moral rupture be repaired, and what does restoration look like beyond the social? And the answers they are giving in terms of how communal guilt, ancestral responsibility, sacrifice, and restorative reintegration can be captured in the social order of the world are not gospel. But they are part of the prior development of the moral imagination that makes certain aspects of the Christian message instantly identifiable and profoundly resonant when they are said. And that is what this study has taught me is that enrichment is a journey of enrichment. When the Jopadhola tradition is subjected to the lens of critical theological analysis, it is as much about the gospel as it is about the global Christian tradition to recover the parts of its own canonical witness that the Western world has marginalized.

The communal culture of guilt and forgiveness, the restorative rather than purely punitive logic of divine justice, the cosmic dimension of reconciliation, and the unshakeable role of the human community in mediating and giving forgiveness that God alone grants are not inventions of African theology but recoveries of the whole biblical witness. I know the Jopadhola tradition has helped me see them more clearly. The Padhola church in Padhola in the Church of Uganda and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tororo is at a crossroads. It owes much to a history of Christian proclamation that has already changed the moral imagination of the Jopadhola people in profound ways. It also inherits the unfinished task of inculturation: the work of sewing the unchanging gospel into a form that speaks with full authority and credibility into the moral and spiritual world of the people it serves. My hope and prayer are that this study may contribute, even modestly, to that ongoing work that the church in Padhola may become a community where

the ancient Jopadhola longing for wholeness among the living, the dead, and the divine is met, transformed, and ultimately fulfilled by the one who says ‘Behold, I am making all things new’ (Rev. 21:5).

References

- Augustine. (2006). *The city of God*. Penguin Classics.
- Barrett, D. B. (1968). *Schism and renewal in Africa*. Oxford University Press.
- Bediako, K. (1992). *Theology and identity: The impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and in modern Africa*. Regnum Books.
- Bediako, K. (1995). *Christianity in Africa: The renewal of a non-Western religion*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Bediako, K. (2004). *Jesus and the gospel in Africa: History and experience*. Orbis Books.
- Berkouwer, G. C. (1971). *Sin*. Eerdmans.
- Bevans, S. B. (2016). *Models of contextual theology* (Rev. ed.). Orbis Books.
- Branch, A. (2017). *Displacing human rights: War and intervention in Northern Uganda*. Oxford University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. SAGE Publications.
- Brueggemann, W. (2018). *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, dispute, advocacy* (2nd ed.). Fortress Press.
- Bujo, B. (2017). *African theology in its social context*. Orbis Books.
- Bujo, B., & Muya, J. I. (Eds.). (2003). *African theology in the 21st century: The contribution of the pioneers* (Vol. 1). Paulines Publications Africa.
- Calvin, J. (1960). *Institutes of the Christian religion* (J. T. McNeill, Ed.; F. L. Battles, Trans.). Westminster Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Doyle, S. (2020). *Before HIV: Sexuality, fertility and mortality in East Africa*. Oxford University Press.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4.

- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1956). *Nuer religion*. Clarendon Press.
- Fetterman, D. M. (2019). *Ethnography: Step-by-step* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Flick, U. (2020). *Introducing research methodology: A beginner's guide to doing a research project* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Gifford, P. (2016). *Christianity, development and modernity in Africa*. Hurst & Company.
- Goldingay, J. (1989). *Daniel*. Word Books.
- Goldingay, J. (2020). *Old Testament theology: Israel's gospel*. IVP Academic.
- Green, J. B., & McKnight, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (2nd ed.). IVP Academic.
- Grenz, S. J., & Olson, R. E. (2019). *20th-century theology: God and the world in a transitional age*. IVP Academic.
- Grudem, W. (2020). *Systematic theology: An introduction to biblical doctrine* (2nd ed.). Zondervan Academic.
- Gyekye, K. (2019). *African cultural values: An introduction*. Sankofa Publishing.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2019). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Horton, M. (2018). *The Christian faith: A systematic theology for pilgrims on the way*. Zondervan Academic.
- Idowu, E. B. (1973). *African traditional religion: A definition*. SCM Press.
- Israel, M., & Hay, I. (2006). *Research ethics for social scientists*. SAGE Publications.
- Kärkkäinen, V.-M. (2013). *Christ and reconciliation: A constructive Christian theology for the pluralistic world* (Vol. 1). Eerdmans.
- Katongole, E. (2011). *The sacrifice of Africa: A political theology for Africa*. Eerdmans.
- Katongole, E., & Rice, C. (2008). *Reconciling all things: A Christian vision for justice, peace and healing*. IVP Books.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.