

**A CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS REVISIONISM IN  
UGANDA: A CASE OF THE FAITH OF UNITY RELIGION IN BUNYORO  
SUB-REGION**

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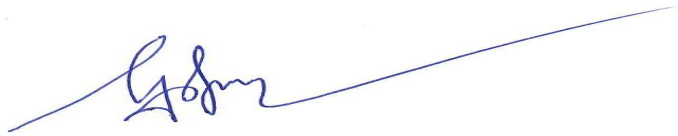


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**DECLARATION**

I affirm that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other university or educational institution.



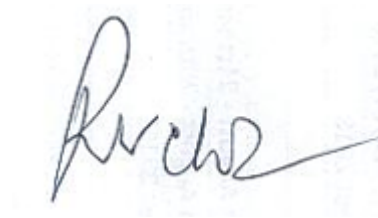
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## **SUPERVISORS' APPROVAL**

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my beloved parents, the late Sedulaka and the late Faibi; my wife, Joseline; our children, Grace, Elisha, Deborah, Wise, Dorcus, and Fortunate; as well as all those who have helped shape my academic and spiritual life.

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

Apologetics:	The study of how to give a reason for hope that is in us by providing a proof, defense or offense.
Epistemology:	The theory of knowledge
Ethics:	Theory of behavior
Metaphysics:	Theory of being, with a view of world & basic realities of life.
Presupposition:	A belief that governs other beliefs.
Revisionism:	It is a shift that involves a significant departure from an authoritative or generally accepted doctrine, theory or practice.
ACOU	Anglican Church of Uganda
AICS	African Initiated Churches
ATR	African traditional religion
COU	Church of Uganda
CA	Christian Apologetics
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
FOU	Faith of Unity
FOUR	Faith of Unity religion
H/QTRS	Headquarters
HSM	Holy Spirit Movement
Matt	Matthew
MRTCG	Movement of the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRM	New Religious Movement
NT	New Testament
OI	Oral Information
O.R.O.B	Omukama Ruhanga Owobusobozi Bisaka
OT	Old Testament
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
SOAG	Society of One Almighty God
REC	Research Ethic Committee
RR	Religious Revisionism
SDA	Seventh Day Adventists
WR	World Religions
TAG	Transcendental argument for the existence of God
UNCST	Uganda National Council of Science and Technology
XN	Christian

## **Abstract**

The thesis examines a Christian apologetic response to religious revisionism in Uganda: a case of the Faith of Unity Religion in Bunyoro sub-region. Religious revisionism involves reinterpreting or redefining established doctrines and poses a significant and growing challenge to orthodox Christianity worldwide, especially evident in Uganda's lively and diverse religious scene. This thesis highlights a critical gap in region-specific Christian apologetic responses to such revisionism, focusing on the rapidly expanding Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR) in the Bunyoro Sub-region, a movement whose founder claims divinity. While the Church of Uganda (COU) has traditionally used presuppositional apologetics to counter theological errors, its continued effectiveness against new religions like FOUR, which deny core Christian essentials such as biblical authority, the deity of Christ, and the Trinity, needs reevaluation. The rise of such groups calls for a more straightforward and evidence-based approach. The main goal of this study was to explore how Christian apologetics can serve as an effective response to religious revisionism in Uganda, with a focus on FOUR. To do this, the research examined the widespread religious revisionism throughout Uganda, thoroughly analyzed FOUR's unique doctrines and practices, and studied their specific disruptive impact on COU ministry within the Diocese of Bunyoro Kitara. Using a qualitative theological-critical method, the study investigated FOUR's core revisionist claims by examining its foundational doctrines and comparing them to orthodox Christian theology and Scripture. Based on Evidential Apologetics and using Edward John Carnell's truth-verification standards, the research builds a strong, context-sensitive Christian response. The findings detail FOUR's significant deviations from traditional Christian beliefs, identifying key areas like Christology, Bibliology, and the nature of God, and showing how they disturb local Christian communities. The study shows that a carefully developed evidentialist apologetic, which utilizes historical, logical, and experiential arguments, can effectively counter these revisionist claims. This research offers a practical, contextually tailored framework for engaging with new religions in an African setting, providing valuable, actionable insights for the COU's pastoral and evangelistic efforts, and enriching the broader scholarly discussion on religious change and Christian apologetics in modern Africa.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **GENERAL BACKGROUND**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis examines the Christian apologetic response to religious revisionism (RR) in Uganda, with a specific focus on the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR) located in the Bunyoro sub-region. Revisionism, according to Rick Kruis (2019), involves advocating for the revision of political theory, religious doctrine, or historical interpretation. Eileen Barker (2013) characterizes revisionism as departing from an authoritative or generally accepted doctrine, theory, or practice. Revisionism encompasses the reevaluation or reinterpretation of historical events, ideologies, or philosophies, with supporters arguing for its promotion of critical thinking and deeper understanding. At the same time, critics may see it as potentially distorting or manipulating the past for political or ideological ends. The term is used without implying any specific value judgment in this context.

#### **1.2 Background of the Study**

The phenomenon of revisionism is pervasive across all major world religions, characterized by a development of initially definitive beliefs and interpretations, but what is regarded as truth and/or their interpretation regularly becomes revised, adjusted, and/or selectively modified over time (Baker, 2013). According to Hammer, Olav, and Rothstein (2012), this process involves the incorporation, reuse, and reinterpretation of existing religious and cultural elements within religious frameworks. Christianity, a prominent global faith, exemplifies this trend, having undergone numerous revisions since its inception.

Within the Christian faith, the phenomenon of religious revisionism (RR), defined by Rick Kruis as 'the advocacy for revision of religious doctrine' (Kruis, 2019), has appeared throughout history. The early Christian church, emerging from its Jewish roots within the Roman Empire, is often compared to a single trunk that, after about a thousand years, split into the Eastern and Western

churches. This analogy is common in Reformed traditions, such as the Christian Reformed Church. Later, the Protestant Reformation of 1517 marked an important moment of RR, causing the Western church to break into different branches, including Lutheran, Reformed (Zwinglian and Calvinist), and Presbyterian denominations (Kruis, 2019; Cox, 2018; Bromberg, 2000).

Martin Luther (1483-1546), a crucial figure in this period of RR, challenged prevailing Catholic doctrines significantly. Abandoning his father's legal goals, Luther became an Augustinian friar, theologian, and reformer (Evans, 2012). Two main theological changes led by Luther were the doctrine of *sola fide* (justification by faith alone) and *sola scriptura* (scripture alone). *Sola fide* countered the Catholic focus on good works and sacramental participation for salvation, stating that salvation is only a gift of God's grace, received through faith in Jesus Christ (Althaus, 1966). *Sola scriptura* opposed the authority of papal statements and church tradition, supporting the Bible as the only infallible source of religious authority (Bagchi & Steinmetz, 2004). These changes formed the theological base for Lutheranism and deeply influenced later Protestant movements.

The revisionist approach to religion, exemplified by Martin Luther's influence on Christian teaching, brought about significant change. Luther challenged many doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), especially questioning the idea of indulgences, which Henry Wace called the foundational principles of the Reformation (Wace, 1883). The RCC taught that indulgences were a remission of temporal punishment for sins already forgiven, granted by the Church through its treasury of merits, often in exchange for acts of piety or financial donations. Luther, however, saw this practice as corrupt, arguing that it undermined true repentance and God's grace. In his Ninety-five Theses of 1517, Luther engaged in an academic debate on the nature and

effectiveness of indulgences, calling for doctrinal change (Wace, 1883). Despite the RCC's refusal to listen to his warnings and their demand that he retracts his works, Luther stayed firm. His decision not to recant his writings, both to Pope Leo X in 1520 and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in 1521, led to his excommunication by the Pope and condemnation by the emperor (Wace, 1883). However, Luther never aimed to create a split within the Church; he wanted reform based on scripture and logical reasoning. At the Diet of Worms, when asked to take back his teachings, Luther famously declared his conscience was bound to the Word of God, stating, "Here I stand, I can do no other" (Evans, 2012).

Religious revisionism in Africa, exemplified by Kimbanguism, arises from the dynamic interaction between Christianity and African Traditional Religions (ATR). This interaction, along with the established presence of Islam, has led to a complex and often contested religious landscape (Aderibigbe, 2015). The introduction of Christianity into African contexts frequently resulted in a process of syncretism, where elements of ATR blended into Christian practice. However, this process also created significant tensions, leading to the condemnation of certain traditional beliefs and practices, such as sorcery, witchcraft, initiation rites, and the traditional roles of ancestors and diviners, within a Christian framework (Okeke et al., 2017; Mbiti, 1969; Mbiti, 1975; Idowu, 1962). This clash of worldviews provided fertile ground for the rise of new religious movements, notably Kimbanguism in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which offers a compelling example of religious revisionism.

Kimbanguism, founded by Simon Kimbangu in the early 20th century, diverged from mainstream Christian teachings in several important ways. First, Kimbanguism emphasized divine healing and prophetic ministry, heavily drawing from African notions of spiritual causality and the role of a

charismatic leader as an intermediary between the divine and the human. This contrasted with the more structured and sacramental approach of established Christian churches, which often dismissed or condemned such practices as 'superstitious' (Andersson, 1999). Second, Kimbanguism developed a unique eschatology that incorporated elements of African cosmology and ancestor veneration. While acknowledging the Christian idea of a single God, it also emphasized the importance of ancestors as spiritual mediators—reconfiguring the Christian understanding of the communion of saints and the afterlife (MacGaffey, 1991). Third, Kimbanguism revised Christian ritual practices, adapting them to fit African cultural norms. For example, the movement created its own distinct forms of worship, including music, dance, and symbolic gestures that resonated with African cultural expressions, rather than strictly following European liturgical traditions (Martin, 1975). These changes, while based on Christian scriptures, were largely shaped by the African context, marking a significant departure from orthodox Christian doctrine and practice. This is not just a superficial adaptation but a fundamental theological reinterpretation, demonstrating the dynamic and transformative nature of religious revisionism in Africa.

The "Church of Jesus Christ on Earth Through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu" offers a strong example of religious reinterpretation within African Christianity, especially through its new understandings of core Christian teachings, including the Trinity, sacraments, and scripture. Concerning the doctrine of the Triune God, Kimbanguism differs greatly from the traditional Christian view. Instead of one God in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), Kimbanguism identifies Papa Simon Kimbangu as the Holy Spirit, Papa Kisolokele Lukelo as God the Father, and Papa Dialungana Kiangana as a modern reincarnation of Jesus Christ (Balz, 2009; Kayongo, 2017). This redefinition fundamentally changes the traditional Christian idea of God. Kimbangu is given roles and titles usually linked to the Holy Spirit, and Kimbanguist prayers reflect this new "trinity"

(Kayongo, 2005). Additionally, the celebration of Christ's birth in Nkamba in 1916 under the name Salomon Dialungana Kiangani further sets the Kimbanguist story apart from traditional Christian accounts (Kayongo, 2005).

Kimbanguism also introduces revisions in its understanding and practice of sacraments. The church recognizes four sacraments: Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage, and Ordination (Kimbangu Church, 2021), with notable changes especially in baptism. Traditionally, Christian baptism is viewed as a symbolic act of initiation into the Christian community, representing the believer's union with Christ's death and resurrection, and the washing away of original sin. It is usually performed through immersion or sprinkling, symbolizing cleansing and rebirth (Romans 6:3-4). In contrast, Kimbanguist baptism is conducted through prayer and the laying on of hands (Luke 2:22-38; Armstrong et al., 2007), highlighting the immediate reception of the Holy Spirit. This practice reflects a shift from a sacramental approach focused on ritual cleansing to a more charismatic focus on spiritual empowerment. The church emphasizes "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" and does not re-baptize individuals already baptized in other Christian traditions. Children are presented for blessing at three months old. The Eucharist is celebrated three times a year on important church dates (Kayongo, 2005), incorporating African elements like diluted honey and a local cake, whose interpretation remains debated (Kato, 1975; Makoko, 2017). Ordination involves prayer, blessing, and the laying on of hands (Balz, 2009), though concerns have been raised about the level of theological training among some leaders (Kayongo, 2005). Marriage within the Kimbanguist Church is understood as a monogamous, lifelong commitment (Balz, 2009).

Finally, Kimbanguism introduces a major revision in how it understands divine revelation. The movement identifies Simon Kimbangu as the primary and definitive source of God's truth,

effectively shifting the source of divine authority from Jesus Christ and the canonical scriptures to Kimbangu himself. This interpretation is supported by the understanding of Kimbangu's name within the movement, which signifies divine revelation (Mokoko, 2017). Such emphasis on Kimbangu's unique revelatory role leads to reinterpretations of specific biblical passages, such as Genesis 41:28 and 41:39, and Matthew 1:18, where verses are reinterpreted to attribute divine qualities and roles to Kimbangu. This approach marks a significant departure from traditional Christian hermeneutics, which focus on the authority of scripture and the person of Jesus Christ as the ultimate revelation of God. As a result, questions arise about the movement's adherence to established principles of biblical interpretation and translation, as understood within mainstream Christian traditions (FBAI, 2017).

Religious revisionism in Uganda is evident in the rise of movements like the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) and the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God (MRTC), each showcasing unique reinterpretations of Christian doctrine and practice. The Holy Spirit Movement, led by Alice Lakwena, emerged in the late 1980s amid social and political turmoil in northern Uganda (Allen, 1991). Lakwena's claim to prophetic authority, which challenged existing leadership structures (Allen, 1991; Mamdani, 1996; Lan, 1985), enabled her to mobilize followers and depict her struggle against the government as a holy war (Allen, 1991:371).

The HSM revised traditional Christian doctrines in several key areas. First, it reinterpreted the idea of spiritual warfare, shifting the focus from a metaphorical fight against sin to a literal, physical confrontation with perceived evil forces, mainly the government (Allen, 1991; Ranger, 1985; Meyer, 1998). This directly challenged the Christian emphasis on peaceful resistance and submitting to authorities (Romans 13:1-7). Second, it changed the understanding of divine protection and

miracles, with followers, known as the Holy Spirit Army, using spiritual means like prayer and rituals, believing they are invulnerable to bullets (Allen, 1991:371). This deviated from the traditional Christian view of miracles as acts of God's sovereign will, often beyond human control. Third, the movement selectively rejected and integrated elements from both Christianity and local spiritual traditions, creating new syncretic rituals. This involved rejecting traditional practices seen as incompatible with Christianity, such as ancestor veneration and the use of charms (Allen, 1991; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; Hastings, 1994), while also incorporating aspects of local cosmology into Christian frameworks (Allen, 1991; Peel, 2000; Hackett, 1998). This syncretism challenged the traditional Christian focus on doctrinal purity and the rejection of pagan practices.

Amid Uganda's societal breakdown, the HSM promoted social cohesion through strict moral codes and accountability (Allen, 1991; Bayart, 1993; Geschiere, 1997). Lakwena's teachings, which prohibited theft and adultery, rebuilt community bonds and countered widespread chaos. Leaders enforced discipline, fostering collective responsibility. By depicting the conflict as a spiritual struggle, the HSM offered hope and purpose, serving as both a religious and social movement during a period of crisis.

The Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God (MRTCG), a millenarian group, exemplifies another form of religious revisionism in Uganda. The MRTCG merged elements of Roman Catholicism with its own distinct interpretations and a widespread apocalyptic worldview (Mayer, 2001; Walliss, 2005). The movement placed intense focus on the Ten Commandments, insisting that strict, literal obedience was the only way to achieve salvation (Mayer, 2001; Walliss, 2005; Robbins, 2004). Claims of Marian apparitions, especially by leader Credonia Mwerinde, were central to their belief system, with messages from Mary holding significant

authority (Mayer, 2001; Tosh, 2007). The MRTCG selectively used and interpreted scripture, viewing biblical texts through the filter of these alleged Marian messages (Mayer, 2001; Clarke, 2004). The movement stressed a stern, judgmental God, fostering a climate of fear (Walliss, 2005; Wessinger, 2000), while minimizing the importance of Jesus and elevating Mary to a key position (Mayer, 2001; Walliss, 2005). Traditional Catholic sacraments were downplayed in favor of their rituals (Mayer, 2001). Apocalyptic beliefs were central to the MRTCG's teachings, with predictions of an imminent world end generating urgency and reliance on the group's leadership (Mayer, 2001; Walliss, 2005; Lifton, 1999). The MRTCG rejected established religious authority, including the Pope and the Catholic hierarchy (Mayer, 2001). This complex web of religious revisionism ultimately led to tragedy when hundreds of members died in 2000 (Walliss, 2005).

The FOUR, which is the focus of this thesis and was founded by Bisaka—who claimed to be God in human form—represents a significant example of religious revisionism in Uganda. Bisaka, a former Catholic catechist, broke away from mainstream Christianity, rejecting the Bible, the Christian God, Jesus, and traditional Christian doctrines, while creating his unique theology and practices. He also considered all church leaders to be devils. The FOUR centers on worshipping Bisaka as the embodiment of God, emphasizing unity and strict adherence to his teachings as the way to salvation. This religion has gained a large following, estimated at two million by Ukah Asonzeh (2018), both in Uganda and beyond, highlighting the dynamic and evolving nature of religious revisionism in the country. A detailed discussion of what the FOUR has changed can be found in chapter three of this thesis.

### **1.2.1 Mainstream Church Responses to Religious Revisionism**

Mainstream churches in Africa and Uganda have adopted various strategies in response to the rise of both NRMs, such as Kimbanguism, and newer, more distinct religions like the FOUR, often combining different approaches. One common characteristic is engagement and dialogue, where mainstream churches seek mutual understanding and common ground (Hastings, 1994). This approach aims to bridge theological divides and promote reconciliation (Walls, 2011), often involving joint theological discussions, participation in ecumenical gatherings, and collaborative social projects (Gifford, 1998). The goal is to address misunderstandings and foster closer relationships. However, criticism and condemnation are also used, especially when dealing with religions like the FOUR, where what they see as core doctrines differ significantly from traditional Christianity. Some mainstream churches express concern about perceived deviations from orthodox Christian doctrine (Barrett, 1982). These churches may issue statements clarifying their theological positions and warning their members against involvement in such movements (Jenkins, 2002), motivated by a desire to protect what they see as doctrinal purity and prevent what they consider heresy or syncretism (Sanneh, 1983).

Recognizing the appeal of both types of new religions, mainstream churches have also pursued adaptation and inculturation, aiming to make their practices and teachings more relevant to the spiritual and cultural contexts of their communities (Bediako, 1995). This can involve incorporating elements of African traditional culture into worship, emphasizing spiritual healing and deliverance, and adopting a more participatory and charismatic style of worship (Meyer, 2004). This acknowledges that the rise of both new religious movements and distinct new religions is partly driven by a desire for a more culturally relevant and spiritually empowering Christianity (Peel, 2000). Education and theological training are also prioritized, with mainstream churches investing in

equipping pastors and lay leaders to understand and respond effectively to both the challenges posed by NRMs and the more specific theological claims of new religions (Fahy, 2001). This includes training in comparative religion, ATR, and contextual theology (Schreiter, 1985), providing church leaders with the necessary knowledge and skills for informed engagement.

Social action and development have become increasingly significant. Since both NRMs and new religions often address social and economic concerns, attracting those marginalized by mainstream churches (Mamdani, 1996), mainstream churches have enhanced their involvement in social initiatives (Kraybill, 2007). This may include establishing schools, hospitals, and community development programs, showing a commitment to holistic ministry. It is essential to recognize the diversity of these responses, which often vary depending on the specific context, the nature of the particular movement or new religion, and the theological orientation of the mainstream church. The interaction between mainstream churches and both new religious movements and newer religious expressions is a dynamic and ongoing process that shapes the future of Christianity in Africa.

The interaction between the COU and both NRMs and newer religious movements in Uganda, while offering potential for positive exchange, also presents unresolved challenges. These include competition for members and resources, often leading to accusations of 'sheep stealing' or doctrinal deviations. This competition drives increased sectarianism and division within the Christian community, hindering ecumenical efforts. The COU also raises concerns about the theological interpretations and practices of NRMs and newer religions, sometimes resulting in accusations of heresy or syncretism. Social and cultural tensions emerge from perceived threats to existing norms, further deepening mutual misunderstandings and prejudices. For example, the FOUR's rejection of core Christian doctrines and its denigration of Christian leaders, whom they label 'devils'

(Bisaka, 1987), demonstrates that prejudice is not exclusive to the COU. This dynamic highlights the fundamental challenges that emerging religions pose to the authority and stability of established religious institutions in Uganda.

### **1.2.2 Problem Statement**

Throughout history, the Church has faced various religious revisionist movements, competing to challenge orthodox Christianity by promoting alternative beliefs and practices. The Church, including the Church of Uganda, has been using the Presuppositional Apologetics approach to respond to dangerous religious revisionist groups that attempt to use historical evidence to justify their specific religious perspectives selectively. However, new religions like the FOUR continue to attract many Christians. The Church aims to find an effective way to address followers of various religious sects because some of their doctrines are very harmful to Christianity in Uganda, such as the FOUR, which denies the authority of scriptures and the deity of Christ. The study, therefore, sought to use the evidential apologetics method as an effective response to religious revisionism (RR) in Uganda, focusing on the case of the FOUR in the Bunyoro sub-region.

### **1.2.3 Objectives of The Study**

The primary goal of this thesis was to evaluate how Christian apologetics (CA) can serve as an effective response to religious revisionism in Uganda, using the case of the FOUR in the Bunyoro sub-region.

The specific objectives of the study included the following:

1. To analyze the state of religious revisionism (RR) in Uganda.
2. To explore how religious revisionism by the Faith of Unity religion (FOUR) is impacting Church of Uganda ministry in the Bunyoro sub-region.

3. To examine how Christian apologetics (CA) could be used to address the effects of religious revisionism (RR) by the Faith of Unity religion (FOUR) in the Bunyoro sub-region.

#### **1.2.4 Research Questions**

The central research question that guided this study was: How could Christian apologetics be an effective response to religious revisionism in Uganda, using the case of the Faith of Unity religion?

The specific questions that guided this study included the following:

1. What is the state of religious revisionism (RR) in Uganda?
2. How is religious revisionism by the Faith of Unity Religion affecting the Church of Uganda ministry in the Bunyoro sub-region?
3. How can Christian apologetics be used to address the effects of religious revisionism by the Faith of Unity religion in the Bunyoro sub-region?

#### **1.2.5 Rationale for The Study**

The rationale for this study came from primary sources: general and Biblical motivations. The general motivations were based on personal experiences, especially observing the rapid growth of alternatives to Christianity in modern society. Conversely, Biblical motivations arose from the researcher's engagement with scripture, aiming to understand God's view on the critical issue of alternatives to Christianity and how a Christian can effectively defend their faith (McDowell & Stewart, 1991: *passim*). Highlighting these two motivation categories clarifies the origins and direction of this thesis, offering insight into its purpose and scope.

##### *1.2.5.1 General Motivations*

The motivation behind the researcher's thesis came from a profoundly personal and multifaceted perspective. Growing up in Uganda as an African Christian in a post-colonial setting, the researcher was immersed in an environment where Christianity was dominant, with only African

Traditional religion and Islam seen as viable alternatives. However, historical events such as General Idi Amin's regime, a Muslim president hostile to Christianity, left lasting impressions on the researcher's memory. The overthrow of a Christian president by Amin in 1971 and subsequent events like the assassination of the Archbishop of the COU in 1977 highlighted the tensions between Christianity and other faiths, especially Islam, in Ugandan society (Rheenen 1976:119).

In contemporary Uganda, the researcher observes a landscape characterized by newfound freedoms of worship and expression. However, this newfound liberty has led to the proliferation of alternative belief systems, including the FOUR, which is seen as hostile to Christianity. The researcher, now a priest and theologian, recognizes the urgent need to understand and engage with these non-Christian religions, especially FOUR, which he calls "Bisakaism." Drawing inspiration from works such as Josh McDowell & Stewart's insights into Christian alternatives, the researcher is keenly aware of the existential threat posed to the Church of Christ by the rapid growth of these alternatives (McDowell & Stewart, 1991). Furthermore, the researcher is driven by the reality that public and private educational institutions have become battlegrounds for spreading various belief systems, further intensifying the competition between Christianity and these alternatives.

Through his dual identity as an African Christian and a scholar of theology, the researcher embarks on this study with a strong sense of purpose. By exploring the teachings and practices of the FOUR, the researcher aimed not only to understand but also to engage with this alternative faith critically. In doing so, he hoped to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges facing Christianity in Uganda and to evaluate how Christian apologetics can effectively respond to religious revisionism in Uganda, using the Faith of Unity religion as a case. Ultimately, this thesis is a sincere effort to reconcile personal experiences, academic interests, and a commitment to the Christian faith within a complex and evolving religious landscape.

### *1.2.5.2 Motivation Arising from The Bible*

The researcher's motivation for conducting this study arose from a deep commitment to his Christian faith, which is firmly rooted in the authority of scripture. In the diverse landscape of Christianity, there is a consensus regarding the early origins of the Church, emphasizing its foundational importance. Drawing from biblical and historical accounts, the researcher identified key insights into the beginning of the early Church, the divine qualities of Jesus, and the importance of guarding against heretical doctrines. They view scripture as a complete source, containing all necessary revelations and serving as the ultimate authority on doctrine, faith, and practice.

Embedded within the biblical story are warnings against false teachings and the spread of deceptive ideologies. The researcher resonates with Jesus' warnings about false prophets, highlighting the importance of discernment (Matthew 7:15-20). They are also inspired by the apostles' efforts to prove the truth of the gospel and strengthen believers against doctrinal errors (John 14:11; 20:24-31; 1 Cor. 15:1-11). Recognizing the danger false teachers pose within Christian communities, the researcher pays attention to the warnings from Peter and Paul, who emphasize the harmful effects of unchecked heresy (2 Peter 2:1; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Corinthians 11:1-21; 1 Timothy 6:3-5). Motivated by a duty to protect and maintain the integrity of the gospel, they share Paul's strong desire to challenge opposing ideas and affirm the truth of Christ's message (Philippians 1:7, 16; 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16). Overall, the researcher's goal is to safeguard Christian doctrine's purity and strengthen believers' spiritual resilience against doctrinal challenges.

### **1.2.6 Significance of the Study**

This study has important implications for both academic discussion and practical ministry in the context of African Christianity.

- It makes a new contribution to the fields of Christian apologetics, missiology, and the study of new religious movements.
- This research addresses a notable gap in existing scholarship by providing an empirical, grounded, and nuanced understanding of the FOUR's unique theological deviations and socio-cultural impacts on COU Christianity in Uganda's Bunyoro Sub-Region.
- It helps us better understand apologetics (defending faith) by demonstrating how it functions within a local, non-Western culture, using everyday experiences.
- It offers a transferable framework for addressing similar religious challenges worldwide.
- Ultimately, this research enhances the scholarly dialogue on religious dynamics in modern Africa.

### **1.2.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The study explored three main areas: its content scope, geographical reach, and time frame. Concerning content, it examined the phenomenon of religious revisionism within Uganda, explicitly focusing on the effects of the FOUR on the ministry of the COU. It also investigated the potential use of Christian apologetics to counter RR, using the case of FOUR within the Bunyoro sub-region.

Specifically, the study limited its investigation to 42 years, covering the existence of the FOUR from 1980 to 2023. This research was conducted between November 2023 and October 2024. The study's focus remained restricted to the manifestations of religious revisionism exemplified by FOUR, serving as a representative case within Uganda, with a particular emphasis on its influence within the Bunyoro sub-region.

### **1.2.8 Theoretical Framework: Christian Apologetics**

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in Christian apologetics, particularly influenced by the integrative approach as outlined by Edward John Carnell in his defense of the trinitarian-theistic faith (Geivett, 2015). Carnell's approach combines philosophy, scripture, and potentially human experience to build a comprehensive defense of the Christian faith. This approach laid the foundation for the researcher's exploration of how Christian apologetics can effectively oppose religious revisionism (RR) in Uganda, with a specific focus on the Faith of Unity religion (FOUR) in the Bunyoro sub-region.

Aligned with the primary goal of Christian apologetics, which is to glorify God and support truth claims, this research adopted a theoretical framework based on Edward John Carnell's theories. Carnell's framework provides criteria for assessing the truthfulness of statements or ideas. These criteria, as outlined by Carnell, include instinct, custom, tradition, consensus gentium, feeling, sense perception, intuition, pragmatism, and systematic consistency (Geivett, 2015; Afolabi, 2018).

The first criterion for verifying the truthfulness of ideas is instinct, defined as the natural tendency or ability to behave or react in a particular way without conscious thought or learning. Edward John Carnell (1952) described instinct as “that natural aptitude of the species which leads to the fulfillment of some unpremeditated action,” though. However, relying solely on instinct for judgment is the lowest level of judgment. Instinct is an inherent tendency in living organisms toward specific behaviors, influencing various aspects of life. This instinctual criterion helped the researcher assess the truthfulness of the beliefs of FOUR. However, some scholars argue that while instinct may suggest truth, it is insufficient as a test for truth because it is difficult to distinguish

purely instinctive responses from those influenced by environmental conditioning (Carnell, 1952; Afolabi, 2018).

The second criterion for verifying the truthfulness of an idea, as described by Edward John Carnell (1952), is custom. Carnell defined custom as “any habit or practice which has come to be associated with the uniform actions or beliefs of a given individual or group” (Carnell, 1952, p. 147). Custom constitutes an established, socially accepted practice within a group of people, shaping their behavior and belief systems (Afolabi, 2018). This criterion helped the researcher determine the truth about customs within the FOUR because some customs can be either beneficial or harmful, genuine or false. Therefore, an external measure must be used to evaluate the validity of customs themselves (Afolabi, 2018).

Edward John Carnell's third criterion for verifying an idea is tradition, which he defined as the standard by which beliefs held for generations are considered true. According to the Cambridge dictionary, tradition includes the beliefs and practices upheld by a society or group over time. Carnell suggested that tradition constitutes the normative body of customs, encompassing criteria and standards passed down through generations (Carnell, 1952). This criterion helped the researcher investigate the validity of the practices and beliefs of the Faith of Unity religion (FOUR).

The fourth criterion for verifying the truthfulness of an idea is consensus gentium, which comes from a Latin term denoting the agreement of the people and has historically served as a criterion for truth verification (Afolabi, 2018). This concept suggests that what is universally believed by everyone, everywhere, and at all times seems to be a reliable standard for truth. However, Carnell (1952) warned against overstating its importance, emphasizing the fallibility of collective judgment. Afolabi (2018) further explained that consensus gentium includes elements such as climate

of opinion, community sentiment, and prevailing belief, indicating that a universally accepted belief can be seen as unquestionably true. Drawing from Edward John Carnell's insights, the researcher used consensus gentium to examine the beliefs and practices of the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR). While this approach may not produce absolute truth, it provides valuable insights into how FOUR establishes its spiritual “truth” in its efforts.

The fifth criterion for verifying truthfulness involved feeling, a term that holds different meanings and varies in interpretation within psychology. Edward John Carnell described feeling as the apperceptive faculty of the soul through which one internally perceives the state of an object, person, or relation, similar to sensing being followed or interpreting astrological signs (Carnell, 1952, p. 152). This definition served as a key tool for assessing whether the religious revisionism within the context of the FOUR was based on emotional responses. Using this tool greatly contributed to accurately evaluating the role of feelings in religious revisionism by FOUR.

The sixth criterion for assessing the truthfulness of an idea relates to sense perception, including faculties such as sight, taste, touch, smell, and hearing. These senses provided what Carnell (1952) called "knowledge by acquaintance," which is different from knowledge gained through inference or reflection. Ebenezer Afolabi argued that most, if not all, of our understanding of the world comes from sensation, allowing us to interact with the environment through various sensory modalities (Afolabi, 2018). When evaluating the effectiveness of Christian apologetics as a response to religious revisionism in Uganda, specifically within the context of the FOUR, this aspect proved crucial. All senses were essential in conducting the research, serving as a comprehensive tool to achieve its goals.

The seventh criterion under consideration is intuition, defined as the innate ability to understand something without physical evidence. Edward John Carnell (1952:155) described intuition as the favored realm of mystics, calling it the eye of the soul that perceives immediately. According to Carnell, intuition helps one grasp core truths, principles, and axioms instantly, such as the idea that the whole equals the sum of its parts or that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. This intuitive ability proved invaluable to the researcher, acting as a natural compass, an internal guide, and a source of knowledge unaffected by outside influences. It allowed the researcher to navigate distractions effectively and stay focused on his investigation titled “A Christian apologetic response to Religious revisionism: A case of Faith of Unity religion.”

The eighth criterion under consideration is pragmatism. According to Edward John Carnell (1958), pragmatism theory is fundamentally an American philosophy, originating with Charles S. Peirce and further developed by William James and John Dewey, drawing on certain Kantian concepts. This theory asserts that truth is not determined through rational coherence but rather through successful empirical action, adaptation to the environment, and the practical fulfillment of human needs. In the context of this research, the relevance of this criterion lies in the longstanding presence of pragmatic elements in orthodox apologetics. For example, Jesus's admonition, “by their fruits you shall know them” (Matt. 7:20), has traditionally served as a pragmatic test for assessing the truthfulness of religious teachings (Geisler, 2013). This perspective helped the researcher establish the validity of the doctrine of the Faith of Unity religion (FOUR) by evaluating their practices, as indicated by the principle of discerning truth through its outcomes.

The ninth criterion for verifying the truthfulness of an idea, systematic consistency, draws from Christian theology, asserting that a judgment is considered valid if it aligns with the mind of God,

who is viewed as the ultimate source of all facts and their meaning (Carnell, as cited in Geivett, 2015). Afolabi (2018) highlighted the advocacy among scholars for the consistency test as a strong tool in evaluating truth, emphasizing its role in ensuring coherence, trustworthiness, and alignment with available evidence. Geisler (2013) characterized systematic consistency as a comparative approach, recognizing its limitations in comparing truth across broad worldviews such as theism and atheism, yet supporting its usefulness for assessing truth within specific worldviews, such as contrasting Christian theism with Islamic theism or different interpretations within Christian theism (Geisler, 2013). In the present study, systematic consistency proved relevant for verifying the truth within the FOUR, which upholds a theistic worldview.

The use of systematic consistency as a criterion for evaluating the truthfulness of an idea proved crucial in this research. Since both Christian theism and the FOUR theism share a theistic worldview, testing for systematic consistency emerged as a practical way to examine the accuracy of Christian apologetic responses to religious revisionism, especially in the context of FOUR. Additionally, the shortcomings of earlier tests—such as instinct, custom, tradition, consensus gentium, feeling, intuition, and pragmatism—highlighted the need for alternative methods like systematic consistency. Norman Geisler called this criterion a “combinational approach” due to its key role (Geisler, 2013). By using an integrated approach and referencing the theories of Edward John Carnell, the study was able to assess how Christian apologetics could effectively oppose religious revisionism in Uganda, focusing specifically on the FOUR in the Bunyoro sub-region.

### **1.3 Literature Review**

This section functions as a literature review, providing secondary information. It explores the perspectives and debates of various authors regarding Christian apologetic responses to religious

revisionism (RR), specifically focusing on the FOUR across different settings. The arguments presented are based on the insights and discussions of numerous writers, with the chapter's discussion guided by the research questions.

This section offers a clear overview of religious revisionism. Religious revisionism involves a critical re-examination and reinterpretation of religious texts, traditions, and historical events, which often leads to debate and controversy. While there are various perspectives, including revisionist, contextual, and skeptical views, this section focuses on the traditionalist Christian response. Crucially, the following discussion establishes the nature and scope of RR, analyzes its demonstrated impact on mainline Christian bodies like COU, and builds the theoretical foundation for using Evidentialist Apologetics as the core strategy to counter movements like the FOUR.

### **1.3.1 Religious Revisionism**

This section of the chapter draws on the insights of well-known scholars such as Eileen Barker (2013), Richard L. Bushman (2005), Hugh Macmillan (1970), Tim Allen (1991), and John Walliss (2005) to examine the complex phenomenon of religious revisionism. While scholarly works are treated as secondary sources, Bisaka's text is treated as primary data. Dosteo Bisaka's *The Book of God of the Age of Oneness* is utilized throughout this thesis exclusively as a primary source document. It constitutes the subject of theological analysis—serving as the foundational text for the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR)—rather than an external academic or theological authority used to support the study's core arguments

Eileen Barker's *Revision and Diversification in New Religious Movements* (2013) offers a comprehensive sociological framework for understanding religious revisionism within the context of New Religious Movements (NRMs). Barker defines revisionism as the reinterpretation or re-

evaluation of beliefs, practices, and historical narratives within religious movements (Barker, 2013:2). This process is often driven by a mix of internal and external factors, such as the need to adapt to changing social and cultural contexts, to negotiate identity within a broader religious landscape, or to address internal tensions and divisions. Barker highlights how NRMs frequently undergo processes of adaptation and diversification, revising their doctrines and practices to better align with contemporary values or to attract new followers (Barker, 2013:1). Her work is invaluable for classifying the Faith of Unity religion (FOUR) as a form of NRM that has successfully revised doctrines to gain a following, a process that must be understood before an effective apologetic response can be formulated.

Richard L. Bushman's *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (2005) provides a thorough and insightful look at Joseph Smith, Jr., as a key figure in religious revisionism. As the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Smith's theological innovations challenged traditional Christian beliefs. One of Smith's most significant revisions was his rejection of the traditional Nicene Trinity in favor of a more distinct and hierarchical understanding of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. This revision is a foundational example of a challenge to core Christian doctrine, providing an essential parallel for understanding how FOUR similarly revises fundamental Christian concepts like the nature of God, though Smith's movement achieved a high degree of organizational success that is contrasted with the localized nature of FOUR (Bushman, 2005:146, 176). His work primarily serves as a historical case study demonstrating the controversial theological break that revisionism represents.

Hugh Macmillan's *The Shembe Movement: A Sociological Study of a South African Religious Sect* (1970) provides a thorough analysis of how the Shembe Movement has engaged in religion

revisionism. The Shembe Movement, a prominent African Independent Church, exemplifies religious revisionism through its innovative blending of Zulu culture and Christian doctrine. It practiced theological syncretism by incorporating Zulu beliefs such as ancestor veneration into its Christian framework (Macmillan, 1970:120-148). Crucially, the movement also reinterpreted scripture, elevating the teachings of its founders alongside the Bible to create a unique canon of authority (Macmillan, 1970:170-197). This syncretism and redefinition of authority are direct parallels to the doctrinal changes seen in the FOUR movement, highlighting a common mechanism of revisionism in the African context that COU must address.

Tim Allen's work, *Understanding Alice: Uganda's Holy Spirit Movement in Context*, (1991), explores the phenomenon of religious revisionism within Uganda's Holy Spirit movement. This revisionism involves reinterpreting and adapting Christian beliefs and practices within the framework of this new religious movement. At the heart of Allen's analysis is Alice Auma, also known as Alice Lakwena, the movement's founder, who blended Christian elements into both spiritual and military activities, creating a unique fusion of traditional beliefs and Christian symbolism (Allen, 1991).

John Walliss's book, *Making Sense of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God* (2005), explains the phenomenon of religious revisionism in Uganda, especially through the MRTCG. Walliss's research serves as a stark warning within the regional context against the extreme dangers and complexities of unchecked religious revisionism. The MRTCG, led by figures like Joseph Kibwetere, claimed divine revelation and sought to establish a new religious identity separate from mainstream Catholicism (Walliss, 2005:55, 61). This case, like FOUR,

demonstrates revisionism's tendency to create new, self-appointed authorities, but tragically resulted in a mass tragedy, underscoring the vital urgency for COU to respond decisively to revisionist cults.

### **1.3.2 How Religious Revisionism is Affecting Church Uganda Ministry**

The literature review in this section provides valuable insights into how religious revisionism, both positively and negatively, impacts COU ministry. While some scholars argue that religious revision has enhanced understanding (Armstrong, 2001), adaptability (Crossan, 1991), and social justice (Cone, 1969), other scholars contend that religious revisionism has a negative effect on COU ministry. For this review, the researcher references Christopher Haigh (1985), Bryan Wilson (1966), Nwadiakor and Udezo (2017), and Ojoniyi Bode (2020). This two-sided discussion helps frame the challenge, ultimately arguing that the negative impacts outweigh any perceived benefits, especially when dealing with religious revisionism of religions like the FOUR, which demands a robust apologetic response.

#### *1.3.2.1 Positive Impact of Religious Revisionism*

Although often seen as a challenge to traditional beliefs, religious revisionism can, paradoxically, have a positive impact by fostering greater understanding, improving adaptability, and strengthening dedication to social justice within religious communities. This section examines these positive aspects, referencing well-known scholarly views.

##### **a. Increased Understanding**

Karen Armstrong (2001) contends that understanding religious texts within their historical and cultural contexts is essential for preventing religious extremism and promoting interfaith dialogue. Religious revisionism challenges strict interpretations of religious texts by encouraging a critical

understanding of the Bible and opposing exclusivity (Armstrong, 2001:123). However, this benefit must be critically balanced against the risk of *over-revisionism*, where the core, historically verifiable claims of the Christian faith are lost, a risk particularly relevant when evaluating the doctrines of the FOUR.

### **b. Adaptability**

John Dominic Crossan (1991) argues for a more contextual understanding of Jesus' life and teachings. By understanding Jesus within his historical and cultural setting, Crossan suggests that Christians can develop a deeper appreciation for Jesus' message and its relevance to contemporary issues, encouraging flexibility in faith practice (Crossan, 1991:189). This approach can make COU ministry more meaningful and engaging by helping Christians better discern Jesus' message for modern issues (Crossan, 1991:156). While this speaks to healthy contextualization, the FOUR's revisions go beyond adaptation to fundamental redefinition of the subject matter itself, which is where a purely adaptable model breaks down and requires a defense of historical fact.

### **c. Social Justice**

James Cone (1969) argues that religion should be used to challenge systemic racism and oppression, supporting the positive effects of religious revisionism, especially in promoting social justice. Cone emphasizes adapting religious beliefs and practices to meet the specific needs of marginalized communities (Cone, 1969:123). This positive focus on social ethics is a valid outcome of revisionism, yet it does not address the foundational truth claims being revised. An effective apologetic, as argued in Section 1.3.3, must be able to defend the truth claims of Christianity while simultaneously pursuing the social justice goals Cone advocates.

### 1.3.2.2 Negative Effects of Religious Revisionism on COU Ministry

Christopher Haigh's (1985) influential work, *Revisionism, the Reformation and the History of English Catholicism*, provides valuable insights into the harmful effects of religious revisionism on COU ministry. Haigh highlights the distortion of historical narratives, the undermining of traditional beliefs, and the effect on religious unity (Haigh, 1985) as key outcomes of religious revisionism. By questioning traditional views of religious texts and practices, revisionism can cause divisions, fragmentation, and conflicts within religious groups (Haigh, 1985). This loss of historical and cultural continuity is precisely what the COU faces when religious revisionist like FOUR redefine core Christian history and tradition.

Bryan Wilson's *Religion in Secular Society* (1966) provides insightful analysis of the challenges that religious revisionism poses to COU ministry within a secularizing context. Wilson emphasizes the decline in the authority of religious institutions in secular societies, a trend often worsened by religious revisionism. As traditional beliefs are questioned and alternative interpretations arise, the authority of religious leaders and institutions can weaken, leading to a loss of influence for COU ministries (Wilson, 1966). The rise of FOUR and similar groups is a manifestation of this decline in traditional authority, highlighting the need for a system, like evidential apologetics, that appeals to objective facts rather than mere institutional hierarchy to re-establish credibility.

Nwadiolor and Udezo's (2017) seminal work... offers a thorough analysis of how religious revisionism negatively affects COU ministry. They explore the schism within the Anglican Communion, providing valuable insights into how revisionist tendencies can lead to the erosion of traditional teachings, create crises of unity, and exert cultural pressure (Nwadiolor & Udezo, 2017). They argue that changing traditional teachings, especially about sexual ethics, has caused division

and weakened the church's moral authority (Nwadiolor & Udezo, 2017:375). This case is highly relevant as it demonstrates how revisionism fractures the Church *institutionally*, creating the very schisms from which local movements like the FOUR draw disaffected members. This requires a strong, unifying intellectual defense of core doctrine.

Ojoniyi Bode's (2020) seminal work, *The Alienation of Christ in African Revisionism of Christianity* provides a comprehensive analysis of the harmful effects of religious revisionism on COU ministry in Africa. The author identifies distortion of Christ's identity, loss of apostolic fervor, and syncretism (Ojoniyi, 2020) as major consequences of revisionism. By reimagining Christ as a mythical figure or a construct of Western colonialism, revisionism can distort the core message of the gospel and diminish spiritual vitality (Ojoniyi, 2020:1). Ojoniyi's work provides the most direct African context for the *theological* damage caused by revisionism, making it essential for understanding the underlying doctrinal errors of the FOUR. The 'Africanization of Christ' can become the 'Alienation of Christ' when historical facts are ignored, a claim that Evidentialism is uniquely equipped to counter.

### **1.3.3 How Christian Apologetics Can Address Religious Revisionism in COU Ministry**

#### **i. Postcolonial and Contextual Theological Critiques**

The challenge posed by the FOUR to the COU is not merely a doctrinal dispute but is fundamentally rooted in the historical and cultural tensions within African Christianity. Addressing this requires engagement with postcolonial theological critiques that have profoundly shaped African ecclesiology and missiology, particularly the insights of Mbiti (1969), Sanneh (1989), and Bediako (1995). These scholars highlight the historical failure of mainline churches to fully indigenize the Christian faith, thus creating a theological and cultural space that new religious movements like

the FOUR can successfully occupy and exploit. This intellectual engagement, therefore, provides the foundational rationale for an enculturated, multi-dimensional apologetic model

John Mbiti provided seminal work critiquing Western theological concepts of time and worldview, asserting that Christianity often failed to adequately integrate with the holistic, communal, and past-focused aspects of African cosmology (Mbiti, 1969). This critique implies that purely intellectual, Western-style apologetics often miss the point, as they fail to engage with the socio-spiritual framework where religious decisions are truly made. Building on this, Lamin Sanneh advanced the concept of "translatability" of the Gospel. Sanneh argued that the vitality of Christianity lies in its capacity to be perpetually rendered into local cultural and linguistic idioms (1989). When the Church—like the COU—maintains an over-reliance on foreign linguistic or cultural forms, it restricts the Gospel's ability to be fully owned by the local community. FOUR's intentional use of local language and its co-option of indigenous practices (as noted in Chapter 4) can thus be theoretically framed as an indigenous counter-response to this historical failure of full translatability, highlighting the urgency of a locally framed apologetic.

Finally, Kwame Bediako emphasized the need to reclaim the theological resources found in African primal religions and use them to construct an authentic African Christian identity (1995). Bediako's work justifies the development of a multi-dimensional framework (as proposed in this study) because it argues that the defense of the faith must be holistic, it must demonstrate that the Gospel transforms local culture and experience, rather than simply discarding it. A contextual apologetic is, therefore, not just a defensive measure, but an essential component of the long-overdue task of theological inculturation.

## **ii. Selected Apologetic Methodologies and Influential Scholars**

Christian apologetics, defined as the rational defense of the faith, provides the essential intellectual and moral tools required to confront the theological confusion and undermined authority caused by revisionism. This review explores different established apologetic approaches and key scholars, ultimately supporting the Evidentialist Apologetics method as the most effective theoretical framework for countering religious revisionism within COU ministry, especially against movements like the FOUR

Christian apologetic methodologies generally include classical, evidential, presuppositional, and cumulative case approaches, each emphasizing different starting points. This research draws explicitly insights from William Lane Craig, John Frame, Michael Sherrard, and Eric Lyons.

#### **a. Classical and Presuppositional Approaches**

William Lane Craig's *Reasonable Faith* (2008) offers valuable insights through philosophical and historical arguments. While a classical apologist, Craig strongly emphasizes historical evidence, especially for Jesus' resurrection. Craig (2008) states that demonstrating Christianity's truth requires argument and evidence (p.58), confirming biblical reliability (p. 123), and providing clear theological explanations (p. 189). His work provides strong intellectual tools but requires a two-step process (philosophy then evidence).

John Frame's *Christian Apologetics* (2015) presents a leading presuppositionalist approach. Frame emphasizes a strong defense of Christian truth rooted in Scripture and sound philosophical reasoning, asserting that all thought begins with foundational assumptions (p. 27). While his focus on the foundational authority of the Christian worldview is useful for defending COU doctrine, his approach may be less effective in an immediate evangelistic or counter religious revisionism by new

religions like FOUR, as it does not prioritize common ground and accessible historical evidence over worldview confrontation.

### **b. The Evidentialist Approach: A Core Focus**

While Craig and Frame provide broad insights, this thesis advocates for an evidentialist approach as the most direct and effective theoretical framework in addressing religious revisionism by FOUR within the COU. Evidentialism relies on historical facts, empirical observations, and logical reasoning as evidence for Christian truth, arguing that cumulative evidence creates a strong case. This approach is chosen because new religions like the FOUR often rely on new, non-verifiable private revelations and reinterpreted scripture. Evidentialism provides a clear, objective means to compare the verifiable historical claims of the Christian faith (e.g., the resurrection) against the unsubstantiated claims of the revisionists.

Key evidentialist scholars providing essential resources include Gary Habermas, Josh McDowell, and John Warwick Montgomery. Habermas, a leading evidentialist, is known for his “minimal facts” approach to Jesus' resurrection (Habermas & Licona, 2010). His historical rigor directly counters revisionist tendencies that demythologize miraculous elements central to COU doctrinal disputes. Josh McDowell's *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (1972/1999) compiles extensive evidence supporting biblical reliability and Christian historical claims. By demonstrating Scripture's trustworthiness, McDowell's work directly challenges revisionist approaches that undermine biblical authority or reinterpret its teachings (McDowell, 1999, p. 34). Similarly, John Warwick Montgomery applies forensic principles to Christian historical claims, emphasizing the power of cumulative historical evidence. These scholars provide the *tools*: the arguments and verifiable facts that

the COU minister can immediately deploy to show that the foundation of the Christian faith is objectively superior to the subjective claims of the FOUR.

**c. Complementary Apologetic Approaches: Relational and Practical**

Beyond intellectual argumentation, relational and practical apologetics serve an important complementary role, as shown in the works of Michael Sherrard (2012), Eric Lyons (2013), and Bobby Conway (2014).

Bobby Conway, through his work, particularly *The Fifth Gospel* (2014), argues compellingly that the Christian's life is the "fifth gospel" that the watching world reads. This approach stresses that a believer's character and actions constitute a "living apologetic" (Conway, 2014, p. 10). By emphasizing that "words align with works," Conway provides an outstanding model for how COU ministers can practically apply the rigorous evidence of the Evidentialist method in a relational and moral context (Conway, 2014). This holistic strategy is critical in confronting the Faith of Unity religion, as it ensures that the intellectual defense of the Christian faith is not undermined by perceived hypocrisy or moral failure, which are common grounds for religious dissent.

Michael Sherrard's *Relational Apologetics* (2012) stresses holiness, respect, and truth when engaging those with revisionist views (p. 47). His approach highlights personal integrity and respectful listening. Eric Lyons' *Good Works—To Be Seen or Hidden* (2013) highlights the importance of living out Christian truth. Lyons argues that good works serve as a helpful tool to counteract religious revisionism (Lyons, 2013). These relational approaches do not provide the intellectual framework but are essential for the implementation of the evidentialist approach, ensuring the defense of the faith is delivered with love and humility, which is critical for restoring individuals drawn into the FOUR back to the COU.

#### **d. Broader Philosophical Perspective: Engaging Modernity, Pluralism & Epistemology**

While the core apologetic response in this thesis relies on evidentialism, a high-level appreciation of post-Enlightenment philosophical perspectives is essential for understanding the underlying environment in which religious revisionism thrives. The rise of new religious movements like the FOUR in the Bunyoro Sub-Region is not entirely isolated but reflects global trends related to modernity, religious pluralism, and fundamental questions of epistemic warrant.

The challenge of modernity is illuminated by Charles Taylor's work on the "secular age" and the shift to the "immanent frame" (Taylor, 2007). Taylor argues that contemporary society is characterized by the breakdown of traditional communal belief systems, making religious choice a private, individual option rather than a communal given. In this context, the COU's loss of membership to the FOUR can be understood as an effect of this "fragmentation of identity," where individuals feel empowered to seek or create new, subjectively satisfying religious systems outside the historically established Church (Taylor, 2007). This situates the COU's challenges within a macro-sociological framework.

The issue of religious pluralism is critically addressed through the lens of philosophers like John Hick. Hick's pluralistic hypothesis suggests that different world religions may be equally valid responses to an ultimate, unknowable Reality (Hick, 1989). While the COU's theological position must maintain its exclusive truth claims, engaging with Hick's theory establishes the intellectual terrain that movements like the FOUR seek to exploit. By presenting a radical new interpretation of truth, the FOUR participates in the broader modern intellectual debate on whether any religion can claim ultimate, exclusive validity.

Finally, Alvin Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology provides a crucial theoretical defense for the fundamental doctrines of the COU. Plantinga argues that belief in God can be "properly basic"—rational without needing external evidential proof—if it is warranted by sound cognitive faculties operating in an appropriate environment (Plantinga, 2000). This philosophical position provides a powerful counter to the rationalist or quasi-secular challenges posed by religious revisionism. It affirms that the COU's core beliefs (e.g., the authority of Scripture and the divinity of Christ) possess genuine epistemic warrant, contrasting this with the unsubstantiated, subjective new revelations and claims of the FOUR's founder.

In conclusion, while utilizing the strengths of classical (Craig) and presuppositional (Frame) defenses, this thesis advocates for the evidentialist approach as the most direct and effective theoretical framework for addressing religious revisionism within COU ministry. Focusing on historical and empirical evidence - particularly for core Christian claims like the resurrection and biblical reliability - evidentialism establishes a tangible, verifiable foundation that directly counters unsubstantiated revisionist narratives. Crucially, the practical success of this intellectual defense is contingent upon its relational delivery. As Bobby Conway (2014) argues in *The Fifth Gospel*, the minister's life must serve as a "living apologetic," ensuring that the demonstration of verifiable truth is coupled with relational integrity and practical Christian humility (Sherrard and Lyons). This holistic strategy - combining robust evidential support with a morally consistent witness - portrays Christianity as a reasonable and historically grounded faith, offering a clear and verifiable alternative to new religions like the FOUR. The subsequent chapters will, therefore, utilize this combined theoretical and practical approach of Evidentialist Apologetics to define, demonstrate the function of, and apply its tools against the specific tenets of the FOUR.

## **1.4. Research Methodology**

This thesis examined how Christian apologetics could serve as an effective response to religious revisionism in Uganda, focusing on the case of the FOUR in the Bunyoro Sub-region. This chapter, therefore, outlines the research design, study area, sources of information, the population and sampling methods, data collection procedures, data collection tools, quality and error control, and the strategies for data processing and analysis.

### **1.4.1 Research Design**

This research adopted a phenomenological approach, which allowed for a detailed exploration and deep understanding of individuals' lived experiences with religious revisionism. This qualitative design was chosen to uncover the core ways people perceive, interpret, and make sense of FOUR's influence and the subsequent responses from the COU. It also employed an evidentialism approach that uses historical and empirical evidence to demonstrate the truth of Christianity. This focus emphasizes the Bible's reliability and the historical evidence supporting Jesus' resurrection. This method presents Christianity as a reasonable religion compared to FOUR. To achieve this, the researcher directly observed activities at selected FOUR worship centers, gaining firsthand insights into their practices and gatherings. In-depth interviews were also essential, conducted with a diverse range of participants, including ordinary followers, leaders, and former members of FOUR, as well as regular Christians, lay readers, priests, and bishops of the COU. Additionally, FGDs were used to gather collective perspectives and foster dialogue on the research themes. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling from specific FOUR worship centers and COU churches within the Bunyoro Sub-region, ensuring a variety of viewpoints from those directly involved with or affected by the FOUR.

The researcher further expanded visits to COU churches at various levels across Hoima, Kibaale, Kikuube, Kagadi, and Hoima Oil City, interviewing the Diocesan Bishop, Dean of the Cathedral, Archdeacons, and parish priests. The goal was to understand their perspectives on how Christian apologetics could address the effects of religious revisionism by FOUR in the Bunyoro Sub-region. Additionally, between March and April 2023, the researcher interviewed members of the Abalokole (the saved Christians), an influential evangelical group, to gather their opinions on using Christian apologetics to counter FOUR's religious revisionism.

To explore the details of the collected data, a thematic analysis approach was used, specifically following Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method as shown in Table 1.1. This repetitive process involved carefully reading interview and FGD transcripts, along with observational notes, to identify common patterns, emerging themes, and valuable insights into participants' experiences and viewpoints. Throughout this study, ethical considerations were of utmost importance. Informed consent was carefully obtained from each participant, ensuring they fully understood the purpose of the study and their rights. The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were strictly protected to build trust and encourage honest sharing. The research was conducted with deep respect for the diverse beliefs and perspectives of all who generously contributed their time and experiences, ensuring a focused and effective inquiry that emphasized the depth and richness of the qualitative data.

#### **1.4.2 The Area of Study**

The research was conducted in Uganda, specifically in the Bunyoro sub-region. The area was chosen for the study because it was the most affected by the teachings of the FOUR. Among all other Christian groups in this sub-region, FOUR was the largest in number and influence. The study

aimed to evaluate how Christian apologetics could effectively respond to religious revisionism using the case of FOUR, a new mega-religion that appears to have revised traditional and mainstream religiosity.

### **1.4.3 Sources of Information**

Both primary and secondary sources of information were used to conduct the research. Primary data was gathered through participant observation, direct communication with respondents via personal interviews, and focus group discussions. Also, Dosteo Bisaka's *The Book of God of the Age of Oneness* is utilized throughout this thesis exclusively as a primary source document. It constitutes the subject of theological analysis—serving as the foundational text for the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR)—rather than an external academic or theological authority used to support the study's core arguments. Secondary data was collected and analyzed by other researchers, published in books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and reports related to this topic. For reliability, relevance, and sufficiency, all secondary data were related to the study's focus and guided by the research questions.

### **1.4.4 Population and Sampling Techniques**

"Population," in research, includes all individuals or objects relevant to the study (Wangusa, 2007: 39). In this study, the population of interest mainly consisted of individuals and groups, specifically followers and leaders of the FOUR, as well as Christians and Christian leaders.

The study was carried out in the Bunyoro sub-region of Uganda, a geographically varied and populated area with an estimated population of 2,761,300 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2020). This sub-region includes Hoima Oil City (122,700), Kagadi (430,200), Kibaale (198,200), Kakumiro

(473,400), Kikuube (358,700), Hoima (374,500), Masindi (340,500), Kiryandongo (313,800), and Buliisa (149,300).

Due to logistical constraints such as limited time, funding, and resources, it was impractical to survey the entire Bunyoro sub-region. Therefore, a purposive sampling strategy was used, targeting four districts and one city that were most relevant and accessible for detailed qualitative study: Kibaale, Kagadi, Kikuube, Hoima District, and Hoima Oil City. These locations were chosen because of the concentration of the FOUR, especially those closely connected to Bisaka — his birthplace in Kibaale, the operational base in Kagadi, and established worship centers in Kikuube, Hoima, and Hoima Oil City.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the FOUR movement's dynamics and its impact on the COU, a qualitative component was added. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were held with a carefully chosen sample of about 30 participants, including ordinary FOUR followers, leaders, and apostates. To complement the perspectives from COU leadership, some Roman Catholic priests were also included in the qualitative sample. This qualitative part aimed to explore the detailed lived experiences, beliefs, and social dynamics within both the FOUR community and the Christian responses, producing rich, contextual data.

To ensure a focused and representative qualitative sample of the Christian population within the four selected districts and Hoima Oil City, the Church of Uganda's administrative divisions—Archdeaconries and Deanery—were used. Based on the proportional distribution of Christian populations across these areas, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted to gather detailed insights from ordinary Christians, lay readers, and priests about their views on the FOUR. Recognizing the exploratory nature of this qualitative study and emphasizing rich, detailed narratives over statistical

generalization, a sample size of 40 participants for interviews and FGDs with Christian respondents was deemed suitable. This number provided enough representation across the stratified groups (ordinary Christians, lay readers, and priests) to capture diverse perspectives within the Church of Uganda's administrative divisions. The aim was to reach data saturation, offering a thorough understanding of lived experiences and interpretations within these Christian communities. This qualitative approach focused on in-depth understanding within the chosen Church of Uganda regions, rather than on broad statistical representation of the entire population.

#### **1.4.5 Procedure for Data Collection**

Data collection procedure refers to the tools and techniques used to systematically gather data for analysis and interpretation. It involves collecting field data to answer research questions. Qualitative research relies on human instruments to determine research focus, select informants, collect and assess data quality, analyze and interpret data, and draw conclusions.

Before using data collection techniques and tools, the researcher met with the FOUR leaders to introduce himself and explain his purpose during their worship days (2nd, 12th, and 22nd). He also scheduled interview appointments, recruited and prepared participants, and arranged the focus group discussion. The number of participants, time, and location for the FOUR were agreed upon.

#### **1.4.6 Data Collection Instruments**

The researcher used instruments such as interview guides, FGD guides, and observation checklists, along with tools like phone calls, recorders, pens, notebooks, and papers. Interview guides were specifically used for the sample population, with an interview schedule prepared for the relevant respondents. Checklists were also employed to ensure accuracy in data collection during observation.

#### **1.4.7 Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection techniques included various methods for gathering information for research or analysis. The researcher used several approaches such as conducting in-depth interviews, employing participant observation, and leading FGDs.

Conducting interviews involved direct interaction between the researcher and participant(s), where questions were asked and responses recorded. The interviews were structured, semi-structured, or unstructured depending on the level of guidance given to participants. The observation technique involved systematically watching and recording behaviors, events, or processes as they naturally occurred in real-time environments. Observations mainly consisted of participant observation, where the researcher actively engaged in the activities being observed to gain deeper insights.

FGDs involved gathering a small group of people to discuss specific topics or issues, guided by a moderator. The interactions among participants generated rich qualitative data. Document analysis involved reviewing existing materials, such as written records, reports, newspapers, social media posts, etc., to extract relevant information for research purposes.

#### **1.4.8 Validity and Reliability**

Making sure tools are valid and reliable was essential to keep the study rigorous. The researcher was committed to conducting pre-tests of the interview and FGD guides to verify their validity and reliability. Pre-testing involved giving the research tools (e.g., interview questions) to a small group of people similar to the target population but not part of the main study. The purpose was to spot any issues with the tools before using them with the real participants. By testing the tools on a small sample, the researcher checked whether they effectively measured the intended constructs. This ensured that the tools accurately captured the key variables. As a result, pre-testing helped

identify any ambiguities, confusions, or errors in wording of questions or instructions. Feedback from pre-test participants helped improve the language and structure of the tools, making them clearer for the actual research.

#### **1.4.10 Quality / Error**

To ensure quality work, the researcher used valid and reliable methods for collecting, analyzing, and verifying data. To confirm the validity of the instruments, such as interview guides were pre-tested before use. He made physical visits and contacted the four zonal leaders (Ise-Abakwenda) of the FOUR to raise awareness and promote the research he needed to conduct in the region. When he explained the purpose and procedures of the study to each interviewee, they cooperated. The zone leaders connected him to the Abakwenda (messengers) and Abaikiriza (believers), from whom the researcher collected data and with whom he pretested the data collection instrument such as interview guide. He then reviewed the results to assess their validity and reliability. After testing the instruments, the researcher ensured their effectiveness and, together with the leaders, scheduled times for interviews. He also checked at the end of each day during data collection whether the interviews were fully done and whether the recorded information was consistent. Once all data was collected and verified for completeness and accuracy, the next step involved data management, processing, and analysis.

#### **1.4.11 Data Management and Processing**

The data was collected, coded, edited, and analyzed using non-statistical methods. The data collected was arranged systematically to ensure relevance and sufficiency. According to Grant (2020), data analysis refers to the process of evaluating data with analytical or statistical tools to uncover useful information. After collecting and sorting the data with these tools, the results were

interpreted to inform decisions. This process helped reduce the risks involved in decision-making by providing useful insights and statistics, often presented in charts, images, tables, and graphs.

The data of this study was presented thematically, with themes developed from the research questions. The qualitative method used for data presentation involved analytical and interpretive perspectives to facilitate understanding. It enabled a comprehensive approach to addressing the research questions (Chen et al., 2018). Patterns and connections within and between data categories were identified. Data was analyzed thematically to develop themes aligned with the main study objectives.

This study followed Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method that follows 7 steps and the data will be analysed as per the table 1.1 below:

**Table 1.1 Data Analysis Process**

No	STEP	DESCRIPTION
1	Readiness and re-reading descriptions with the original text	The researcher acquired a general feeling for the experience
2	Extracting significant statements	This was done to generate information pertaining directly to phenomenon studied
3	Formulating meanings	The researcher illuminated meanings hidden in various contexts of the phenomenon
4	Categorizing into clusters of themes and validating	The purpose was to identify common meanings that will be familiar to all the respondents
5	Describing	The researcher generated an exhaustive description of the themes identified
6	Returning to participants	The researcher went back to the respondents to validate the findings
7	Incorporating any changes based on the informants	The researcher presented a theoretical approach that universally reflects the feedback features of the phenomenon

#### **1.4.12 Ethical Consideration**

Pritha Bhandari (2021) argued that a critical issue in every research is that participants should be granted informed consent before they participate in the study. Before the research began, the researcher clarified the nature of the study, and participation is voluntary and based on informed

consent. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point if they wish. They were also told they can choose not to answer any questions if they feel uncomfortable. Confidentiality was discussed with participants before they take part. Respondents are assured of complete confidentiality, ensuring that none of their cases will be reported in a way that could be traced back to them. Before engaging in a conversation with an interviewee, the researcher clearly explained the research purpose, the intent of the interview, and the confidentiality involved. The researcher followed respondents to their location and conducts interviews without interrupting their usual activities. This allowed the researcher to maintain the flow of conversation and stay on track. Interviewees were always asked for consent to record, and if they are uncomfortable with taping, the device is not used.

## **1.5 Summary**

Chapter One provides a detailed overview of this research, divided into four main sections. The Introduction describes the overall context of the study. The Background of the Study then offers broad contextual information, tracing religious revisionism from historical Christianity (such as Martin Luther) to various African contexts like Kimbanguism, the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God (MRTCG), and mainstream church responses. Within this comprehensive background, the study's problem statement, objectives, and research questions are presented, along with Christian apologetics as the theoretical framework guiding the analysis of the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR). The Literature Review reviews existing scholarship on religious revisionism. Finally, the Research Methodology section describes the overall approach and design. This organized structure in Chapter One establishes the essential context for Chapter Two, which will detail the COU's established theology and practices.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICES OF CHURCH OF UGANDA**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the theology and practices of the COU within the Bunyoro sub-region, detailing its core beliefs, main emphases, sacraments, episcopal governance, distinctive features, and internal diversity. It also considers how it expresses these through sacramental celebrations, ministry, worship, governance, community engagement, fellowship, evangelism, and the influence of language and culture. This foundational overview provides an essential baseline for analyzing the religious revisionism of the FOUR and its effect on COU ministry in the Bunyoro sub-region.

#### **2.2 Church of Uganda Theology**

This section presents findings on COU beliefs gathered from interviews with 30 participants, including 10 ordinary Christians, 10 lay readers, and 10 clergy, as well as FGD with 10 tutors at BRTC, conducted on January 20, 2023, in Hoima. This empirical approach to understanding theology from the perspective of adherents aligns with contemporary sociological studies of lived religion (Woodhead, 2016). The interviews and FGDs examined core COU theological beliefs, key doctrinal emphases, the sacraments, episcopal polity, and distinctive features of COU theology. This data sheds light on how these principles are understood and applied within the context of the Bunyoro sub-region.

##### **2.2.1 Core foundations**

Scripture, Tradition, Reason, The Trinity, The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, and The Creeds form the foundation of COU theology in the Bunyoro sub-region. This section examines the

nanced understanding and implementation of these core elements among different participant groups.

### **a. Scripture, Tradition, and Reason**

Findings from interviews and FGDs consistently reaffirm Scripture’s central role as the foundational Word of God and the highest authority within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region. While its divine origin was universally accepted, practical application and interpretation varied significantly among participants, as did engagement with Tradition and Reason. This variation reflected the inherent COU theological approach, often described as a “three-legged stool”—a metaphor originating from Richard Hooker (Marshall, 2010) and emphasized by Urban T. Holmes III (1982), who highlighted the interplay of Scripture, reason, and tradition in understanding Christian authority. This connection to Hooker's classic Anglican model emphasizes Scripture's recognized primacy (Hooker, 1593-1597).

Clergy, as primary interpreters, consistently recognized Scripture’s guiding role in their ministry. CL03 stated, "The Bible guides our preaching, teaching, and pastoral care" (OI, 14.06.2022 Kagadi). While emphasizing Scripture, CL01 also highlighted the importance of integrating the wisdom of the Church Fathers and contextualizing faith within their lived experiences, saying, “Scripture is our primary guide, but we must also consider the wisdom of the Church Fathers and the context of our own experiences” (OI, 15.01.2022, Hoima). This demonstrates their traditional role in mediating divine revelation, in line with the church’s teaching office.

Lay readers engage with Scripture both liturgically and personally, affirming its importance while recognizing challenges in understanding. LR03 admitted, "We read the Bible in church, and in our studies, but some passages are hard to understand" (OI, 14.02.2023 Kikuube). They also hold the

Bible's authority but see a practical need for reason when applying traditional practices to modern life. LR01 emphasized this point, stating, "The Bible is the word of God, but some of the old traditions are hard to follow in today's world. We have to use our minds to know how to apply the Bible" (OI, 18.12.2022, Kagadi). Their pragmatic use of reason supports Bujo's (1992) call for inculturation and aligns with historical efforts to make Anglican resources accessible, influenced by figures like Cranmer (1549/52).

In contrast, ordinary Christians have a more dependent relationship with Scripture, often relying on clerical interpretation. OC03's statement, "The Bible is significant, but we need our priest to explain it to us" (OI, 14.02.2023), exemplifies this. Similarly, OC01 commented, "The Bible is what we follow. Our priest tells us what it means. We don't know about the old traditions" (OI, 30.11.2022 Kikuube), showing limited understanding of tradition and reliance on priestly guidance. This dependence on clergy echoes Mbiti's (1969) observations about traditional respect for authority and supports Campbell's (1995) recognition of different roles within the church. The finding that ordinary Christians mainly learn theological ideas through mediated sources like sermons, liturgy, and lived church traditions is also reflected by Rodgers Jr. (2002) and Chadwick (1993), who point out how theological principles spread indirectly in faith formation.

During an FGD, the tutors of BRTC offered a nuanced view. They underscored Scripture's centrality as a theological foundation and the critical need for accurate interpretation, cautioning against misinterpretations. T03 emphasized, "The correct interpretation of the Holy Scriptures is essential, and we must be careful to avoid misinterpretations" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima City). This resonates with scholarly concerns about contextual hermeneutics, which seek to make the biblical text relevant to specific cultural realities while guarding against distortions (Ukpong,

1995). T01 also noted the importance of balancing all three elements: “The balance of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason is essential for theological understanding, but often it is difficult to find the perfect balance” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). Theologically, this difficulty is resolved by upholding Scripture's supremacy (*Sola Scriptura*), which is biblically grounded in passages asserting its divine origin and ultimate authority, such as 2 Timothy 3:16 (“*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*”), thus establishing Scripture as the final rule against which Tradition and Reason must be critically measured. Tutors at BRTC, recognizing the inherent complexity of balancing these sources, indicated a need for nuanced theological education responsive to Bunyoro’s contextual realities. Their engagement aligns with Bediako’s (1992) emphasis on African agency in shaping Christian theology.

This disparity in perspectives underscores the diverse understandings and applications of core COU theological foundations within the Bunyoro sub-region, revealing a spectrum of engagement with Scripture, Tradition, and Reason, a common feature in diverse Anglican contexts globally (Chapman, 2013; Snyder, 2023). The observed variations in practical application and interpretation highlight crucial dynamics of biblical reception and engagement with tradition and reason. Theologically, these differences test the concept of the clarity of Scripture on non-essential matters, while simultaneously demonstrating the persistent danger of misapplication. This challenge is anticipated in the New Testament itself, where 2 Peter 3:16 (NIV) explicitly notes that some people “twist” the Scriptures to their own destruction, underscoring the necessity of a principled and communal engagement with the text, which Tradition and Reason are meant to safeguard. The differing interpretations mirrored Sykes’s (1978) analysis of ongoing debates. These findings collectively emphasize the continuing need for robust theological education to bridge the gap between scriptural authority and comprehensive understanding across all levels of the church in Uganda.

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**Table 2.2 Participant Perspective on Source of Authority**

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Location &amp; Date of Interaction</b>	<b>Key Observation/Quotation</b>
Clergy (CL01)	Hoima, January 15, 2022	“Scripture is our primary guide, but we must also consider the wisdom of the Church Fathers and the context of our own experiences”
Clergy (CL03)	Kagadi, June 14, 2022	“The Bible guides our preaching, teaching, and pastoral care.”
Lay Readers (LR03)	Kikuube, February 14, 2023	“We read the Bible in church, and in our personal studies, but some passages are hard to understand.”
Lay Readers (LR01)	Kagadi, December 18, 2022	“The Bible is the word of God, but some of the old traditions are hard to follow in today’s world. We have to use our minds to know how to apply the Bible”
Ordinary Christians (OC03)	Kikuube, February 14, 2023	“The Bible is very important, but we need our priest to explain it to us.”
Ordinary Christians (OC01)	Kikuube, November 30, 2022	“The Bible is what we follow. Our priest tells us what it means. We don’t really know about the old traditions”
BRTC Tutors (T03)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“The correct interpretation of the Holy Scriptures is essential, and we must be careful to avoid misinterpretations.”
BRTC Tutors (T01)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“The balance of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason is essential for theological understanding, but often it is difficult to find the perfect balance”

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

## **b. The Trinity**

The Trinity stands as a foundational doctrine within the COU, affirmed by various groups, though with differing theological depths. Clergy members, as expected, articulated a strong understanding of its centrality. For instance, CL02 stated, "The Trinity is the mystery of our faith, one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It guides our worship and understanding of God's saving work" (OI, 15.01.2022, Hoima), emphasizing its importance for both belief and practice. This comprehensive grasp aligns with established theological perspectives on the doctrine's inherent complexity (Battenhouse cited in Byaruhanga, 2005).

Lay readers, while affirming the doctrine, often expressed it in more functional terms related to worship. LR04 noted, "We always pray to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. That is how we know God" (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi), highlighting its practical application in prayer. This pragmatic, worship-oriented understanding of the Trinity among lay readers is further illuminated by LaCugna (1991), who emphasizes the Trinity's practical relevance in Christian life and worship.

Ordinary Christians generally held a more simplified understanding, often focusing on the distinct roles of the three persons. OC01 explained, "God is one, but we have the Father who created, Jesus who saved us, and the Holy Spirit who helps us now" (OI, 15.01.2022, Hoima), indicating a basic grasp of the Trinitarian roles. This simplified understanding, when contrasted with the deeper comprehension needed, resonates with Rahner (1970)'s distinction between "God as Experienced" and "God in Himself."

A FGD with BRTC tutors acknowledged these varying levels of comprehension, with T01 commenting, "While everyone affirms the Trinity, the depth of understanding, particularly regarding

the co-equality and co-eternity of the persons, needs further theological education among the laity” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima City), underscoring the ongoing need for theological formation on this core doctrine. This suggests an apparent necessity for tailored theological formation to bridge gaps in Trinitarian understanding, as Thiselton (2009) provides a lens for differing articulation levels based on theological vocabulary, and McGrath (2017) underscores the teaching challenges of this complex doctrine.

**Table 3.2 Participant Perspective on Trinity**

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Location &amp; Date of Interaction</b>	<b>Key Observation/Quotation</b>
Clergy (CL02)	Hoima, January 15, 2022	“The Trinity is the mystery of our faith, one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It guides our worship and understanding of God’s saving work.”
Lay Readers (LR04)	Kagadi, April 20, 2023	“We always pray to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. That is how we know God.”
Ordinary Christians (OC01)	Kikuube, November 30, 2022	“God is one, but we have the Father who created, Jesus who saved us, and the Holy Spirit who helps us now.”
BRTC Tutors (T01)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“While everyone affirms the Trinity, the depth of understanding, particularly regarding the co-equality and co-eternity of the persons, needs further theological education among the laity.”

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

### **c. The 39 Articles of Religion**

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion are a foundational summary of Anglican doctrine, defining core beliefs on scripture, salvation, and church order. Findings from interviews and FGDs consistently show that these Articles, integral to the Book of Common Prayer, are foundational for doctrine in the COU. Clergy members, like CL01, directly mirror the Articles’ emphasis on scriptural authority: “the Bible as our ultimate guide for faith and life” (OI, 15.01.2022 Hoima), and their understanding of salvation reflects the doctrine of justification: “we are saved by grace through

faith, but our good works are evidence of that faith” (OI 15.01.2022 Hoima). These findings are strongly supported by scholarly emphasis on the foundational role of such statements in Anglican doctrine (Bicknell, 1955; Hooker, 1593/97).

While some lay readers, such as LR04, demonstrate direct engagement with the Articles through training, ordinary Christians primarily absorb these theological frameworks through mediated means like sermons, liturgy, and lived church traditions, as OC01 noted: “Our understanding of faith and practice is primarily shaped by sermons, liturgy, Bible studies, and the lived traditions of the church” (OI, 30.11.2022 Kikuube). This mirroring of ordinary Christians’ experiences by Rodgers Jr. (2002) and Chadwick (1993) highlights how theological principles permeate faith formation indirectly through liturgy. Lay readers’ direct engagement aligns with historical efforts to make Anglican resources accessible, influenced by figures like Cranmer (1549/52).

Despite varying levels of direct awareness, BRTC tutors, exemplified by T02, stress the Articles’ ongoing importance: “a deeper engagement with the Articles is crucial for ensuring a robust and consistent theological understanding among church leaders and members” (FGD, 20.03.2022, Hoima City). This echoes Sykes (1978) and Bray (1998), who underscore the Articles’ function as a crucial shared theological framework for the Anglican Communion, calling for consistent understanding within the Ugandan context.

***Table 4.2 Participant Perspective on 39 Articles of Religion.***

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Location &amp; Date of Interaction</b>	<b>Key Observation/Quotation</b>
Clergy (CL01)	Hoima, January 15, 2022	“The Bible as our ultimate guide for faith and life”
Clergy (CL01)	Hoima, January 15, 2022	“We are saved by grace through faith, but our good works are evidence of that faith”

Lay Readers (LR04)	Kagadi, April 20, 2023	“We possess a deeper understanding of COU doctrine and its sources, potentially having engaged with the Articles through training or personal study”
Ordinary Christians (OC01)	Kikuube, November 30, 2022	“Our understanding of faith and practice is primarily shaped by sermons, liturgy, Bible studies, and the lived traditions of the church”
BRTC Tutors (T01)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“a deeper engagement with the Articles is crucial for ensuring a robust and consistent theological understanding among church leaders and members”

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

**d. The Creeds**

The Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds are foundational statements of Christian faith, summarizing core beliefs about the Trinity, Incarnation, and other essential doctrines. Findings consistently identified these Creeds as foundational to COU theology within the Bunyoro sub-region. Clergy member CL02 asserted, “The Creeds are foundational. They summarize our core beliefs about the Trinity and Incarnation” (OI 15.01.2022, Hoima), highlighting their essential role.

However, a critical challenge emerged as lay readers noted a disconnect between liturgical recitation and theological comprehension. LR02 stated, “We recite the creeds in church, but many people do not understand the meaning of the Trinity” (OI, 18.12.2022, Kagadi). Ordinary Christian OC02 echoed this sentiment: “We say the words, but I don’t fully understand all of them” (OI, 30.11.2022 Kikuube). This lack of deep understanding, despite clerical affirmation of their importance, potentially hinders spiritual formation. The study's findings on creedal understanding strongly align with established scholarship; Wainwright (1980) stresses the integration of worship and theological comprehension, highlighting the risk of ritualism when this link is broken. Lathrop (1993) further emphasizes the ideal of liturgical action leading to doctrinal grasp, a breakdown observed in this research.

BRTC tutors reinforced the creeds’ importance while identifying a clear need for enhanced theological education to bridge this gap, with T02 stating, “There is a necessity for further theological education.” This directly aligns with Groome (1998), who advocates for reflective engagement to integrate reflection with practice, addressing the finding that creedal recitation often lacks deep understanding. These viewpoints collectively underscore that mere recitation does not ensure comprehension, emphasizing the crucial role of theological education, a need directly echoed by the BRTC tutors.

**Table 5.2 Participant Perspectives on Creeds.**

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Location &amp; Date of Interaction</b>	<b>Key Observation/Quotation</b>
Clergy (CL02)	Hoima, January 15, 2022	“The Creeds are foundational. They summarize our core beliefs about the Trinity and Incarnation”
Lay Readers (LR02)	Kagadi, December 18, 2022	“We recite the creeds in church, but many people do not understand the meaning of the Trinity”
Ordinary Christians (OC02)	Kikuube, November 30, 2022	“We say the words, but I don’t fully understand all of them”
BRTC Tutors (T01)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“There is a necessity for further theological education on the Creeds, so that the laity can better understand their faith”

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

### **2.2.2 Key Doctrinal Emphases**

Through interviews and FGDs, participants consistently identified several key doctrinal emphases within the COU: The Incarnation, Justification by Faith, the Atonement, and the Resurrection. These doctrines form the bedrock of COU theology and shape the understanding of God, humanity, salvation, and the life to come.

#### **a. The Incarnation**

Findings from interviews and FGDs within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region reveal a consistent understanding of the Incarnation’s profound significance, albeit expressed with varying emphasis

across different roles. Clergy members, aligning with established COU theology, stressed Christ's dual nature as fully God and fully human, viewing it as the ultimate expression of divine love. As CL05 stated, "The Incarnation means that God truly became one of us in Jesus, fully divine and fully human. This is how we understand God's love for us" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). This emphasis on the Chalcedonian definition of Christ's dual nature directly reflects Alister McGrath's (2017) theological insights.

Lay readers often highlighted the Incarnation as God's act of solidarity, demonstrating divine empathy and presence amidst human struggles. LR01 noted, "Jesus coming in the flesh shows that God understands our struggles and is with us" (OI, 15.01.2022, Hoima). This theme resonates with John Macquarrie's (1990) discussions of God's profound solidarity with humanity through the Incarnation. Ordinary Christians articulated a foundational belief in Jesus as both divine and human. According to OC05, "We believe Jesus is the Son of God who came down to earth as a man" (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi), a broad understanding encompassing N.T. Wright's (2006) view of the Incarnation as God's way of redeeming and restoring creation.

During an FGD, BRTC tutors underscored the doctrine's crucial implications for salvation and the full completion of God. T03 commented, "People must understand that through the Incarnation, God revealed himself fully and made our redemption possible" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima), indicating its central role in the broader theological framework of the COU in this region. This point aligns with Wolfhart Pannenberg's (1968) arguments on the Incarnation as God's decisive self-revelation.

The data suggests a shared foundational understanding of the Incarnation across different demographics within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region. Clergy articulated a more theologically

precise Chalcedonian view that Jesus Christ is one person in two distinct natures—fully divine and fully human—united without confusion, change, division, or separation (McGrath, 2017), while lay readers emphasized its relational and empathetic dimensions. Ordinary Christians held a simpler, yet core belief in Christ’s dual nature. Crucially, educators highlighted the doctrine’s pivotal role in comprehending salvation and the nature of God, indicating the Incarnation serves as a central tenet shaping faith and theological understanding throughout the community.

**Table 6.2 Participant Perspective on Incarnation.**

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Location &amp; Date of Interaction</b>	<b>Key Observation/Quotation</b>
Clergy (CL05)	Kibaale, May 30, 2023	Emphasized the dual nature of Christ as fully God and fully human, viewing it as divine love: “The Incarnation means that God truly became one of us in Jesus, fully divine and fully human. This is how we understand God’s love for us.”
Lay Readers (LR01)	Hoima, January 15, 2022	Highlighted the Incarnation as God’s act of solidarity and empathy: “Jesus coming in the flesh shows that God understands our struggles and is with us.”
Ordinary Christians (OC05)	Kagadi, April 20, 2023	Articulated a foundational belief in Jesus as both divine and human: “We believe Jesus is the Son of God who came down to earth as a man.”
BRTC Tutors (T03)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“Underscored the Incarnation’s importance for salvation and God’s revelation: “It’s crucial for people to understand that through the Incarnation, God revealed himself fully and made our redemption possible.”

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

**b. Justification by Faith**

Findings from interviews and FGDs within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region revealed varying levels of theological nuance regarding Justification by Faith. Clergy members, like CL04, articulated a balanced view, stating that salvation is “by grace through faith, but our good works are

evidence of that faith” (OI, 30.10.2022, Kagadi). This reflects the COU emphasis on both grace and its practical manifestation, consistent with Richard Hooker’s (1593-1597) articulation of good works as the outflow of living faith.

Lay readers echoed this, with LR04 emphasizing the necessity of “good works” alongside faith for a complete Christian life (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi). This suggests a practical understanding of faith driving ethical action, a point resonant with John Wesley’s (1738) stress on holiness in Christian living. Ordinary Christians, while affirming salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, expressed a more simplified understanding. OC04 stated, “We believe that Jesus saves us, if we believe in him” (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi). This perspective reflects Martin Luther’s (1520) foundational *sola fide*, though potentially lacking engagement with complexities emphasized by N.T. Wright (1997) regarding justification’s relational aspects beyond mere individual belief.

Tutors at BRTC offered an analytical perspective, with T05 highlighting the need for “careful theological exploration and pastoral guidance” on this interplay (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This recognition of potential for ambiguity and the necessity of clear instruction for a holistic grasp of justification aligns with Alister McGrath’s (2011) emphasis on historically informed understanding and the nuances of the doctrine. The data reveals a discernible spectrum in the comprehension of justification by faith within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region. While clergy and lay leaders demonstrate a nuanced understanding that integrates the primacy of grace through faith with the essential role of good works as its evidence, ordinary Christians tend towards a more foundational understanding centered solely on belief in Jesus for salvation. This disparity suggests varying levels of theological engagement and highlights a potential need for more comprehensive theological education across the laity. The BRTC tutors’ emphasis underscores this necessity, pointing to the

importance of bridging these differing levels of understanding to foster a more holistic and practically lived theology of justification throughout the church.

**Table 7.2 Participant Perspectives on Justification by Faith**

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Location &amp; Date of Interaction</b>	<b>Key Observation/Quotation</b>
Clergy (CL04)	Kagadi, October 30, 2022	“We are saved by grace through faith, but our good works are evidence of that faith.”
Lay Readers (LR04)	Kagadi, April 20, 2023	“Good works” alongside faith are necessary for a complete Christian life.”
Ordinary Christians (OC04)	Kikuube, April 20, 2023	“We believe that Jesus saves us, if we believe in him.”
BRTC Tutors (T05)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“Careful theological exploration and pastoral guidance” are needed on the interplay of faith and works”

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

### **c. Atonement**

The insights from interviews and FGDs with participants in the COU’s Bunyoro sub-region revealed a variety of perspectives on the Atonement, aligned with the Anglican tradition’s acceptance of different models. Clergy members often described the Atonement as God’s loving act of reconciliation through Christ’s sacrifice, as illustrated by CL01 in Hoima stating, “The Atonement is God’s gift of love, sending Jesus to die for our sins and bring us back to him” (OI, 15.01.2022, Hoima), highlighting divine grace. This view closely matches models such as “atonement as sacrifice” and “atonement as reconciliation” discussed by Alister McGrath (2017).

Lay readers, while affirming reconciliation through Christ’s death, often highlighted its practical implications for forgiveness. LR02 in Kikuube noted, “Because Jesus died, our sins are forgiven, and we can have peace with God” (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube), focusing on the outcome. This

emphasis on bringing different parties together resonates with John Macquarrie’s (1990) concept of “at-one-ment.” Ordinary Christians typically expressed a more basic understanding of Jesus’ death as the means of salvation, exemplified by OC05 in Kibaale’s simple statement, “Jesus died on the cross for us so that we can go to heaven” (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). This reflects a fundamental substitutionary belief that fits within a broader understanding of Christ’s saving work.

This observed spectrum of understanding aligns well with N.T. Wright’s (2006) presentation of a multifaceted view of Atonement, which includes various aspects like victory, sacrifice, and divine love. Recognizing this broad theological scope, the BRTC tutors during their FGD in Hoima, as expressed by T02, stressed the importance of teaching different Atonement models – “as sacrifice, as victory, as moral example – so people can grasp its full meaning” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima), showing an awareness of the need for thorough theological education on this central Christian doctrine. These scholarly frameworks together validate the range of atonement theologies found within the Bunyoro COU context, from core substitutionary views to more nuanced understandings of reconciliation and divine love.

***Table 8.2 Participant Perspectives on Atonement***

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Location &amp; Date of Interaction</b>	<b>Key Observation/Quotation</b>
Clergy (CL01)	Hoima, January 15, 2022	The Atonement is God’s gift of love, sending Jesus to die for our sins and bring us back to him.”
Lay Readers (LR02)	Kikuube, February 14, 2023	“Because Jesus died, our sins are forgiven, and we can have peace with God.”
Ordinary Christians (OC05)	Kibaale, May 30, 2023	“Jesus died on the cross for us so that we can go to heaven.”
BRTC Tutors (T02)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“We need to teach various Atonement models – as sacrifice, as victory, as moral example – so people can grasp its full meaning”

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

#### **d. The Resurrection**

Through interviews and FGDs, participants in the COU consistently affirmed the importance of the Resurrection, both as a core theological truth and a lived practice, especially through the passionate celebration of Easter Sunday to mark the resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ. This aligns with a fundamental belief of Christian faith, as N.T. Wright (2006) powerfully states, asserting that “without the resurrection, the whole Christian story collapses.”

Clergy members stressed its fundamental role in Christian faith and the promise of eternal life. For example, CL03 said, “The Resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith; without it, everything else falls apart. It guarantees our own resurrection” (OI, 14.06.2022, Kagadi), emphasizing its importance for salvation and future hope. This view aligns with scholarly insights that see the Resurrection as both a historical event and the ultimate validation of Christ’s claims and the foundation of Christian hope (Alister McGrath, 2017).

Lay readers often focused on the Resurrection as a source of hope and victory over death. LR05 in Hoima noted, “Because Jesus rose from the dead, we know that death is not the end, and we too will rise” (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima), emphasizing its personal significance for believers. This understanding reflects the eschatological aspect of the Resurrection, where it signifies triumph over mortality and the promise of eternal life, a theme explored by theologians like Jürgen Moltmann (1972). Ordinary Christians generally expressed a straightforward belief in Jesus’ rising and its impact on their own eternal destiny. OC02 in Kikuube simply stated, “Jesus died and rose again, and because of that, we will also rise to be with God” (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube), reflecting a basic understanding of the salvific outcome.

The BRTC tutors, during their FGD in Hoima, emphasized the importance of consistently teaching the many aspects of the Resurrection. T06 said, “We need to ensure that people understand the historical reality, the victory over death, and the implications for our present and future life in Christ” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima), highlighting the need for thorough catechesis on this key doctrine and supporting scholarly calls for a strong, multi-faceted understanding of this core belief.

**Table 9.2 Participant perspective on the Resurrection**

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Location &amp; Date of Interaction</b>	<b>Key Observation/Quotation</b>
Clergy (CL03)	Kagadi, June 14, 2022	“The Resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith; without it, everything else falls apart. It guarantees our own resurrection.”
Lay Readers (LR05)	Hoima, August 23, 2023	“Because Jesus rose from the dead, we know that death is not the end, and we too will rise”
Ordinary Christians (OC02)	Kikuube, February 14, 2023	“Jesus died and rose again, and because of that, we will also rise to be with God.”
BRTC Tutors (T06)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“We need to ensure that people understand the historical reality, the victory over death, and the implications for our present and future life in Christ.”

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

### **2.2.3 The Sacraments**

The data collected from interviews and FGDs shows a consensus among participants that the sacraments, including the dominical sacraments and other sacramental rites, are a key doctrinal emphasis and occupy a central role in COU liturgical practice. This aligns with a broad Christian understanding of sacraments as visible signs of unseen grace, a concept deeply rooted in Christian theology and emphasized by various traditions, including the Anglican (Byaruhanga, 2005; Anglican Compass, 2013).

### **a. Dominical Sacraments**

Findings from interviews and FGDs within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region showed a widespread recognition of sacraments, especially the Dominical Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, established by Christ, as central to Anglican doctrine and liturgical worship. This aligns with a long-standing theological tradition highlighted by figures like John Calvin (1536), who stressed their institution by Christ, and contemporary African theologians such as Byaruhanga Christopher (2005), who calls them the “Gospel sacraments” and affirms baptism as Christian initiation. However, the depth of understanding varied considerably across participant groups.

Clergy members described a theological view of sacraments, with CL05 referring to them as “outward signs of inward grace,” and highlighting their function as channels of divine blessing (OI, 10.11.2022, Hoima). Lay readers displayed a more practical understanding, focusing on the everyday significance of these sacraments, with LR05 stating, “Baptism initiates us into the church, and communion unites us with Christ,” emphasizing their communal and Christ-centered nature (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi). This community-focused and Christ-centered outlook aligns with Alexander Schmemmann’s (1963) view of the sacraments as liturgical and communal acts.

Ordinary Christians, while recognizing the practice of these sacraments, adopt a more procedural perspective, with OC05 stating, “We baptize babies, and take communion on Sundays” (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi). This response indicates a potential gap between ritual participation and theological understanding, emphasizing the need for a deeper engagement with the meaning of these sacred acts. This phenomenon echoes Karl Rahner’s (1963) call for a more profound engagement with sacramental meaning beyond mere ritual, and reflects the diverse symbolic dimensions inherent in sacramental practice, as explored by Paul Tillich (1951-1963).

Recognizing this spectrum, tutors at BRTC emphasized the crucial importance of both proper administration and theological understanding of the Dominical Sacraments, with T06 stating that “The proper administration and understanding of the Dominical Sacraments is vital for the spiritual health of the church” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This view highlights the need for both clergy and laity to be equipped with the knowledge and understanding necessary to participate meaningfully in these core expressions of COU faith.

**Table 10.2 Participant Perspectives on Dominical Sacrament**

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Location &amp; Date of Interaction</b>	<b>Key Observation/Quotation</b>
Clergy (CL05)	Hoima, November 10, 2022	“Outward signs of inward grace,” and emphasizing their role as channels of divine blessing.”
Lay Readers (LR05)	Kagadi, April 20, 2023	“Baptism initiates us into the church, and communion unites us with Christ.”
Ordinary Christians (OC04)	Kagadi, April 20, 2023	“We baptize babies, and take communion on Sundays.”
BRTC Tutors (T05)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“The proper administration and understanding of the Dominical Sacraments is vital for the spiritual health of the church.”

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

While COU Christians across the Bunyoro sub-region unanimously affirm the importance of Dominical Sacraments in their worship, understanding them as rites directly established by Christ, our interviews revealed a wide range of theological understanding. From the clergy’s nuanced comprehension of their deeper spiritual meaning to the more procedural view common among ordinary Christians, this variation highlights a significant gap between consistent liturgical practices and the theological depth many participants have. Therefore, there is an urgent need for improved theological education to ensure all believers fully grasp the profound significance embedded in these core COU practices.

## **b. Other Sacramental Rites**

The recognition and understanding of sacramental rites beyond Baptism and Holy Communion by all participant groups showed notable variation. While the Dominical Sacraments remained central, other rites such as Marriage, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Ordination, and Anointing of the Sick were viewed with differing levels of familiarity and importance. This diversity reflects the Anglican tradition's nuanced approach to these 'other sacraments' or 'sacramentals,' which are often distinguished from the two Dominical Sacraments as being of significant pastoral value but not universally required for salvation, a distinction thoroughly examined by Anglican doctrinal scholars like E.J. Bicknell (1927) in his work on the Thirty-Nine Articles.

Findings from interviews and FGDs within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region revealed varying levels of acknowledgment and understanding. Clergy members, like CL01, with their theological training, emphasized the importance of all sacramental rites, stating, "all of the sacramental rites are important, and have a purpose in the life of the church" (OI, 15.01.2022, Hoima). However, CL03 noted the rarity of the anointing of the sick (OI, 14.06.2022, Kagadi), highlighting a tension between theological completeness and practical realities within the local context.

Lay readers, such as LR03, demonstrated a more selective understanding, ranking Marriage and Confirmation as "very important" while acknowledging a lack of knowledge about others like the anointing of the sick (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube). This reveals a potential gap in awareness and highlights the need for more comprehensive engagement with the historical and theological context of these rites, as emphasized by E.W. Kemp (1957) in his analysis of canon law and church practice.

Ordinary Christians, exemplified by OC06, exhibited a very narrow understanding, mainly associating sacramental rites with weddings and confirmation: “We have weddings in church, and children get confirmed” (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). They also showed a lack of awareness of practices like the anointing of the sick in the Anglican tradition: “I have never heard of a sacramental rite of anointing the sick in the COU; I only hear that in the Roman Catholic Church” (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). This limited exposure to the broader sacramental life of the church underscores the need for practical pastoral work to fill this understanding gap, a concern highlighted by Jeremy Taylor (1650) in his devotional works on Christian living. Additionally, this reveals a missing link with the crucial role of sacramental practice in spiritual growth, as explained by David A. de Silva (2018).

The tutors at BRTC, recognizing this disparity, identified a clear need for targeted pastoral education on less common sacramental rites. As T03 articulated, “pastoral education on the less common sacramental rites is needed” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This aligns with Kenneth Stevenson’s (1987) emphasis on fostering genuine communal sacramental participation, suggesting that equipping all members for full engagement is a crucial, yet currently unrealized, goal for the Church in the Bunyoro sub-region. Such education would promote a more complete engagement with the entire spectrum of Anglican sacramental life, ensuring these rites contribute fully to the community’s spiritual formation.

**Table 11.2 Participant Perspectives on Other Sacramental Rites**

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Location &amp; Date of Interaction</b>	<b>Key Observation/Quotation</b>
Clergy (CL01)	Hoima, January 15, 2022	“All of the sacramental rites are important, and have a purpose in the life of the church”
(CL03)	Kagadi, June 14, 2022	“The anointing of the sick is a rare practice in the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region”

Lay Readers (LR03)	Kikuube, February 14, 2023	He acknowledged these rites as “very important,” but also admitted that “some of the other rites are not well understood, such as anointing of the sick”
Ordinary Christians (OC06)	Kibaale, May 30, 2023	“We have weddings in church, and children get confirmed” Also said “I have never heard of a sacramental rite of anointing the sick in the COU; I only hear that in the Roman Catholic Church”
BRTC Tutors (T03)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“Pastoral education on the less common sacramental rites is needed”

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

The data in the table further emphasizes that while the Dominical Sacraments are unquestionably central in the Bunyoro COU community, there is considerable variation in how other sacramental rites are understood and practiced. This important insight reveals a clear and urgent need for targeted educational efforts within the Church. Such initiatives are vital to deepen the understanding and involvement of the laity, allowing them to fully embrace and benefit from the Church’s broader sacramental life.

**2.2.4 Episcopal Polity**

Findings from interviews and FGD within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region showed that while the importance of episcopal polity—based on principles like apostolic succession, episcopal oversight, unity, and catholicity—was recognized, understanding of its theological foundation, especially apostolic succession, varied greatly. This core structure, vital to Anglican identity, was strongly defended by historical figures like Richard Hooker (1593-1597) in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, who highlighted its role in maintaining continuity with the early church.

Clergy members, as custodians of doctrine, demonstrated a strong grasp of this theological foundation. They emphasized the bishop’s role in providing continuity with the early church, as CL01 stated, “Our bishops are successors to the apostles, providing continuity with the early church”

(OI, 15.01.2022 Hoima). This perspective aligns with John Jewel’s (1562) *An Apology of the Church of England*, which highlights apostolic succession through ordination as crucial to Anglican claims of legitimacy. Additionally, this resonates with Henry Hammond’s (1651) argument for the divine right of bishops in his *Dissertations on Episcopacy*, reinforcing the theological bedrock of their authority.

In contrast, lay readers recognized the hierarchical structure of bishops, priests, and deacons as leadership roles but showed a more functional understanding. LR03 affirmed, “We have bishops, priests, and deacons, and they lead the church” (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube), indicating a limited grasp of the deeper theological underpinnings. Ordinary Christians exhibited an even more simplified view, primarily focusing on the bishop as the sole leader, as OC04 stated, “The bishop is the leader of the church” (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi). This highlights a potential lack of awareness regarding the broader historical and theological rationale for the episcopal structure.

Recognizing this range of understanding, tutors at BRTC identified a clear need for improved theological education on apostolic succession. T04 stated that “The historical and theological basis of apostolic succession needs to be explained more fully to the lay people” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima), emphasizing the importance of bridging the gap between practical recognition and theological understanding. This call for deeper knowledge reflects Paul Avis’s (2002) modern analysis in *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, which highlights the need for a balanced approach to ecclesiology and addressing different interpretations of apostolic succession to ensure informed participation and strong theological grounding within the church.

**Table 12.2 Participant Perspectives on Episcopal Polity**

Participant Group	Location & Date of Interaction	Key Observation/Quotation
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Clergy (CL01)	Hoima, January 15, 2022	“Our bishops are successors to the apostles, providing continuity with the early church,”
Lay Readers (LR03)	Kikuube, February 14, 2023	“We have bishops, priests, and deacons, and they lead the church”
Ordinary Christians (OC04)	Kagadi, April 20, 2023	“The bishop is the leader of the church”
BRTC Tutors (T03)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“The historical and theological basis of apostolic succession needs to be explained more fully to the lay people”

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

The data presented in the table visually emphasizes the observed disparity: while episcopal polity is recognized as central, there is a clear range of understanding its theological foundations, especially apostolic succession. This underscores the ongoing need for targeted education to enhance all church members' understanding of this fundamental COU doctrine.

### **2.2.5 Distinctive Characteristics**

Findings from interviews and FGDs within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region show that participants consistently recognized distinctive features of COU theology. They unanimously identified the Book of Common Prayer and religious symbolism as the main distinguishing elements of COU theology.

#### **a. The Book of Common Prayer (BCP)**

Findings from interviews and FGDs within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region showed widespread recognition of The BCP as central to worship across all participant groups. However, while its practical use was acknowledged, its historical significance and deeper theological meanings were less understood, especially among lay members—a phenomenon Eamon Duffy (1992) attributes to neglecting liturgical context. Clergy, reflecting Kenneth Stevenson’s (1987) focus on the BCP’s formative role, highlighted its importance in shaping COU worship, with CL01 explaining,

“The Book of Common Prayer shapes our liturgy and provides a common framework for prayer” (OI, 15.01.2022, Hoima).

Lay readers mainly emphasized the practical role of the prayer book in services, affirming, as LR02 stated, “We use the prayer book in church” (OI, 18.12.2022, Kagadi). Similarly, ordinary Christians focused on the act of reading prayers from it, as OC07 noted, “We read the prayers from the book in church” (OI, 14.11.2022, Hoima City)—highlighting a practical approach that Bryan Spinks (2013) suggests overlooks the stored theological richness. Tutors at BRTC stressed its essential role as COU heritage, asserting, as T04 explained, “The Book of Common Prayer is a vital part of COU heritage, and its importance must be maintained” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This highlights the need for theological education to foster a deeper appreciation of this foundational text beyond its practical use, aligning with Paul Bradshaw’s (2002) call for historical and theological analysis to fully understand the BCP’s significance.

**Table 13.2 Participant Perspectives on the Book of Common Prayer**

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Location &amp; Date of Interaction</b>	<b>Key Observation/Quotation</b>
Clergy (CL01)	Hoima, January 15, 2022	“The Book of Common Prayer shapes our liturgy and provides a common framework for prayer”
Lay Readers (LR02)	Kagadi, December 18, 2022	“We use the prayer book in church”
Ordinary Christians (OC07)	Hoima City, August 23, 2023	“We read the prayers from the book in church”
BRTC Tutors (T04)	Hoima, March 20, 2023 (FGD)	“The Book of Common Prayer is a vital part of COU heritage, and its importance must be maintained”

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

The findings show a consistent recognition of the BCP’s importance to COU worship, but also highlight a clear gap in understanding. Clergy recognize its formative liturgical role, while lay readers and everyday Christians mainly see it as a practical tool, suggesting a significant lack of

awareness about its historical and theological significance. This varying level of understanding emphasizes the urgent need for improved theological education, as recommended by BRTC tutors. The BCP's essential role as part of COU heritage risks being reduced to just a procedural tool if its deeper meaning remains hidden from the laity. Bridging this gap is essential to ensure all COU Christians in Bunyoro fully connect with the BCP as a core part of their faith.

### **b. The Doctrine of Religious Symbols**

The COU, part of the global Anglican Communion, sees religious symbols as outward signs of spiritual realities that support devotion and instruction, rather than objects of worship. This "Via Media" approach, discussed by Richard Hooker (1594) and Mark Chapman (2012), balances expression with a Reformed focus on avoiding idolatry. CL07 affirmed, "Our focus is always on what the symbol points to – Christ – never on the symbol itself" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale), consistent with Karl Barth's (1936) theology.

Central COU symbols hold deep significance for the congregation. The Cross/Crucifix universally symbolizes Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection (Anglican Compass, 2020), serving as a "daily sermon" CL02 noted (OI, 15.01.2022, Hoima). The Altar/Holy Table is the focal point of the sanctuary, representing God's presence (Shawn O. Strout, 2019), and is described by LR03 as an "anchor point" for worship (OI, 14.02.2023, Kibaale), a concept also explored by Shawn O. Strout (2019). The Pulpit/Lectern emphasizes the Word of God, highlighting Anglicanism's dedication to biblical proclamation (McGrath, 2007). This is rooted in the biblical mandate for preaching the Gospel as the central means of discipleship. Paul's question in Romans 10:14 - "How... are they to hear without someone preaching?" - theologically justifies the centrality of the lectern. It underscores the conviction that the hearing of the authoritative Word is the essential means

through which faith is produced and nurtured, and it upholds the clergy's primary role as authorized proclaimers.

Liturgical vestments (cassock, surplice, stole, chasuble) represent clerical authority, the holiness of worship, and the continuity of Christianity. Their seasonal colors help the congregation follow Christ's life (Kavanagh, 1975; Zawilla, 1997). OC10 shared, "When the priest puts on the different colored robes... it makes the service feel special, like we are truly in God's presence" (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima). These consistent views affirm that the COU's symbolic expressions effectively guide devotion toward the Trinitarian God and Christian salvation, contrasting with systems that elevate human figures or use idiosyncratic iconography (McGrath, 2017; Eliade, 1959; Bell, 1992).

### **2.3 Church of Uganda Practices**

The COU in the Bunyoro sub-region expresses its lively faith through a diverse range of practices, deeply rooted in tradition yet influenced by local culture. This analysis, based on interviews with 30 individuals and FGD with 6 tutors from Bishop Ruhindi Theological College (BRTC), uncovers nuanced understandings and varying engagement in worship, sacraments, and ministry. Among these, sacramental celebrations are key, yet results show both shared recognition and significant differences in their theological understanding among all participant groups.

#### **2.3.1 Sacramental Celebrations**

Regarding baptism, while it is universally recognized as an initiation, as CL01 stated, "Baptism is the entry into the Christian community for all" (OI, 15.01.2022, Hoima), a clear division exists between infant and adult practice. This reflects broader theological debates about divine grace and human faith (Barth, 1969; Gunton, 2002), with lay readers like LR02 mainly focusing on infant

baptism as “the starting point of Christian life for children” (OI, 18.12.2022 Kagadi), and OC05 viewing it as “the recruitment of soldiers of Christ” (OI, 20.04.2023 Kagadi). Tutors like T03 acknowledge this complexity, emphasizing the need for “careful pastoral consideration” in applying baptismal theology (FGD, 20.03.2022 Hoima City).

Similarly, Holy Communion/Eucharist showed different views on Christ’s presence. Clergy like CL01 described it as “a profound encounter with Christ, a celebration of his sacrifice” (OI, 15.01.2022 Hoima), resonating with sacramental realist views (Tillich, 1963). Lay readers like LR02 called it “a remembrance of Jesus” (OI, 18.12.2022 Kagadi), aligning with more symbolic ideas (Schmemmann, 1973), while OC06 saw it as “a ritualistic act of partaking in bread and wine” (OI, 30.05.2023 Kibaale). Tutors T03 emphasized the need for clear theological teaching on these different views of Christ’s presence (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima).

Ordination, understood as a clerical rite, shows varying levels of theological understanding. Clergy like CL02 described its sacred nature as “a calling for ministry” (OI, 15.01.2023, Hoima), reflecting the view of ordination as a sacramental gift of grace (Rahner, 1976). Lay readers like LR05 focused on a “functional role in providing church leadership” (OI, 20.04.2023 Kagadi), highlighting practical aspects of ministry (Wainwright, 1997). Ordinary Christians like OC07 had a simplified view: “Ordination is when the bishop gives power to lead the church” (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima City). Tutors T04 stressed “apostolic succession and the impartation of spiritual authority” (FGD, 20.03.2023 Hoima City).

Confirmation, widely recognized as a rite of affirming faith, revealed differences in understanding the act of laying on of hands. Clergy members like CL03 described it as “a rite of passage for baptized individuals” (OI, 14.06.2022, Kagadi)—a common historical interpretation (Martos,

2001). Lay readers such as LR06 focused on its timing: “Confirmation is usually done when young people are ready to take their faith more seriously” (OI, 30.05.2023 Kibaale), which aligns with views on spiritual maturity (Osborne, 2003). Ordinary Christians like OC06 emphasized the bishop’s role: “Confirmation is when the Bishop puts his hands on you to give you the Holy Spirit” (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). Tutors like T06 highlighted the “strengthening of faith” through the laying on of hands (FGD, 20.03.2022, Hoima City), emphasizing the ongoing need for more in-depth theological education across all COU practices.

**Table 14.2 Diverse Perspectives of Sacramental Celebrations**

<b>Sacrament</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Location &amp; Date</b>	<b>Key observation &amp; Quotation</b>
<b>Baptism</b>	Clergy (CL01)	Hoima Jan 15, 2022	“Baptism is the entry into the Christian community for all”
	Lay Readers (LR02)	Kagadi Dec 18, 2022	“Baptism is the starting point of Christian life for children”
	Ordinary Christians (OC05)	Kagadi April 20, 2023	“Baptism is the recruitment of soldiers of Christ”
	BRTC Tutors (T03)	Hoima City Mar 20, 2022	Need for “careful pastoral consideration” in applying baptismal theolog
<b>Holy Communion</b>	Clergy (CL01)	Hoima Jan 15, 2022	“A profound encounter with Christ, a celebration of his sacrifice”
	Lay Readers (LR02)	Kagadi Dec 18, 2022	“Remembrance of Jesus”
	Ordinary Christians (OC06)	Kibaale May 30, 2023	“A ritualistic act of partaking in bread and wine”
	BRTC Tutors (T03)	Hoima Mar 20, 2023	Necessity for clear theological instruction on different interpretations of Christ’s presence
<b>Ordination</b>	Clergy (CL02)	Hoima Jan 15, 2023	“A calling for ministry”
	Lay Readers (LR05)	Kagadi Apr 20, 2023	“Functional role in providing church leadership”
	Ordinary Christians (OC07)	Hoima City Aug 23, 2023	“Ordination is when the bishop gives power to lead the church”
	BRTC Tutors (T04)	Hoima City Mar 20, 2023	Emphasized “apostolic succession and the impartation of spiritual authority”
<b>Confirmation</b>	Clergy (CL03)	Kagadi Jun 14, 2022	“A rite of passage for baptized individuals”

	Lay Readers (LR06)	Kibaale May 30, 2023	“Confirmation is usually done when young people are ready to take their faith more seriously”
	Ordinary Christians (OC06)	Kibaale May 30, 2023	“Confirmation is when the bishop puts his hands on you to give you the Holy Spirit”
	BRTC Tutors (T06)	Hoima City Mar 20, 2022	Emphasized the “strengthening of faith” through the laying on of hands

*Researcher’s Data December 2023*

Understanding of baptism, confirmation, ordination, and Holy Communion varies widely within the COU. Clergy offer detailed theological perspectives, while lay readers focus on practical relevance. Ordinary Christians often have simplified, authority-based views. BRTC tutors consistently emphasize the theological complexity of these sacraments and the importance of careful pastoral application and clear theological teaching to bridge the gap between official doctrines and everyday understanding across the diverse congregation.

### **2.3.2 Worship Practices**

Findings from interviews and a FGD with six Archdeacons from Bunyoro Kitara diocese revealed key aspects of worship practices within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region. Clergy members emphasized the central communal Sunday gathering in church buildings, a core element of Christian worship highlighted by Gregory Dix (1945). Prayer, both liturgical (Book of Common Prayer) and spontaneous, fostered a direct connection with God, as CL03 stated, “Prayer in our services is how we speak to God, both through the set prayers and from our hearts” (OI 15.01.2023, Hoima), aligning with Geoffrey Wainwright’s (1982) assertion of worship as doxology.

Lay readers emphasize the importance of Scripture reading (Churchman pocket book, Common Lectionary), focusing on the "holy things" and spoken words Gordon Lathrop (1993) explores. Sermons by clergy or lay leaders provide biblical interpretation relevant to local life. Theologically, this function is the fulfillment of the New Testament mandate for authoritative teaching and

application that keeps the ancient text relevant. The foundation for this continuing teaching tradition is found in Acts 2:42, which records the early church's enduring commitment to the Apostles' teaching (*Didache*), establishing it as an indispensable function of Christian leadership. LR03 noted, "The sermon helps us understand how the Bible applies to our lives here in Bunyoro" (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube), reflecting Markus Bockmuehl's (2006) emphasis on Scripture's importance and local relevance. Ordinary Christians highlight that music, combining traditional hymns with local gospel melodies led by choirs and instrumentalists, is essential. As OC03 said, "Music is the heartbeat of our worship; it lifts our spirits and unites us in praise, blending our COU heritage with our local expressions" (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube), supporting Harold Best's (2003) discussion of music's theological significance. The FGD with Archdeacons highlighted the unifying role of these practices while recognizing the diverse expressions within different congregations. AC01 stated, "Our worship seeks to honor God through Word, sacrament, and praise, while also reflecting the unique cultural context of our communities" (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima). Collectively, these findings emphasize the purposeful nature of COU worship in the Bunyoro sub-region, aiming to honor God through traditional forms while embracing diverse cultural expressions.

### **2.3.3 Liturgical Practices**

Findings from interviews and a FGD with six Archdeacons from the Bunyoro Kitara diocese shed light on the COU's liturgical practices in the Bunyoro sub-region. Clergy members emphasized that the structured rhythm of worship is guided by the COU liturgical calendar, shaping their spiritual journey through annual seasons like Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. As CL03 noted, "The liturgical calendar provides a framework for our spiritual growth, walking us through the life of Christ year after year" (OI, 14.02.2023, Kagadi), aligning with James F. White's (1990) insights on its role in spiritual formation. Lay readers confirmed that these seasons feature specific

readings, prayers from the Book of Common Prayer, and distinct rituals, sometimes with local adaptations. LR04 observed, "We follow the calendar, but sometimes we incorporate our local songs or ways of giving thanks during these special times" (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi), demonstrating a contextual engagement with tradition, a point consistent with Marion J. Hatchett's (1995) work on prescribed prayers and readings.

Ordinary Christians emphasized the importance of sacraments, with regular Holy Communion and Baptism (mainly infant baptism) being central. OC01 stated, "Baptism is how our children are welcomed into the church, and Holy Communion is when we remember Jesus' sacrifice" (OI, 30.11.2022, Kagadi), reflecting Joseph Martos' (2002) and David Power's (1999) focus on sacraments as encounters with the sacred. Archdeacons additionally highlighted the strategic use of liturgical colors and church decorations to visually emphasize the theological importance of each season. AC02 noted, "The liturgical colors and rituals help to teach and deepen our understanding of the theological meaning of each season" (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima), emphasizing how these practices foster a sense of the sacred and improve communication, as discussed by R. Kevin Seasoltz (2005) and James F. White (1990).

#### **2.3.4 Church Governance and Structure**

Findings from interviews and a FGD with six Archdeacons from Bunyoro Kitara diocese examined Church Governance and Structure within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region. Ordinary Christians emphasized that at the local level, Lay Readers lead worship and provide pastoral care under ordained clergy, with OC06 noting, "Our Lay Reader is very important; they lead prayers when the priest is away" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). This practical role aligns with Adrian Hastings' (1979) historical perspective on African Christianity, which often highlights how global Anglican structures are adapted to fit local contexts, especially through the essential role of lay leadership.

During the FGD, Archdeacons explained that Parishes are basic units led by a Priest, and groups of parishes form Archdeaconries, headed by an Archdeacon who provides administrative and pastoral support. As AC03 stated, “The Archdeaconry is a vital link, ensuring parishes receive the support they need” (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima). This reflects Jean M. R. Tillard’s (1992) concept of the church as a community of interconnected local churches. Clergy members emphasized that several Archdeaconries make up a Diocese under a Bishop, responsible for the church’s well-being and mission in their area, with CL05 highlighting, “The Bishop provides the spiritual leadership for our entire diocese” (OI 10.11.2022, Hoima). This hierarchical yet interconnected system, from Lay Readers to the Bishop, aligns with Stephen Neill’s (1965) depiction of Anglicanism’s balance of local and central authority, and also illustrates David W. Fagerberg’s (2004) focus on the organic connection between structure and the church’s functions. At the Provincial level, the Archbishop holds the highest office, offering overall guidance, as Lay Reader LR05 remarked, “We see the Archbishop as the leader of the whole Church of Uganda” (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi). This comprehensive structure ensures both local pastoral care and broader strategic direction within the Church of Uganda, aligning with Lacey C. Warner’s (2017) insights into how structure facilitates mission and order.

### **2.3.5 Holistic Community Development**

The COU has a long-standing and significant tradition of actively engaging in comprehensive community development, especially through establishing and managing educational institutions. Historically, the Church has viewed education as a vital part of its mission, grounded in a theology that emphasizes human dignity and the Great Commission. This dedication has resulted in the widespread building and administration of primary and secondary schools throughout Uganda. These schools serve as important centers for academic, moral, and spiritual growth, directly

promoting literacy, social mobility, and national progress. Scholars like Ssekamwa (1997) and Adetunmbi et al. (2024) confirm that the roots of formal education in Uganda are closely connected to early Christian missionaries, including COU Christians, a role further supported by recent research (Nsimenta, 2025; Arinaitwe, 2009).

Findings from clergy and lay readers consistently affirmed this strong commitment to education. Church members often highlighted the theological need behind these efforts, seeing schools as direct expressions of their spiritual duty. CL04 stated, "Our schools are not just about academics; they are about raising a morally upright generation and fulfilling our mandate to serve the whole person" (OI, 30.10.2022, Kagadi). This view aligns with broader theological ideas of Christian education as a complete and holistic effort (Groome, 1980; Dykstra, 2005). Lay readers, who are more connected to local realities, stressed the practical benefits and real impact. LR05 said, "The church schools are often the best in our villages. They provide quality education and keep our children disciplined" (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi), echoing the long-standing view that mission schools offer structure and quality (Ajayi, 1965; Berman, 1975).

Among ordinary Christians, a strong sense of pride and gratitude was evident for the educational opportunities provided. OC08 shared, "Many of us, or our children, would not have gone to school if it wasn't for the church. They taught us to read the Bible and also gave us a future" (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima). This highlights the church's widely perceived role as a foundational provider of education and social upliftment, deeply embedded in their lives. This aligns with scholarly observations that African churches remain crucial non-state actors in providing essential social services, particularly for marginalized populations, contributing significantly to national development (Gifford, 1998; Nsimenta, 2025). Collectively, these consistent perspectives affirm the enduring

importance of the COU's role in educational provision as a cornerstone of its practical theology and ongoing community engagement.

### **2.3.6 Language and Culture**

Findings from interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region reveal a deliberate, localized approach to language and culture in its practices. The church strategically prioritizes the use of Runyoro, the widely spoken local language, in key aspects of congregational life, although other regional languages are also used. Clergy member CL01 emphasized this, stating, "using Runyoro ensures everyone truly understands the message" (OI, 15.01.2022, Hoima), underscoring efforts to overcome linguistic barriers to understanding—a concept supported by Eugene Nida's (1993) work on cultural adaptation in religious communication.

Lay readers and ordinary Christians further expressed the deep emotional and spiritual bond fostered by this approach. LR06 noted that "praying and singing in our own language connects us more deeply" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale), while OC03 found that "hearing the Bible in Runyoro makes it feel like it's directly for us" (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube). These sentiments align with Andrew Walls' (2002) and Kwame Bediako's (1992) insights into the transformative power of vernacular translation and the indigenization of Christianity in Africa. Beyond language, archdeacons confirmed the church's active engagement with local culture, with AC06 mentioning the intentional inclusion of "traditional songs and storytelling where appropriate to make the Christian faith relatable" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima City). This dual emphasis on linguistic accessibility and cultural sensitivity shows a commitment to developing an indigenous form of Christianity that deeply resonates within the Bunyoro community, reflecting David Tshishiku's (1984) assertion that theology must mirror local lived experiences.

## **2.4 Summary**

Chapter Two offers a foundational overview of the COU's theology and practices within the Bunyoro sub-region, based on empirical research. It outlines core beliefs such as the relationship between Scripture, Tradition, and Reason (with Scripture as the ultimate authority), the doctrine of the Trinity, and the importance of the 39 Articles and ecumenical Creeds, along with key doctrinal themes including the Incarnation, Justification by Faith, the Atonement, and the Resurrection. The chapter also examines how this faith is expressed in practice through sacramental celebrations, worship, episcopal governance, and the influence of language and culture. This comprehensive overview of COU theology and practices provides a crucial baseline, establishing the norms and beliefs against which Chapter Three will analyze the specific doctrines, practices, and religious revisionism of the FOUR.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES OF FAITH OF UNITY RELIGION

#### 3.1 Introduction

Chapter three provides a detailed look at the FOUR, a unique religion that started in Uganda. This chapter explores the core beliefs of FOUR and examines its distinctive practices. Importantly, it shows how FOUR is a notable example of religious revisionism, especially in relation to the established doctrines and practices of the COU. By clearly pointing out differences and reinterpretations of Christian tradition, this chapter highlights FOUR's specific role within Uganda's diverse spiritual landscape, shaped by its connection to a major mainstream faith.

#### 3.2 Doctrines of the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR)

This section explores the core doctrines that form the basis of the FOUR, offering a detailed understanding of its theological structure. This understanding comes from extensive primary data, including interviews with 13 ordinary followers of FOUR, 13 leaders of FOUR, and 10 apostates, as well as a FGD with 6 Abakwenda (messengers) of FOUR in the Bunyoro sub-region, specifically in the Kagadi, Kibaale, Kikuube, Hoima Districts, and Hoima City. Dosteo Bisaka's *The Book of God of the Age of Oneness* is utilized throughout this thesis exclusively as a primary source document. It constitutes the subject of theological analysis, serving as the foundational text for the FOUR, rather than an external academic or theological authority used to support the study's core arguments. By analyzing these key beliefs, the study highlights the unique religious identity of FOUR within the Ugandan spiritual landscape, particularly setting the stage for examining how these beliefs reflect instances of religious revisionism in relation to the COU's theology and practices.

## **Doctrinal Revisions**

FGDs systematically identified specific doctrinal revisions introduced by FOUR concerning the COU's theology. These FGDs, conducted in Hoima (Bunyoro sub-region), involved 10 parish priests (February 10, 2023) and 6 tutors (March 20, 2023). Participants consistently noted a profound divergence in beliefs. For instance, T02 observed, “FOUR teachings are quite different from what we know in the COU” (FGD, 20.03.2023 Hoima). Likewise, RV04 stated, "We noticed significant changes in their understanding of core beliefs" (FGD, 10.02.2023 Hoima). The subsequent subsections detail these prominent doctrinal shifts, illustrating how FOUR directly reinterprets established COU theological concepts.

### **3.2.1 Core Foundations of FOUR**

This section detailed these core foundations, which included: the authoritative sources of its religious knowledge; its unique understanding of the Trinitarian nature of 'God'; the specific tenets outlined in the Doctrine of 23 Questions; its distinct Doctrine of Marriage; the interpretation of God's Commandments within its framework; and finally, the Doctrine of the 'Sacred Text' at the heart of FOUR's beliefs and practices. These foundational aspects represent significant revisions compared to the established theology and practices of the COU, as described in Chapter Two.

#### **a. Authority: Sources of Religious Knowledge**

Findings from interviews and FGDs across the Bunyoro sub-region revealed that the FOUR bases its religious authority on multiple sources. Unlike the Anglican Church of Uganda, which relies solely on the Bible as its authoritative scripture (as discussed in Chapter Two about COU's scriptural authority), FOUR identified “The Book of God of the Age of Oneness” as its main sacred text. This trait is common in new religious movements, where founders create their own sacred

writings (Wallis, 1984). Ordinary followers, such as OF01, consistently said, “Everything we believe and do came from the Book. It was the word of God for us” (OI, 18.07.2022, Kibaale). Also, the statements of O.R.O. Bisaka carried significant, almost prophetic weight, shaping the faith's understanding as it developed. Leaders like FL01 explained, "When O.R.O. Bisaka spoke, it was as if God himself was speaking to us" (OI, 18.07.2022, Kibaale), a common feature in emerging religious groups where a living leader's words can override traditional scriptural authority (Bromley, 2012). Additionally, shared interpretations greatly influenced the lived theology of FOUR. Apostates like AP01 (OI, 18.07.2022, Kibaale) noted leaders interpreting the texts and Bisaka's words for followers, while members like OM01 (FGD, 05.02.2022, Kagadi) described their collective efforts to guide adherents, demonstrating how local contexts affected the application of core beliefs within religious communities (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985).

### *New Scriptural Authority*

A significant doctrinal revision by FOUR questioned scriptural authority. This marked a direct change in COU theology, which, as discussed in Chapter Two, holds the Bible as the sole, divinely inspired, and ultimate source of religious knowledge. FOUR effectively removed the Bible's exclusive status, elevating "The Book of God of Oneness," written by its founder O.R.O. Bisaka, to a position of primary authority. This move openly rejected the Bible's supremacy in the view of its followers. Furthermore, O.R.O. Bisaka's statements shifted from biblical interpretations to direct revelations, carrying authority comparable to or even greater than the Bible's. As T03 noted, “The followers of FOUR give more importance to 'The book of God of Oneness' than the Bible itself” (FGD, 20.03.2023 Hoima). This act of rejecting an established scriptural canon and replacing the source of ultimate religious authority is a key trait of many new religions trying to establish

distinctiveness and a unique basis for their beliefs (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985). This clearly shows FOUR's strategic effort to create its own unique theological foundation.

This shift directly challenged the COU view of biblical supremacy and the role of tradition and reason in theological interpretation (as discussed in Chapter Two). Theologically, this rejection undermines the doctrine of formal sufficiency (2 Timothy 3:17), as the data shows a shift to extra-biblical revelation: RV04 noted, “The followers treat the words of O.R.O.B. as if they are direct commands from God, even more so than biblical teachings” (FGD, 10.02.2023 Hoima), a sentiment RV08 echoed by stating, “They have their own book which they value more than the Bible” (FGD, 10.02.2023 Hoima).

This change in scriptural hierarchy, placing the founder's pronouncements at the center, aligns with analyses of new religious movements where the founder's charisma becomes key to the belief system (Bromley & Melton, 2002). This functional substitution of authority violates the central biblical warnings against adding to the divine Word (Revelation 22:18-19) and represents a departure from the orthodox faith's unalterable basis of practice (Deuteronomy 4:2). It shows the powerful influence of the founder's charisma in shaping the movement's distinctive religious practices, entirely separate from traditional Christian norms.

#### **b. Trinitarian nature of ‘God’**

Findings from interviews and a FGD in the Bunyoro sub-region revealed FOUR's unique understanding of the nature of 'God,' which fundamentally revises the Christian Trinitarianism taught by the COU, as detailed in Chapter Two. While the COU follows the traditional doctrine of one God existing as three co-equal and co-eternal Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—FOUR describes a unified deity in three distinct spirits: the Lord God of Hosts, the Lord God of Holiness,

and the Lord God of Power. Ordinary followers, such as OF01 and OF02 (OI, 18.07.2022 Kibaale), firmly believed that “The Lord God of Power of God is presently embodied by O.R.O.B.,” often citing personal healings and protection as direct evidence. Leaders, like FL02 (OI, 12.08.2022 Kagadi), emphasized the "seamless and harmonious interaction among the three divine spirits," viewing O.R.O.B.'s manifestation as a modern divine expression. This reinterpretation of divine presence through a living leader, rather than the COU's view of God's transcendent yet present nature through the Holy Spirit and the singular incarnation of Christ, aligns with charismatic new religious movements (Ukah, 2018) and forms of religious syncretism seen in new spiritual traditions (Twumasi-Ankrah, 1994).

The Abakwenda (Messengers) in their FGD (22.12.2023 Kagadi) passionately affirmed this revised Trinity doctrine, especially the role of O.R.O.B. They shared numerous personal testimonies, such as MS01's statement that "Bisaka's touch healed my debilitating back pain," highlighting the tangible spiritual benefits central to many African Independent Churches (Chitando & Gunda, 2013). However, apostates, while acknowledging FOUR's teaching on the three spirits, offered critiques that align with orthodox Christian concerns. AP02 (OI, 12.08.2022 Kagadi) strongly claimed Bisaka's elevation "deviated from traditional monotheistic principles and bordered on the deification of a human being," reflecting scholarly worries about human deification in new religious movements (Russell, 2004). AP03 also noted an "intense focus on Bisaka's worship sometimes overshadowed the other aspects of the Godhead," directly contrasting with the COU's emphasis on balanced worship of all three Persons of the Trinity.

Table 15.2 offers a detailed overview of the Trinitarian concept of 'God' across FOUR doctrines, as seen by different groups, clearly showing how each aspect differs from the traditional COU view of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Table 15.2 Showing the trinitarian nature of 'God' in FOUR doctrines as perceived by different groups**

<b>Aspect of Trinitarian nature of 'God'</b>	<b>Role According to FOUR Doctrine</b>	<b>Assertions by Ordinary Followers (OF)</b>	<b>Assertions by Leaders (FL)</b>	<b>Assertions by Apostates (AP)</b>	<b>Assertions by <i>Abakwenda</i> ('Apostles')</b>
<b>The Lord God of Hosts</b>	Ultimate creator of all existence	Affirmed as the ultimate creator	Described as an inseparable facet of the singular 'Godhead.'	Acknowledged as part of the teaching, but focus is questioned	Emphatically affirmed as having a distinct role.
<b>The Lord God of Holiness</b>	Responsible for spiritual purification and moral cleansing	Affirmed as responsible for spiritual purification and moral cleansing.	Described as an inseparable facet of the singular 'Godhead.'	Acknowledged as part of the teaching, but focus is questioned.	Emphatically affirmed as having a distinct role.
<b>The Lord God of Power of God</b>	Supreme Fighter, unifier of humankind, embodied by O.R.O.B.	Firmly asserted as presently embodied by O.R.O.B.; cited healings and protection as evidence of his divinity warranting worship.	Asserted as O.R.O.B.'s contemporary manifestation addressing current spiritual needs; cited unity efforts and overcoming evil as evidence of his divine authority.	Elevation of Bisaka to this status seen as deviating from monotheism and bordering on human deification; questioned the unequivocally divine nature of his powers.	Emphatically affirmed as embodied by O.R.O.B.; cited numerous personal testimonies of healing, protection, exorcism, guidance, unity, and neutralizing charms as irrefutable proof of his divine nature warranting complete devotion and worship.
<b>Overall Trinitarian nature of 'God'</b>	Three spirits with different roles working harmoniously within one God	Understood as three distinct spirits within one God.	Emphasized as a seamless and harmonious interaction of inseparable facets within the singular 'Godhead.'	Acknowledged as the teaching, but concern raised about the balance of emphasis and potential overshadowing of other aspects by the focus on Bisaka.	Emphatically affirmed as three distinct roles within one God, with O.R.O.B. having a direct and immediate impact on their lives.

*Source: Researcher's Data April 2023*

### *Reinterpretation of the Godhead*

Rodney Stark (1996) argues that new religions often modify, reinterpret, and adapt existing religious ideas to establish their uniqueness. In line with this, FOUR offers a distinct understanding of the Trinity, viewing 'God' as manifesting through three spirits with specific roles: the Lord God of Hosts (creator), the Lord God of Holiness (purifier), and the Lord God of Power, believed to be embodied by O.R.O. Bisaka. This fundamental change significantly shifts the traditional view of the Godhead, and the new identities and relationships within its Trinity structure effectively reject elements of orthodox Christian theology. During a clergy FGD, RV05 expressed concern, stating, "Their 'three spirits' concept is not the Trinity we know. It redefines who God is" (FGD, 10.02.2023, Hoima). This redefinition is seen as a distortion of established Trinitarian doctrine, directly challenging the COU's long-standing confession of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three distinct yet co-equal Persons of one God (as outlined in Chapter Two, referencing the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds).

Likewise, in a separate FGD with tutors, T01 noted the implications of O.R.O. Bisaka's perceived embodiment, remarking, "The idea that their leader is the 'Lord God of Power' is completely foreign to our understanding of God's incarnation" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This introduction of a contemporary embodiment of divine power echoes patterns identified by Eileen Barker (1984), where the founder's role and perceived divine connection are central to a new movement's theology and authority. This directly contradicts the COUs understanding of the Trinity, having dropped its core tenets of a singular, once-for-all incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as a distinct Person of the Godhead, not a leader's embodied power. Bryan Wilson (1970) highlights that the revision of core doctrines, such as the nature of the Godhead and the role of key figures,

is a common strategy for new religions to differentiate themselves and create a unique theological identity, which is clearly demonstrated by FOUR's reinterpretation.

### **c. The Doctrine of 23 Questions in the Faith of Unity Religion**

Findings from interviews and a FGD extensively highlighted the importance of the Doctrine of 23 Questions within FOUR. This doctrine, outlined in "The Book of God of Oneness" (Bisaka, 1987:55; Kayiso, 2007; Ukah, 2018), was a key element in understanding FOUR's theological framework in the Bunyoro sub-region. Oral interviews with FOUR leaders in Hoima revealed that the *okwetekaniza* (Preparation) prayer, guided by these 23 affirmative questions, was the initial and essential step for new members joining the *itambiro* for prayer days. As FL09 stated, these "guided 23 questions expected to be answered in affirmation... precede every prayer day which takes place in the compound of the *itambiro* before one is allowed to enter" (OI, 15.10.2022 Hoima). This process was confirmed by direct observation in Kagadi (Observation, 02.11.2023), which documented a confession practice where prospective converts recorded transgressions, submitted them to Bisaka, and received symbolic acceptance followed by record destruction, signifying cleansing and integration. This structured catechism and initiation ritual are common in new religious movements that establish distinct communal identities (Dawson, 2006).

The multifaceted nature of these questions highlighted FOUR's theological and moral principles, calling for a clear break from previous affiliations and setting firm boundaries against traditional Bunyoro beliefs (Nsimbi, 1969; Beattie, 1960) and Christian beliefs (Mbiti, 1970; McGrath, 2017). This contrasts directly with the approach of the COU, which, as discussed in Chapter Two, generally seeks to evangelize within, rather than demand outright renunciation of, cultural practices unless they directly conflict with biblical teachings. For example, the rejection of traditional

Bunyoro healing involving physical alterations, exemplified by the question “whether cut to insert medicine in his/her body,” was highlighted by MS01 during an FGD in Kagadi (FGD, 22.12.2023) as rejecting “traditional ways that involve physical alterations” in favor of Bisaka's healing power. Similarly, questions about ethical conduct, past spiritual allegiances, and harmful practices, as affirmed by MS02, MS03, and MS04 respectively (FGD, 22.12.2023, Kagadi), aimed to portray these aspects of Bunyoro spirituality as “belonging to darkness and incompatible with the light of Owobusobozi.” Questions regarding engagement with traditional remedies and ancestral worship, as emphasized by MS05 and MS06 (FGD, 22.12.2023, Kagadi), called for a shift in reliance and reverence toward FOUR's principles, highlighting a focus on O.R.O. Bisaka's power and aligning FOUR with African Independent Churches that often elevate their founders (Barrett, 1968; Sundkler & Steed, 2000), which marks a departure from the COU's focus on Christ as the only mediator. The concluding plea within the 23 Questions underscored Bisaka's central role as a conduit of divine grace and unity, though perceived opposition to other religions created tension about the scope of this declared love.

### *New Catechism*

FOUR's "New Catechism" consists of 23 affirmative questions for prospective members and intentionally departs from the COU traditional educational methods, which usually rely on creeds and biblical teachings (see Chapter Two). Unlike the COU's approach to cultural adaptation, this new catechism explicitly required individuals to renounce traditional Bunyoro practices to join. As RV06 noted, "Their New Catechism, these 23 Questions, required individuals to renounce their cultural practices and traditional beliefs as a condition for joining them, which was very different from our approach" (FGD, 10.02.2023, Hoima). This clear demand for a break aligns with scholarly views of new religions that define themselves by opposition to established norms and

necessitate a complete severance of ties to reinforce group identity (Wallis, 1979; Lofland & Stark, 1965; Berger, 1967). It reflects a strategic move to create a unique and exclusive identity for the new faith, contrasting sharply with the COU's more inclusive and culturally sensitive evangelism.

Furthermore, FOUR's new catechism fundamentally changed the source of divine mediation by emphasizing religious authority on O.R.O. Bisaka, thus moving away from the COU's Christ-centered approach to initiation (as explained in Chapter Two about salvation and sacraments). T06 highlighted this key change: "This New Catechism also positioned O.R.O.B. as the key to divine favor, something absent in our catechism" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This centralization of a founder's authority is typical of new religious movements, where charismatic leaders often hold significant influence, shaping doctrines and practices, and sometimes overshadowing traditional religious figures (Barker, 1984; Wilson, 1970). This is quite different from more established denominations like the COU, which usually base authority on Scripture, creeds, and the historic episcopate, not on a living individual's mediation.

#### **d. The Doctrine of Marriage**

Findings from interviews revealed that the doctrine of marriage within the FOUR, as observed across the Bunyoro sub-region, was fundamentally structured as a covenant between the aspiring couple and their respective parents. This approach marked a significant revision from the COU theology of marriage, which, as detailed in Chapter Two, primarily views marriage as a sacred covenant between one man and one woman before God, officiated by the church. In FOUR, O.R.O. Bisaka played a central role in the initial matching of couples. According to FL03 (OI, 12.08.2022 Kagadi), the Abakwenda provided pre-marital guidance and coordinated arrangements, forwarding names to O.R.O. Bisaka for discernment of compatibility. This centralized spiritual guidance

in marital matters, where a charismatic leader directly influences fundamental life decisions, is a common feature in new religions (Coleman, 2004; Hexham & Poewe, 1997) and fundamentally differs from the COU's emphasis on individual agency and pastoral counsel within established doctrine.

During pre-marital guidance, the Abakwenda instructed couples based on words written on a marriage certificate stating, "A man shall not be prevented from marrying more other wives." Interestingly, FOUR discouraged bride wealth, which, according to AP09 (OI, 15.10.2022 Hoima), attracted men seeking "free wives," reflecting a desire to reform traditional practices that some new religions undertake (Hexham & Poewe, 1997). The marriage covenant also included provisions for property division upon death or divorce, as FL011 explained (OI 12.08.2022 Kagadi). Familial consent was paramount, with AP01 (OI, 18.07.2022 Kibaale) stressing, "They really stress that marriage is not just between the two people, but it's a bond between the families." O.R.O. Bisaka's perceived role in matching couples was also significant, with OF02 (OI, 18.07.2022 Kibaale) stating, "We trust Bisaka's wisdom in helping people find the right partners for a stable marriage," underscoring the perceived divine insight of the leader in personal affairs (Pobee, 1979).

### *Polygamy*

FOUR introduced a major revision by fundamentally rejecting the COU core doctrine of monogamy and instead allowing polygamy for men. This directly opposed the COU's scriptural view of marriage as solely between one man and one woman for life, a key principle outlined in Chapter Two. Such a clear doctrinal break from established religious norms signals a move by new religions to establish a distinct identity and create a sectarian split (Wallis, 1979). The acceptance of polygamy for men was confirmed by FL05 (OI, 20.07.2022 Kikuube), while OF06 (OI, 18.07.2022

Kibaale) justified it by saying, “unmarried women are more prone to promiscuity and prostitution if they don’t find men to marry them.” Clergy member RV01 described this teaching as “a direct contradiction” (FGD, 10.02.2023), a view echoed by tutor T04 who called it "a major difference" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This highlights FOUR's significant doctrinal revisionism and its strategic move to forge a unique religious identity that openly departs from mainstream Christian norms, especially the COU's commitment to universal Christian marriage principles.

This outright rejection of marital exclusivity aligns with how some new African religions incorporate local customs and is evident in certain African Independent Churches, reflecting processes of religious syncretism and indigenization (Mbiti, 1975; Sundkler, 1961). The founder's direct influence over personal matters like marriage highlights the pervasive nature of charismatic authority within these movements, shaping both doctrine and social practices. This doctrinal change had significant social and ethical effects on Ugandan society; RV04 highlighted its "significant implications for family life" (FGD, 10.02.2023, Hoima), and T01 noted its "substantial" consequences in communities (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima), sharply diverging from the COU's monogamous norm. This revealed a complex mix of cultural adaptation and charismatic leadership that fundamentally reshaped family structures within the movement, with major societal impacts that contrast with the COU's theological view of social order.

#### **e. The Doctrine of Commandments of ‘God’**

Findings from interviews revealed that, according to the FOUR, God's commandments are considered innate. This idea differs from the theology of the COU, which, while recognizing a natural moral law, primarily stresses divine revelation through Scripture as the ultimate and necessary source of God's commands because of humanity's fallen state (McGrath, 2017; and as discussed

in Chapter Two on COU's scriptural authority). FL13, a senior leader, stated that “all people have the ability to know the commandments of God because what God requires from people is evident in God’s nature, can easily be seen and understood by everyone as summarized in the book of God of the age of oneness” (OI, 12.08.2022, Kagadi). This view of inherent moral knowledge, while aligning with broader philosophical and theological debates on natural law or innate human conscience (Mbiti, 1970), downplays the COU's focus on revealed law.

Observation of worship meetings supported this understanding, as followers easily recited the commandments. For example, OF10 recited a nine-point list: “1. Adore the Lord God of hosts who created you 2. Honour the three days of God. 3. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. 4. Never kill. 5. Never steal. 6. Never tell lies. 7. Never behave like animals in sexual issues. 8. Never covet. 9. Never be jealous” (OI, 12.08.2022, Kagadi). This list, found in "The Book of God of the Age of Oneness" (Bisaka, 1987:68), shares thematic similarities with the Biblical Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5). However, significant differences exist, showing FOUR's revisionist approach. While Christian theology recognizes inherent moral understanding (Romans 2:14-15), it considers divine revelation in scripture the ultimate authority because of humanity's fallen state (McGrath 2017). FOUR's specific commandments, such as "Honour the three days of God" instead of the Sabbath, and its unique monotheistic phrasing, reflect distinct theological developments within a new religious movement, characteristic of syncretic reinterpretation (Walls, 2002; Sundkler & Steed, 2000).

### *Reinterpreting the Commandments of God*

FOUR's reinterpretation of the commandments of God represented a significant act of religious revisionism, directly changing key beliefs held by the COU, as discussed in Chapter Two. The

COU's understanding of the Ten Commandments includes: the exclusive worship of the triune God (1st Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me"), the prohibition of idolatry (2nd Commandment: "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything..."), the reverence for God's name (3rd Commandment: "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God..."), and the observance of the Sabbath as the Lord's Day (4th Commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.") While seemingly drawing inspiration from the structure of the biblical Ten Commandments, FOUR systematically rejected, dropped, adjusted, and modified core aspects of COU doctrine concerning these divine directives.

The fundamental change in the object of worship by FOUR marked a sharp break from the doctrine of the COU. The church's exclusive focus on the triune God was replaced with primary adoration for Bisaka, as stated in FOUR's First Commandment: "Adore the Lord God of hosts who created you." This shift was emphasized during a FGD with clergy, where RV04 said, "Our allegiance is to the Creator, the Lord of all, who brought us into being in COU" (FGD, 10.02.2023 Hoima). This radical change, which effectively replaces the Christian God as the main object of worship, aligns with Stark and Bainbridge's (1987) idea that new religions often reinterpret or replace traditional objects of worship. It directly revises the first and second commandments as understood by the COU.

Furthermore, regarding reverence for God's name and the observance of sacred time, FOUR's revisions continued to diverge from the teachings of the COU. The COU's emphasis on the sanctity of Sunday as the Lord's Day (4th Commandment in the biblical decalogue, as discussed in Chapter Two) had been removed and replaced by FOUR with their own 4th Commandment: "Honour the three days of God." During a FGD with tutors, RV06 remarked, "The observance of Sunday as the

Lord's Day is fundamental to our tradition. This shift to honoring three unspecified days represents a significant alteration" (FGD, 10.02.2023 Hoima). Regarding reverence for God's name (3rd Commandment), although a direct quote on its change was not available, the overall change in objects of worship and leadership within FOUR's system—such as T04's statement, "We teach that the Bible is the ultimate source of God's commands and moral guidance. Any other source taking precedence is a fundamental difference" (FGD, 20.03.2023 Hoima)—likely indicates a modification in how sacred names are understood and used, aligning with Berger's (1967) argument about how changes in core objects affect religious frameworks.

The source of authority for these commandments was another key area of revision. The COU firmly based its understanding on the Bible, as emphasized by T04: "We teach that the Bible is the ultimate source of God's commands and moral guidance. Any other source taking precedence is a fundamental difference" (FGD, 20.03.2023). In contrast, FOUR derived its commandments from "The book of God of the age of oneness" authored by Bisaka (1987), which clearly rejects the Bible's exclusive authority—a cornerstone of COU's theology. This establishment of a new authoritative source is characteristic of religious sects, as highlighted by Wilson (1970). Essentially, FOUR distorted the core meaning of the Ten Commandments in these essential aspects to fit its unique theological framework, directly revising the established doctrines of the COU.

#### **f. The Doctrine of the 'Sacred Text'**

Interviews showed that the FOUR uniquely centers around its single sacred text, *The Book of God of the Age of Oneness* (1987), written and self-published by its founder, O.R.O. Bisaka. This starkly contrasts with the COU which, as explained in Chapter Two, recognizes only the Holy Bible as its inspired and infallible sacred scripture. As OF03 (OI, 15.10.2022) noted, the new book

is crucial because "This Book is everything for us. It has the true word of God for this time, and it shows us how to live in unity." In this text, Bisaka introduced a radical theological shift, claiming it replaces the Bible to inaugurate the "age of oneness" (Bisaka, 1987:20). Creating new scriptures that supersede earlier ones is common among charismatic founders, often centralizing authority and establishing a unique revelation (Wallis, 1984; Bromley, 2012). This marks a notable act of religious revisionism when compared to traditional Christian norms.

Beyond its doctrinal statements, *The Book of God* also served as a detailed resource, including historical stories, Bisaka's autobiography, hymns, moral guidelines, and accounts of miraculous healings. Its format, similar to the Judeo-Christian Bible with numbered verses, made it easier to use. However, the book also critically viewed the Bible and Christian traditions. FL07 (OI, 12.08.2022) explained, "Bisaka's Book shows us where other religions went wrong and why his message of unity is the only true path now." This confrontational stance is common among new groups trying to set clear theological boundaries (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985), highlighting its revisionist stance compared to the COU's emphasis on biblical authority. The book's final section, structured like a catechism with 47 questions and answers, spread key beliefs, such as Bisaka's divine status ("I am one of the Spirits which are in one God," Bisaka, 1987: 83-84), reinforcing Bisaka's main theological view and subtly challenging the COU's Christ-centered doctrine.

Furthermore, Bisaka's clear definitions of key terms and his insistence on their unchanged translation emphasized the text's authority in maintaining cohesion. The doctrinal claim that FOUR was the only genuine religion with the pure word of God was often highlighted. OF11 (OI, 18.07.2022) stated, "We believe Bisaka's Book is the true word from God for this age. The Bible has been changed, but our Book is pure." This assertion of exclusive truth and scriptural purity is a common

way for new religions to set boundaries (Beckford, 1985), and it directly contradicts the COU's view of the Bible as the unchanging, eternal Word of God. However, as some former members mentioned in interviews, this strict stance against change might actually limit internal critique and adaptation within a changing spiritual environment (Introvigne, 2016).

### *Reinterpreting Sacred Text*

The COU firmly established the Holy Bible as its sole, inspired, and infallible sacred text, considering it the ultimate authority on all matters of faith and practice (as detailed in Chapter Two). While valuing tradition, reason, and experience in theological reflection, the COU maintained its subordination to and guidance by Scripture. In stark contrast, FOUR introduced "The Book of God of the Age of Oneness," authored by its founder, as its unique 'sacred text.' This act of religious revisionism involved a claim that this new book superseded the Bible, presenting the "true word of God for this time." This elevation of a new text to the level of primary scripture signified a radical change in the COU's foundational belief in the Bible's unique authority and sufficiency. This phenomenon aligns with sociological analyses of religious innovation, where new religions often introduce new sacred texts or reinterpret existing ones to address perceived inadequacies or offer new solutions (Stark, 1996; Dawson, 2007).

This revision was significantly achieved by rejecting the Bible's role as the only and ultimate sacred text. During a Focus Group Discussion with Clergy, RV03 stated, "For us in the COU, the Bible is the foundation of our faith. Introducing another book that claims to be superior is to undermine everything we believe" (FGD, Clergy, 10.02.2023, Hoima). FOUR thus changed the very basis on which religious truth and practice were determined by adding and elevating a new text to a position of importance. This directly altered the source from which divine revelation and

guidance were believed to come. The COU's doctrine, which regarded the Bible as uniquely inspired and infallible, was directly challenged by FOUR's claim that their text was the "true word of God for this time," implying a rejection of the Bible's timeless and ultimate authority. T03 agreed with this during a FGD, noting, "The idea that God's word needs updating through a new book went against our understanding of the completeness of Scripture" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This act of establishing a new scriptural authority is a common trait of emerging religions seeking to set themselves apart from established traditions, often analyzed for their social role in creating group identity and shared beliefs (Wallis, 1984; Berger, 1967).

Furthermore, the claim that the new text replaced the Bible suggested a fundamental reinterpretation of traditional scriptural authority within Christianity. The COU's reliance on the Bible as the complete and final word of God was essentially challenged. By introducing a text claiming to be a more relevant or updated revelation, FOUR altered the established understanding of divine communication and the role of scripture in faith. This revisionist approach marked a significant shift in the very foundation upon which religious truth and practice are based, moving away from the COU's biblically centered framework toward a new textual authority. As RV07 commented during FGD, "To place another book above or even alongside the Bible as the primary word of God is a fundamental departure from Christian teaching and tradition" (FGD, 10.02.2023, Hoima). This displacement of a core sacred text signals a major change in religious belief and practice, often accompanied by the reinterpretation of history and tradition to justify the new authority (Kuhn, 1962; Hexham & Poewe, 1997).

### **3.2.2 Distinctive Doctrines**

Beyond its core foundations (as detailed in section 3.2.1), the Faith of Unity Religion is defined by several distinctive doctrines that fundamentally differentiate it from the theology and practices of the COU. These unique theological positions and beliefs are essential for understanding the movement's identity and practices. They include: the Doctrine of Bisaka's Incarnation and Resurrection, the Doctrine of Salvation in the FOUR, and the Doctrine of Religious Symbols.

#### **a. The Doctrine of Bisaka's Incarnation and Resurrection**

A central belief of FOUR was the divinity of its founder, O.R.O. Bisaka, born on June 11, 1930. Followers firmly believed he was God incarnate, a claim that directly challenges the COU's core doctrine of a single, unique incarnation of God in Jesus Christ (as established in Chapter Two). This fundamental teaching was clearly emphasized during a FGD in Kagadi (FGD, 05.02.2022). During this discussion, MS03, a senior elder, vividly described a pivotal trance-like experience where Bisaka "went to see the Lord of hosts," a moment that, in their view, led to his ultimate ascension to a divine status. This story of a founder's direct encounter with the divine and subsequent deification is a common feature of charismatic new religious movements seeking special legitimacy (Wallis, 1984; Barker, 1989). Bisaka himself declared, "I am the manifestation of God in this age, sent to restore humanity to its original state of oneness with the Creator" (Congregational Address, 22.05.2023 Hoima). This claim of a contemporary, personal incarnation directly contradicts the COU's Trinitarian view of God, which attributes incarnation solely to Jesus Christ.

Following O.R.O. Bisaka's death on January 13, 2021, the doctrine further developed to include his "resurrection" in the form of his son, who took leadership and is now recognized as the resurrected Bisaka. This ongoing divine presence became central to the new religion, directly opposing

the COU's doctrine of Christ's sole bodily resurrection and ascension. Followers believed that the original Bisaka's divine actions—such as "Healing all diseases, fighting Satan and evil practices" (MS06, FGD, 05.02.2022)—were now embodied in the current manifestation. This broad impact, including healing and social change, helped establish charismatic authority within the movement, as explained by Stark & Bainbridge (1985). This validation continued through the 'resurrected' figure of Bisaka's son, meaning the special spiritual power and legitimacy once attributed to the founder were believed by followers to now exist in and be expressed through his successor, thus maintaining the existing system of authority. As FL09 stated, "O.R.O. Bisaka never truly left us; he is still here, working through his son" (OI, 15.10.2022, Hoima). This idea of a continued, incarnate divinity through a successor sharply contrasts with the COU's view of apostolic succession and the enduring but non-incarnate presence of the Holy Spirit.

This doctrine of Bisaka's incarnation and resurrection, however, greatly differed from mainstream Abrahamic religions and most notably from the core beliefs of the COU. The COU strongly believed in the unique and singular incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. This fundamental doctrine claimed that Jesus, the Son of God, uniquely took on human flesh, lived a sinless life, died for humanity's sins, and was resurrected to offer salvation. This belief in Christ's singular incarnation was a key element of Christian theology, setting it apart from other faiths and being confirmed by historical creeds such as the Nicene (325 AD) and Chalcedonian (451 AD) definitions (as discussed in Chapter Two). These theological frameworks stressed that Christ is fully God and fully human at the same time, typically ruling out the possibility of multiple subsequent incarnations (Macquarrie, 1990; McGrath, 2017).

*Bisaka's Incarnation: A Fundamental Theological Departure*

FOUR explicitly rejected this core Christian belief by asserting that its founder, O.R.O. Bisaka, was God incarnate, a present-day manifestation of the divine, and that this divinity continued through his son. This marked a fundamental theological change. During a FGD with clergy, RV06 stated, "The belief that Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God, the only incarnation, is central to our faith. To claim another person held that status was a direct contradiction of the Gospel" (FGD, 10.02.2023, Hoima). The uniqueness of Christ's incarnation, a non-negotiable doctrine for the COU, was directly contradicted and replaced by the claim of another individual's divinity and its continuation. This revision fundamentally twisted the traditional Christian understanding of who God incarnate is and the singular historical event of Christ's coming. Nothing was simply dropped or adjusted; instead, a central tenet was directly opposed and replaced with a new belief.

Furthermore, during a FGD, T05 commented, "The idea of multiple incarnations, especially one in recent history, fundamentally challenged the historical and theological significance we attributed to Jesus Christ" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This statement fundamentally undermined the central claims of the Christian faith regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ, representing a radical act of religious revisionism. The COU's understanding, as expressed by RV02 in the FGD, was that "Jesus Christ is the fullness of God in human form (Colossians 2:9). There was no other like Him, and no subsequent individual could claim the same unique divine identity" (FGD, 10.02.2023, Hoima). Sociologically, the claim of a founder's divinity is common in the formation of new religious movements, often serving as a centralizing force for belief and devotion, as well as a key strategy for establishing new authority (Wilson, 1990; Dawson, 2007). This creates a distinct identity separate from traditional religions. Despite these differences, followers remain firmly convinced; OF04 stated, "Bisaka is different. He is God who walks among us, and his spirit lives on through his son, unlike other prophets or gods" (OI, 20.09.2022, Kikuube). Scholarly

analyses of incarnation (Burns, 2022) support that FOUR's claim, based on personal experience and follower assertions, does not align with established comparative religious frameworks.

#### **b. The Doctrine of Salvation in the FOUR**

Findings from the interviews revealed that salvation within the FOUR operates through a dual pathway: ethical conduct and ritual participation. This fundamentally revises the COU's core doctrine of salvation, which firmly states that salvation is a free gift from God received solely through grace by faith in the atoning sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ (i.e., *sola gratia* and *sola fide*). Primarily, FOUR followers believed salvation resulted from consistently performing good deeds. FL05 (OI, 20.09.2022, Kikuube) exemplified this by describing a daily commitment to charitable acts, noting, "Every morning I make a list of 11 things to do... I find joy in performing good deeds for Abatali (non-members of FOUR)." This emphasis on tangible moral behavior, articulated in Bisaka's teachings (1987:25) as laying a "firm foundation for your holy spiritual life," reflects a common practice in many religious traditions where salvation is actively earned through demonstrable actions (Smith, 2004), a direct departure from COU's *sola fide*.

FOUR's understanding of salvation also included a ritualistic aspect centered on divine intervention and healing. O.R.O.B. was believed to perform salvific miracles, such as deliverance from Satan and diseases, on the 2nd, 12th, and 22nd of each month (Bisaka, 1987:26). Elder FL08 (OI, 15.10.2022, Hoima Oil City) explicitly stated that "all members of the FOUR who attend worship on the 2nd, 12th, and 22nd are assured of salvation because O.R.O.B. saves everyone who enters his *itambiro*." This guarantees salvation for participants while marking non-participants as opposing spiritual forces. The focus on healing and miraculous intervention as key to salvation is a major

feature of many African Independent Churches and new religions (Sundkler & Steed, 2000), further setting FOUR apart from the COU's soteriology.

Thus, FOUR's doctrine linked individual good deeds with communal worship. While ethical conduct is a common theme across different traditions—such as Buddhist *karma* (Keown, 2000) or Jewish *mitzvot* (Sacks, 1995)—FOUR's uniqueness was its claim that salvation was assured through obedience to specific worship days and O.R.O.B.'s intervention. From a Christian theological perspective, this doctrine differed greatly. Classical Protestant theology (Luther, 1525; McGrath, 2017) strongly emphasized *sola gratia* (grace alone) and *sola fide* (faith alone) in Christ's atoning sacrifice as the only way to salvation. This sharply contrasted with FOUR's focus on human effort and ritual participation. The emphasis on good deeds risked echoing Pelagian and semi-Pelagian views, which downplay divine grace (Chadwick, 1993; Augustine, c. 426-427 AD). In addition, the idea of assurance of salvation through ritual attendance, rather than through a personal, transformative relationship with Christ, marked a fundamental difference in how salvation is achieved within Christian theology (Wright, 1997), representing a major revision by FOUR.

### *Shift in Justification*

FOUR's religious revisionism regarding justification involved introducing a dual pathway to salvation, which directly contradicts the core doctrine of the COU that salvation is by grace through faith alone, as explained in Chapter Two. The COU teaches that salvation is a free gift from God, received solely through faith in Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice and resurrection. While good works are seen as a result of genuine faith, they are not a way to earn salvation. This view aligns with the central principle of *sola fide* (faith alone) from the Protestant Reformation, emphasizing that

justification before God is achieved through faith in Christ, independent of human works or rituals (Luther, 1535; McGrath, 1986).

FOUR explicitly rejected this central Protestant tenet. They modified the understanding of how salvation is achieved by introducing the necessity of both ethical conduct and ritual participation, specifically attendance at worship on designated days. This ritual adherence is believed to channel salvific miracles through O.R.O.B., the founder. During a FGD with clergy, RV08 stated, "Our understanding is clear: salvation is through grace, a gift from God through faith in Jesus. Any teaching that adds human effort or ritual as a requirement fundamentally changes the Gospel" (FGD, Clergy, 10.02.2023, Hoima). This emphasis on earning salvation through good deeds and guaranteeing it through ritual, mediated by the founder, fundamentally altered the COU's understanding of salvation as a gift received through faith in Christ alone. This shift toward emphasizing human actions and ritual participation as necessary for salvation represents a move away from the doctrine of *sola gratia* (grace alone), a foundational principle of Protestant theology (Calvin, 1536; Luther, 1525; Bavinck, 1895-1901). Such shifts in soteriology are common in new religious movements as they establish distinct paths to spiritual fulfillment (Robbins, 1988).

During a FGD with Tutors, T05 stated, "The assertion that salvation can be earned or guaranteed by specific actions or attendance at certain rituals is a departure from the core message of grace that we teach" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). The claim that those outside these specific rituals belong to opposing spiritual forces further distorted the traditional Christian understanding of God's grace being freely offered through faith in Christ. The idea of grace as unmerited favor was modified to include human actions and ritual practices as necessary for salvation. Nothing was explicitly removed from the COU's doctrine, but its core meaning was deeply changed and supplemented

with new requirements. As RV05 mentioned during a clergy FGD, "The exclusivity implied in their teaching, suggesting salvation is tied to specific rituals within their community, contradicts the open invitation of the Gospel to all through faith in Christ" (FGD, 10.02.2023, Hoima). Such exclusive claims, where salvation is linked to specific group membership or practices, resemble certain Christian exclusivist views which emphasize Jesus as the only way to salvation (John 14:6), but fundamentally redefine the means and focus of that salvation within the new religious framework (Wallis, 1984; Dawson, 2007), thus showing a major revision of COU theology.

### **c. Doctrine of Religious Symbols**

Interview findings showed that while FOUR explicitly rejected traditional religious symbols like the Christian cross and Islamic crescent, it developed its own symbolic language to express its identity and beliefs. This marked a significant departure from the COU's theological framework, which centers the cross as the key symbol representing Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. FL06 (OI, 18.07.2022, Kikuube) stated, "We reject old symbols like the cross and crescent because our religion uses its own symbols, such as Bisaka, to show who we are and what we believe." These symbols include Bisaka himself, specific colors like white and yellow/gold, and various gestures of reverence. The frequent depiction of Bisaka emphasized his role as a divine figure believed to influence followers' destinies (Ukah, 2018). Testimonies confirmed this, with FL11 sharing, "Seeing Bisaka in my dream brought healing" (OI, 12.08.2022 Kagadi), and OF03 and FL02 noting, "...his image reminds us of God's presence and protection" (OI, 12.08.2022, Kagadi). Charismatic movements often create new iconography by reinterpreting traditional symbols to establish a unique identity (Coleman, 2004; Introvigne, 2016). In FOUR's case, this redefinition replaces Christ-centered symbolism. The performative aspect was visible in followers' attire; they wore white robes symbolizing purity, often with a "Kitara" sash for spiritual protection (Kayiso, 2007).

FL04 (OI, 20.09.2022, Kikuube) said, "Wearing the white robe signifies our commitment to purity, leaving behind symbols of other faiths." Bisaka's distinctive clothing, including long white robes and a unique "Kitara," reinforced his symbolic importance and established a visual identity different from COU clergy vestments.

Architectural features and gestural symbols were also key parts of FOUR's revised symbolic system. The consistent use of white and yellow in *Matambiro* (healing centers) design created a distinct identity (Ukah, 2018), contrasting with the more varied liturgical colors and architectural styles found in COU churches (as discussed in Chapter Two). Symbolic behaviors included the mandatory removal of shoes before entering sacred spaces, signifying respect, and kneeling or bowing before Bisaka, symbolizing deep reverence. FL13 (OI, 12.08.2022, Kagadi) stated this removal was "a rejection of worldly attachments." FL01 (OI, 18.07.2022, Kibaale) shared, "When we kneel before O.R.O. Bisaka, it is an expression of our submission to God's representative on earth." Researcher observations (22.03.2022, Hoima Oil City) noted followers offering garments for Bisaka to step on, reinforcing his symbolic prominence. From a Christian theological perspective, FOUR's symbolic doctrine differed greatly, mainly through the rejection of Christocentric symbols like the cross (McGrath, 2017) in favor of Bisaka's central role, raising concerns about potential idolatry and moving away from the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ (Barth, 2004; Exodus 20:3-5; Augustine, 2003). The redefinition of sacred space, rituals, and attire (Eliade, 1959; Bell, 1992) shifted focus from traditional Christian practices, highlighting a fundamental difference in understanding Christology, authority, and the nature of divine presence (Calvin, 1989), constituting a comprehensive symbolic overhaul.

### *Reinterpretation of Religious Symbols*

FOUR's reinterpretation of religious symbols represented a significant act of religious revisionism, directly challenging and replacing the established symbolic framework of the COU, as thoroughly described in Chapter Two. The COU places the cross at the very center of its symbolic system, symbolizing the crucifixion, resurrection, and salvation work of Jesus Christ. Other important symbols include the baptismal font, altar, and various liturgical colors, all carrying specific theological meanings connected to Christian doctrine.

In stark contrast, FOUR systematically rejected these traditional Christian symbols, deeming them irrelevant or outdated. During a FGD with Clergy, RV01 remarked, "They completely abandon the cross, which is the very heart of our Christian faith. That alone shows a radical break" (FGD, 10.02.2023, Hoima). Instead, FOUR replaced them with new, internally developed symbols, mainly focusing on O.R.O. Bisaka himself. This change effectively shifted the object of reverence from Christ to the founder, as T02 explained during a FGD: "The symbols they use, especially Bisaka's image and presence, serve the same purpose as our cross and sacraments, but they direct devotion towards him, not Christ" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This represents a direct departure from the COU's Christ-centered worship and symbolism, replacing it with an anthropocentric emphasis.

The implications of this symbolic shift are significant. By rejecting the cross and adopting new symbols associated with Bisaka, FOUR not only changed its visual identity but also fundamentally redefined the center of salvation, authority, and divine presence. This act aligns with sociological theories that suggest new religious movements create unique symbolic worlds to strengthen their identity and set themselves apart from parent traditions (Berger, 1967; Dawson, 2006). This

change is not just a small update but a complete replacement of the COU symbolic landscape with a new set of signs that emphasize FOUR's distinctive theology, especially the divinity and ongoing presence of its founder. This directly conflicts with the second commandment (prohibition of idolatry) and its understanding of worshipping God alone that the COU observes.

### **3.3 Practices of Faith of Unity Religion**

The doctrines of the FOUR, as explained in the previous sections, are clearly represented through a specific set of religious practices. This section carefully examines these practices, showing how they represent a significant revision of the established theology and practices of the COU, which were described in Chapter Two. This includes an exploration of Worship Practices in FOUR, Liturgical Practices, Celebrations in FOUR, Names and Religious Identity in FOUR, Governance and Structure in FOUR, and Language and Culture. By analyzing the differences in these areas, this section highlights the lived experience of FOUR's unique theological framework.

#### *Practical Revisions*

Findings from FGDs conducted within the Bunyoro sub-region of Uganda included discussions with 10 clergy on February 10, 2023, and 6 tutors on March 20, 2023, both in Hoima. These revealed that FOUR had implemented significant revisions—forms of religious innovation and indigenization—in practices commonly observed in the COU across several key aspects. This process created a unique religious expression for FOUR, rooted in local culture and a distinct theological framework that clearly departs from COU norms. The FGDs consistently showed that FOUR systematically rejected, dropped, modified, twisted, or adapted several practices prevalent in the COU, directly reflecting its revised theological foundations. Such processes of innovation and indigenization are often seen in the emergence of new religions, especially in African contexts,

as they navigate and incorporate local traditions with new spiritual ideas while establishing a unique identity (Sanneh, 1989; Hackett, 1998).

### **3.3.1 Worship Practices in FOUR**

Findings from interviews and FGDs on worship practices within the FOUR in Uganda's Bunyoro sub-region show vibrant, sensory-rich rituals. These practices mark a significant change from the more structured and formal worship typical of the COU, which emphasizes liturgical order, biblical readings, and Trinitarian prayer (as outlined in Chapter Two).

Gatherings in sacred spaces like the Kapyemi camp (Kagadi) involved lively singing and dancing as acts of devotion. This was in sharp contrast to the more restrained bodily expressions seen in traditional COU worship. As FL05 explained, "When we sang and danced together, we felt a strong unity, a connection not only with O.R.O. Bisaka but with each other" (OI, 20.09.2022 Kikuube). This communal and experiential nature of worship is typical of many new religious movements, where shared emotional experiences build strong group bonds (Dawson, 2011).

Prolonged prayer sessions, often involving communal recitation and personal supplications specifically directed to O.R.O. Bisaka, were also central. This significantly revises the COU's traditional prayer practice, which mainly focuses on praying to God the Father through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit (as detailed in Chapter Two). A key element was the reading of "The Book of God of the Age of Oneness," which, as discussed in the "Sacred Text" section, replaced the Bible's central role in the COU worship. OF06 noted, "When the Book was read, it's like Bisaka himself was speaking to us, giving us strength and understanding" (OI, 18.07.2022 Kibaale). Such sacred texts often serve as foundational pillars for the identity and doctrine of new

religions, providing a direct connection to divine authority (Melton, 1999), in contrast to the COU's biblical focus.

The laying on of hands by Bisaka during healing ceremonies was an important practice. FL07 recounted, "When Bisaka laid his hands on my head, I felt a warmth spread through my body, and the pain instantly lessened" (OI, 15.10.2022 Hoima). This indicated a belief in the direct transfer of divine power through Bisaka, a common feature in charismatic and healing-focused movements where leaders are seen as channels for miraculous intervention (Csordas, 1994). This differed from the COU's more general approach to healing prayers, often led by clergy without the same centralized personal mediation of divine power.

Furthermore, walking barefoot on sacred grounds within these sites symbolized deep respect for the holy environment (Eliade, 1959), a practice not found in typical COU worship spaces. Colourful decorations and wearing liturgical or ritual gowns enriched the worship atmosphere, along with symbolic objects like staffs and altars. OM03 said, "Everything we did, from the songs to the way we dressed and decorated, was to honor Mukama (Lord) and feel His presence among us" (FGD, 05.02.2022 Kagadi). OM06 added, "The singing lifted our spirits and brought us closer as one family in Mukama" (FGD, 05.02.2022 Kagadi). These practices strengthened social bonds and collective identity (Turner, 1969; Bell, 1992).

### *Re-envisioning Worship*

FOUR's revisionism in worship involved a clear rejection of key elements of the COU. This included removing traditional Christian hymns, established liturgical formats, and any direct praise or invocation of the Christian God, Jesus Christ, and Christian prayers. Instead, FOUR adapted, altered, and modified worship practices to create a unique religious expression.

This rejection of traditional COU worship styles was clear in FOUR's adoption of lively, sensory-rich rituals marked by energetic singing, dancing, and rhythmic clapping. As RV01 stated, "They have introduced a very energetic style of worship with constant singing, dancing, and clapping, which is quite different from the more solemn and structured services we have in the COU" (FGD, 10.02.2023 Hoima). This change aligns with observations in the sociology of religion, where new religions often set themselves apart through unique ritual practices, forming distinct emotional and social connections (Wilson, 1970; Luckmann, 1967; Bell, 1997).

FOUR additional practices were adapted and modified by centralizing healing power. The laying on of hands for healing by O.R.O. Bisaka became a core ritual, directly changing the more diverse and less centralized prayer for healing approach of the COU (as discussed in Chapter Two). RV05 noted, "While prayer for healing is part of our practice, the direct laying on of hands by a single figure believed to transmit divine power in this way is not a central or commonly emphasized ritual in the COU" (FGD, 10.02.2023, Hoima). The centralization of healing power in the founder is a common feature in new religious movements with charismatic leaders (Barker, 1984; Weber, 1922; Meyer, 1999).

Furthermore, FOUR altered the musical tradition by introducing specific sacred hymns like "Nkaikiriza Ruhanga Murungi," which conveyed their unique doctrines. This effectively rejected the traditional COU hymnal and its Christocentric theological content. T06 highlighted this, stating, "Their songs are not just for praise; they teach you what to believe about God and their leader. This is a specific way they build their understanding" (FGD, 20.03.2023 Hoima). This demonstrates an explicit rejection and adaptation of fundamental worship elements, a common strategy for establishing a distinct religious identity and reinforcing group cohesion through shared

symbolic expressions (Durkheim, 1912; Geertz, 1973; Kloppers, 2020), all directly contrasting with the COU's established worship forms.

### 3.3.2 Liturgical Practices

Findings from interviews and FGD in Uganda's Bunyoro sub-region across Kibaale, Kagadi, Kikuube, Hoima, and Hoima Oil City showed that FOUR uses different liturgical practices alongside its main worship. These practices mark a clear departure from the traditional liturgical practices of the COU, which usually feature a set order of service, specific lectionary readings, fixed prayers, and sacrament-centered rituals.

A key element of FOUR's revised liturgy was the use of liturgical vestments. As FL09 stated (OI, 15.10.2022, Hoima), members wore a white *kanzu* secured with a *Kitara* during ritual admission on specific worship days (the 2nd, 12th, and 22nd of each month). FL05 noted this practice "marks our belonging to the age of oneness brought by O.R.O Bisaka" (OI, 20.09.2022, Kikuube), signifying a clear group identity through dress (Firth, 1973; Kubler-Ross, 1997). This contrasts with the COU's use of specific vestments (e.g., albs, stoles, chasubles) that represent clerical roles and liturgical seasons rather than membership or a 'new age.' FOUR Leaders (Abakwenda and Abahe-reza) exclusively wore white *kanzu* (robes). OF01 in Kibaale explained, "This white robe shows we are clean before O.R.O.B. and dedicated to his service" (OI, 18.07.2022). He also said that the *Kitara* was considered "a protection, a way to fight against bad spirits" (OI, 18.07.2022, Kibaale), reflecting the protective and symbolic power often attributed to ritual garments (Turner, 1969), which differs from the COU's symbolic reliance on the cross for protection. The researcher's observations at various *itambiro* supported this, noting the founder, O.R.O. Bisaka, wore a distinctive long white silk robe and bishop-style girdle, symbolizing his supreme authority within the

FOUR community (Observation, 11.06.2023, Kagadi). Such distinctive attire for religious leaders is common in many new religions, signifying their unique spiritual status and role (Dawson, 2011), but in FOUR's case, it challenges the COU's understanding of episcopal authority and vesture.

Beyond vestments, the prominent use of liturgical colors, especially white and yellow (gold), was another significant practice, as FL05 mentioned (OI, 20.09.2022, Kikuube). Observations in the *itambiro* and on printed materials throughout the Bunyoro sub-region confirmed this (Observation, 11.06.2023, Kagadi). FL13 in Kagadi proudly declared that white and yellow "are our colors, they show who we are, the people of the age of oneness" (OI, 12.08.2022, Kagadi), further explaining that "white reminds us of purity and light, while yellow is like the sun, full of God's power" (OI, 12.08.2022). The symbolic use of colors to convey theological meaning and group identity is a well-established practice across many religious traditions (Grimes, 1990; Senn, 2012). This consistent use of liturgical colors emphasized their unifying symbolic importance within the FOUR, influencing not only their own spaces but also, as observed, occasionally extending to decorative choices in other local religious institutions in Uganda, although their specific theological interpretation of white and yellow differs from Anglican liturgical color meanings.

### *Reinterpreting Liturgy*

FOUR's religious revisionism deliberately diverged from the COU by selectively adopting, adapting, and significantly modifying liturgical elements. This included their order of service, use of colors, vestments, and other symbols, aligning with broader trends of indigenization and syncretism common in African new religions (Bediako, 1995; Hastings, 1979). FOUR specifically removed core COU components such as Christian prayers (e.g., the Lord's Prayer, collects), biblical scripture readings from the lectionary, the Eucharist (Holy Communion), and Baptism.

Instead, FOUR modified the overall format, replacing their own prayers, songs, and scripture from “The Book of God of the Age of Oneness.” As T04 observed, “They follow a pattern that resembles a church service, but the words and the books they use are completely different” (FGD, March 20, 2023, Hoima). They also adjusted gathering times and changed the meaning of liturgical elements while keeping some structural features like teaching, though with revised content. RV05 explained, “They have what looks like a sermon, but the content is entirely about Bisaka and their own teachings, not from the Bible as we know it” (FGD, February 10, 2023, Hoima). This selective borrowing and modification is a common approach for new religions seeking both familiarity and distinction, a process called “ritualization” by scholars to describe how practices become authoritative and unique (Barker, 1984; Wallis, 1984; Bell, 1997), fundamentally altering the COU's established liturgy.

The adaptation of liturgical colors was also evident. While FOUR used white (symbolizing purity and light), their use of yellow (a color associated with the ruling government in Uganda) demonstrated a unique contextualization. This sharply contrasts with the COU's symbolic use of colors linked to the Christian calendar and theological themes (e.g., green for growth, red for Pentecost). RV03 mentioned, “The cultural adaptation of vestments like the white kanzu worn by followers was also significant” (FGD, 10.02.2023, Hoima). O.R.O. Bisaka's distinctive silk white kanzu reinforced his unique status. While followers wore the kanzu on worship days, senior leaders adopted it as daily attire, similar to the COU bishops. Leaders also adapted garments, wearing white kanzus like cassocks. Still, the crozier, a traditional symbol of episcopal authority in the COU, was exclusively carried by Bisaka, re-signified to emphasize his unique authority. RV05 observed, “The way Bisaka carries that staff, it's like a king, not just a religious leader as we understand it” (FGD, February 10, 2023, Hoima). This reinterpretation of vestments and symbols is crucial for

constructing a distinct identity and establishing new material expressions of belief (Geertz, 1973; Morgan, 2010), representing a direct revision of the COU's liturgical symbolism and authority.

Furthermore, FOUR introduced entirely new symbolic practices, such as advising new members to write their sins on pieces of paper as a sign of repentance. This comprehensive approach to liturgical practice shows a deliberate strategy of selective borrowing, cultural integration, and fundamental change to create a unique religious identity. This process is essential for new religion to connect with their specific socio-cultural environment and build collective belief (Luckmann, 1967; Berger, 1967; Harvey, 2012), all of which involve significant revisions of COU liturgical norms.

### **3.3.3 Celebrations in the Faith of Unity religion**

Findings from interviews conducted in various *Matambiro* (healing centers) within the Bunyoro sub-region of Uganda highlight the importance of celebrations in the FOUR. These celebrations regularly take place on the 2nd, 12th, and 22nd of each month as prayer days, along with three major annual festivals: February 22nd (marking Bisaka's first healing miracle in 1980), July 2nd (Twaikya, giving thanks to God for Bisaka's children), and June 11th (Bisaka's birth anniversary) (Bisaka, 1987). This sharply contrasts with the COU's liturgical calendar, which is based on the life of Christ (e.g., Christmas, Easter, Pentecost) and traditional saints' days.

As FL04 noted, these were "vibrant gatherings, often held in *Matambiro* adorned in white (representing earthly power or purity) and yellow (symbolizing heaven) – FOUR's predominant colors – involve adherents dressed in white liturgical gowns engaging in energetic singing and dancing" (OI, 20.09.2022 Kikuube). Observations at Kasasa Itambiro in Hoima Oil City revealed monthly prayer days filled with "rhythmic clapping and swaying during praise songs" (Observation,

12.03.2023 Hoima Oil City), underscoring the lively and participatory nature of these events. This focus on sensory-rich, communal rituals aligns with sociological and anthropological theories about how shared symbolic systems and collective effervescence foster communal identity and reinforce group solidarity (Durkheim, 2008; Bell, 1992; Geertz, 1973).

A particularly important element across all celebrations was the sacred hymn "Nkaikiriza Ruhanga Murungi" ("My God is good"), composed by Bisaka (Bisaka, 1987:9-10). During an interview at Kibaaale *Matambiro*, FL06 stated, "This song, O.R.O. Bisaka gave it to us long ago. It reminds us of God's goodness at all times, in happiness and sorrow," (OI, 18.07.2022 Kibaale), highlighting its emotional and theological significance. The hymn's lyrics emphasize its theological depth and serve as a powerful invocation, showing how sacred music promotes religious unity and conveys values (Bauman, 1992). Observations at Kapyemi, FOUR's headquarters in Kagadi (11.06.2023 Kagadi), further showed the "fervent intensity" of singing this hymn, bringing the congregation together in shared devotion and strengthening FOUR's distinct worldview. OF01 described this as a "new chapter, moving away from the older religious narratives" (OI, 18.07.2022, Kibaale), indicating that the festive atmosphere greatly enhanced the movement's appeal and unique identity, a common trait of new religions aiming to establish a distinctive appeal and identity (Ukah, 2018; Stark & Bainbridge, 1987).

From a traditional Christian theological perspective, the vibrant and central celebrations within the FOUR, while sociologically understandable as a way of fostering community, were not recognized as aligned with mainstream Christian doctrine and worship. This was due to a perceived shift in the focus of devotion away from the Triune God and the centrality of Jesus Christ (Barth, 2004; McGrath, 2017) toward the veneration of Bisaka and the movement's unique symbols and history

(Bisaka, 1987; Kayiso, 2007). This departure from established Christian symbols and practices, along with the potential for what some Christians might interpret as excessive reverence toward a human figure (Exodus 20:3-5; Augustine, 2003), and a perceived lack of grounding in core Christian events and teachings, led to a view of these celebrations as a deviation from genuine Christian worship, where authenticity was linked to the centrality of Christ and connection to biblically rooted traditions.

### *Inventing Celebrations*

FOUR engaged in religious revisionism by fundamentally rejecting the traditional Christian calendar of religious festivals and creating its own. This process, standard in new religious movements establishing distinct identities (Bromley & Melton, 2002; Dawson, 2007), involved centering a new calendar on founder O.R.O. Bisaka's life, with Year One starting on his birthdate. This clear break from observances like Christmas and Easter (which are central to the COU's liturgical year, as discussed in Chapter Two) included communal celebrations on dates such as February 22nd (Bisaka's first healing miracle), July 2nd (Twaikya or Children's Day), and June 11th (Bisaka's birth anniversary).

RV02 highlighted this, stating, "FOUR have their special days... completely replacing our traditional Christian holidays" (FGD, 10.02.2023, Hoima). RV07 added, "FOUR have essentially created their sacred history and calendar, focused entirely on Bisaka" (FGD, 10.02.2023 Hoima). This creation of new sacred times reinforces group identity and sets the new religion apart through a unique collective memory (Durkheim, 1912; Eliade, 1959), directly revising the COU's Christ-centered calendar worship.

Furthermore, FOUR redefined the concept of regular worship days. While the COU considers Sunday its main day of worship, based on the biblical tradition of resurrection, FOUR established monthly prayer days on the 2nd, 12th, and 22nd of each month at *Matambiro* (healing centers). These gatherings, marked by lively singing, dancing, wearing white *kanzu*, and rituals focused on unity, form a new tradition that effectively replaces the traditional Christian emphasis on Sunday worship. T01 described them as "very different from our quieter Sunday services and the holidays we observe" (FGD, 20.03.2023 Hoima). T02 observed, "These monthly gatherings seem to be central to their community life and their worship of Bisaka" (FGD, 20.03.2023 Hoima), underscoring their importance. This intentional change to the religious calendar and liturgical practices, centered on the founder and key events in the movement's history, is common in new religions, helping foster unity and set them apart (Wallis, 1979; Eliade, 1959; Wilson, 1990), and represents a clear departure from the COU's traditional worship schedule and focus.

### **3.3.4 Names and Religious Identity in FOUR**

Findings from the Bunyoro sub-region highlight how the FOUR actively shapes a unique religious identity through its naming practices. This represents a direct revision of the COU's naming traditions, which, as discussed in Chapter Two, have historically combined biblical, Christian (often European-origin), and local names, usually given at baptism to mark entry into the Christian community.

FL11 noted that followers believe naming children is a "divine responsibility" (OI, 12.08.2022, Kagadi). To go beyond traditional denominational ties, parents are encouraged to select names with positive connotations; OF09 stated, "parents in our religion are encouraged to choose names with positive meanings, as these names will be invoked repeatedly throughout the individual's life"

(OI, 15.10.2022, Hoima). This approach, which intentionally contrasts with European-origin names often associated with COU or Catholic ties, aligns with how new religious movements create distinct identities (Dawson, 2011; Stark & Bainbridge, 1987). While some Christian viewpoints may see it as ignoring biblical name significance (McGrath, 2017), for FOUR, it indicated a deliberate strategy to establish a unique religious identity separate from established denominations.

Further reinforcing this identity, FOUR actively disassociates from specific traditional Bunyoro names linked to deities or animals. For example, MS04 mentioned that names like "Abwooli, Ateenyi, and Abooki" were avoided (FGD, 5.02.2022, Kagadi). The movement also rejects foreign names, which MS02 noted were seen as "imposed post-baptism during the colonial era" (FGD, 5.2.2022, Kagadi), reflecting FOUR's belief that Europeans aimed to spread their own beliefs by deeming indigenous practices inferior (Bisaka, 1987). These naming strategies collectively carve out a unique social and spiritual space, separate from both traditional indigenous beliefs and historical Christian influences (Ukah, 2018). This demonstrates FOUR's comprehensive effort to establish a distinct spiritual and cultural sphere, directly challenging the more syncretic approach to naming practices of the COU.

### *New Identity in Name*

FOUR fundamentally revised naming practices, explicitly rejecting the COU's use of foreign (often Christian) names for a nativistic revival. This involved intentionally choosing local names with positive meanings while rejecting those associated with traditional spirits or foreign influence, strengthening an indigenous religious identity (Linton, 1943; Wallace, 1956). This directly contrasts with the COU's practice of baptizing individuals with names, often biblical or Christian,

which represent their new identity in Christ (as detailed in Chapter Two on COU's baptismal practices).

Clergy observed this emphasis, with RV06 stating, "They are very particular about the names their followers use... avoid those with any connection to traditional spirits or foreign origins" (FGD, 10.02.2023). CL01 added that new local names represented "new religious belonging" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima), serving as a symbolic break with the past (Dawson, 2006). This demonstrated a significant strategic effort to develop a unique, indigenized religious identity, indicating a clear disassociation from previous affiliations and a move away from the COU's traditional naming conventions.

This focus on nomenclature as a marker of identity was also observed by tutors. T01 mentioned the intentional effort "to create a distinct linguistic identity" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). T04 added that selecting the right name "aligns a person with the good forces and separates them from negative influences of the past" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This deliberate linguistic distinction, reflecting religious and cultural values (Akinaso, 1981), highlighted FOUR's approach to constructing identity, aiding boundary maintenance and social cohesion within the new movement (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Barth, 1969). It indicated that linguistic practices were not just superficial changes but fundamental elements in shaping the movement's unique theology, establishing its boundaries, and reinforcing its collective ideology, thus diverging from the more universalistic naming practices of the COU.

### **3.3.5 Governance and Structure in FOUR**

Findings from interviews with leaders and members of the FOUR in Uganda's Bunyoro sub-region showed a hierarchical governance structure with clear distinctions between leaders and ordinary

followers. This setup marks a significant change from the COU's more decentralized and conciliar governance, which, as discussed in Chapter Two, is episcopally led but includes synodical governance and a well-defined system of clerical orders and lay leadership.

At the top of FOUR's structure stood O.R.O. Bisaka, who held central spiritual authority and was revered by followers as 'God in the flesh.' His leadership was based on perceived divine spiritual experiences, a common trait among charismatic religious movements where founders claim direct revelation (Weber, 1978; Dawson, 2011). As FL02 explained in Kagadi, "O.R.O. Bisaka is our direct connection to God; his word is law" (OI, 12.08.2022, Kagadi). Bisaka was distinguished by wearing traditional liturgical garments, such as a white cassock, and carrying symbols of authority like a white crozier, representing his kingship and pastoral role within the community—typical attributes of leaders claiming unique spiritual status (Eliade, 1959). This exclusive divine authority granted to Bisaka directly contrasts with the COU's view of authority, which is based in Christ and mediated through bishops, clergy, and synods.

Below Bisaka, FOUR's religious hierarchy was highly structured to maintain authority and unity, further distinguishing it from the COU's decentralized model. It descended from the Abandeye (children of Bisaka), who held authority over everyone except Bisaka, to the Abakwenda (Messengers). The Abakwenda, who were key communicators and enforcers of order, wore distinctive kanzu with rank markings; FL07 noted they were "the pillars of the community, guiding us in worship and teaching us the true path" (OI, 15.10.2022), while FL01 added their duty was to "teach the doctrines and guide the people" (OI, 18.07.2022). Further down the hierarchy are the Abahe-reza (servants), identifiable by their kanzu with two knots, and finally the Abaikiriza (new believers) as the entry point. This layered structure, with its defined roles and central headquarters in

Kapyemi, fostered a disciplined community and reinforced its sacred worldview, reflecting the institutionalization common in successful new religious movements (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987). This indicated a deliberate and effective strategy for creating a self-sustaining, highly centralized religious organization, marking a clear departure from the established governance of the COU.

### *Restructuring Governance*

FOUR's religious revisionism rejected the COU's more distributed leadership, restructuring governance into a distinct hierarchy with founder O.R.O. Bisaka at its divine apex. This centralization of authority, characteristic of charismatic leadership (Weber, 1968), was evident to the clergy. RV05 noted "At the top is Bisaka, and then there are levels below him," while RV06 emphasized Bisaka's "immense authority, unlike our bishops whose authority is primarily pastoral and administrative, not divine" (FGD, 10.02.2023, Hoima). This represents a fundamental revision of the COU's understanding of authority, which traditionally flows from Christ through ordination and episcopal succession, not through a single, divinely incarnate figure. The introduction of the Abendaye (Bisaka's children), who hold unique, elevated positions, further altered this structure by adding hereditary elements sometimes linked to the routinization of charisma (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985), which is absent in the COU's leadership, rooted in merit and ordination.

This suggested a strategic move to centralize and strengthen Bisaka's authority, moving away from traditional church governance. This hierarchical structure was reinforced through the adaptation and redefinition of authority symbols, such as robes and Bisaka's exclusive use of the crozier, creating a syncretic authority system that blends indigenous and Christian elements (Bediako, 1995; Sundkler & Steed, 2000). Tutors observed the Abendaye's special respect; T02 noted, "The Abendaye are treated with special respect. They have roles that others don't, clearly showing their

elevated status within the faith. This isn't how leadership roles are usually defined in our churches" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). T01 further observed that governance "revolved entirely around Bisaka. His word is final" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This consolidation of power is common in new religions (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Wallis, 1984). This approach effectively legitimized the new hierarchy, blending cultural symbols and Christian reinterpretation for internal cohesion and local acceptance (Geertz, 1983), thereby radically revising the shared and delegated authority model of the COU.

### **3.3.6 Language and Culture**

Findings from interviews and observations within Uganda's Bunyoro sub-region highlighted the central role of language and culture in FOUR. The religion strategically used Runyoro, the local language, as the main medium for its rituals, teachings, and daily interactions, fostering a strong sense of community identity. This linguistic focus was emphasized by the deliberate preservation of specific key phrases and hymns in Runyoro, contrasting directly with the COU's more dualistic approach of using both local languages and English in its liturgy and administration. As FL04 noted, "there are words which were told never to change in all languages and these are Omukama Ruhanga Owobusobozi Bisaka, Itambiro, Omwikiriza, Omuhereza, Omukwenda, Okujweeka, Abendaye" (OI, 20.09.2022, Kikuube). Furthermore, FL09 emphasized the importance of linguistic continuity for unity, stating that "Five Hymns are barred from changing: Ruhanga Owamahe, Nkaikiriza Ruhanga, Tumukugize itweena, Nobusobozi bwe, and Ruhanga Owamahe Aizire" (OI, 12.08.2022, Kagadi). This careful maintenance of Runyoro not only strengthened internal cohesion but also set the FOUR apart within Uganda's diverse religious landscape, reflecting a broader trend in African new religions to vernacularize sacred concepts and establish a distinct ethno-religious identity (Sanneh, 2008; Ukah, 2018).

Beyond language, the FOUR selectively incorporated and reinterpreted various cultural practices, often reframing familiar African traditions through the lens of FOUR doctrine. This differed from the COU's engagement with culture, which typically seeks to indigenize Christianity within cultural forms rather than reinterpret the forms themselves as inherently sacred to a new faith. As FL06 emphasized, "communal prayers for well-being, reminiscent of traditional healing rituals, are not evil, and we adopt them to focus on the One God, frequently invoking the name of O.R.O. Bisaka" (OI, 18.07.2022, Kibaale). Similarly, OF08 explained the significance of attire, stating that "our adoption of liturgical white robes (*kanzu*), a garment with East African roots, has new religious significance within the FOUR, symbolizing purity and the 'age of oneness,' with specific markings denoting rank" (OI, 15.10.2022, Hoima Oil City). Indigenous ritual elements like rhythmic singing and clapping, observed during worship in the Bunyoro sub-region (Observation, 22.02.2023, Kikuube), were integrated to foster unity. Yet, their lyrical content and context were aligned with FOUR's doctrine. This careful use of culture helped the FOUR connect with the local community while also building a separate religious identity, a process often described as syncretism or indigenization, where new religious meanings are constructed from existing cultural forms (Landau, 2017; Hefner, 1998).

### *Reclaiming Language and Culture*

FOUR's religious revisionism challenged the COU's dominance of the language used in worship and administration, traditionally seen as English alongside local languages. FOUR actively aimed to reclaim local culture by primarily using Runyoro in rituals and teachings, aligning with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) ideas on decolonizing the mind. They also adopted indigenous practices, such as communal prayers and traditional attire like the white *kanzu*, reinterpreting these within their own doctrine. As clergy observed, RV02 stated, "They conduct their services and teachings

mainly in Runyoro. This is different from our churches where English is often used alongside the local language” (FGD, 10.02.2023 Hoima). RV03 added, “I've seen them use traditional songs and adapt them for their worship, giving them new religious meaning” (FGD, 10.02.2023 Hoima). This process exemplifies indigenization, where new religions adapt to local African contexts (Bediako, 1995; Meyer, 1999), representing a clear revision of the COU's linguistic practices.

This focus on local language and cultural re-framing established a unique identity rooted in local customs, intentionally reducing perceived Western influences. This cultural reclaiming and linguistic pride fostered unity and a strong sense of identity among followers. T06 said, “They really promote the use of Runyoro. Even in casual conversation among themselves, they often use it” (FGD, 20.03.2023). T02 added, “The white Kanza they wear, while a common garment, has become a key symbol of their religion, almost like a uniform that connects them to their local roots and their religious identity” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This approach by FOUR, emphasizing cultural reclamation and linguistic pride, aligns with research on language as a powerful marker of group identity and boundary maintenance (Al-shammari, 2018; Barth, 1969). These findings suggest that FOUR strategically used language and cultural symbols to create a distinct ethnoreligious identity, fostering strong internal unity and signaling a clear break from traditional religious norms and the more universalistic culture of the COU.

### **3.4 Summary**

Chapter Three explores the FOUR, a distinct Ugandan religion, by examining its unique doctrines and practices based on extensive interviews and FGDs. The FOUR's authority mainly comes from its founder, O.R.O. Bisaka, and his self-written “Book of God of the Age of Oneness,” which replaces the Bible. Key doctrines include Bisaka's claimed divinity and incarnation, a unique

understanding of the Trinity, salvation through good deeds and ritual participation, and acceptance of polygamy. The FOUR's practices involve lively, sensory-rich worship, healing ceremonies led by Bisaka, distinctive liturgical clothing, and unique symbols that reject traditional Christian iconography. This chapter ultimately highlights The FOUR's significant religious reform, creating a new spiritual identity through fundamental reinterpretations of traditional beliefs and practices, paving the way for Chapter Four's focus on the profound impact of these differences on the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE IMPACT OF THE FAITH OF UNITY RELIGION'S DOCTRINE ON THE CHURCH OF UGANDA IN BUNYORO SUB-REGION

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter explored the complex impact of the FOUR's doctrine on the COU within the Bunyoro sub-region. It examined the specific doctrinal challenges that FOUR posed to established COU beliefs, highlighting key theological differences and their direct effects on COU theological understanding. Additionally, this chapter looked into the real-world effects of FOUR on the COU's ministry in Bunyoro sub-region, including its influence on COU attendance, membership, financial stability, and outreach efforts. Finally, the chapter considered the broader social and cultural consequences of FOUR's presence on COU communities, including its impact on social cohesion, traditional values, and family structures. The analysis was based on testimonies from COU leaders (priests and lay readers) and regular members, along with insights from theological tutors, to offer a clearer picture of the lived religious experiences within the Bunyoro COU community. This thorough analysis aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how FOUR's presence is reshaping the religious landscape and affecting the lives of COU Christians in the Bunyoro sub-region.

#### **4.2 Doctrinal Challenges and Their Direct Theological/Ecclesial Impacts**

The FOUR posed significant doctrinal challenges to the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region, fundamentally diverging from established Christian beliefs and practices. These challenges struck at the core of COU theology and doctrine, leading to direct theological and church-related impacts.

##### **4.2.1 Scriptural Authority**

COU theology endorses the Bible as the highest authority in faith and doctrine, highlighting its divine inspiration, infallibility, and the vital role of careful interpretation based on its historical, literal, and cultural contexts (McGrath, 2017; Wright, 2011; Fee & Stuart, 2014). However, findings from multiple sources reveal a direct and clear challenge to this core principle by FOUR. CL06 noted that “the FOUR rejected the Bible, establishing its own religious texts ‘The Book of God of the age of Oneness’ and the pronouncements of its leader as the primary source of authority. They call it the 'new scripture' for the new age” (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). This outright rejection of Christianity's foundational text was explicit, with Bisaka himself (1987) stating his goal to “do away with the Bible” to create a new form of spiritual unity under his leadership. LR04 further explained, “They teach that the Bible is outdated, that its messages were meant for a past age, and that Bisaka's book is the fresh, relevant word of God for today's world, directly from God without human error. They claim it is superior because it came through the new manifestation of God” (OI, 19.03.2023, Kagadi). This assertion aligns with scholarly insights by Dawson (2007), who notes that new religions often establish unique sacred texts to provide a distinct foundational story and source of authority, legitimizing their new teachings.

This rejection of the Bible created an immediate and irreconcilable divide in religious authority, undermining the very source from which COU theology derives its strength and from which COU Christians seek guidance for life and doctrine. OC01, an ordinary Christian, said, “They don't use the Bible at all. They have their own book, which is very different from what we are taught. It's confusing for people who have grown up with the Bible as God's true word, and it makes them question everything they previously held sacred” (OI, 30.11.2022, Kikuube). As a result, this difference at the core of religious authority created a deep gulf between the theological frameworks, making direct theological dialogue difficult and seriously undermining the COU's focus on biblical

literacy and formation among its members. T03 expressed this concern, saying, “Without the shared authority of the Bible, there's no common ground for theological discussion. It's like two different languages of faith, making reconciliation of beliefs nearly impossible and forcing COU Christians to explicitly defend the Bible's ongoing relevance” (FGD, 27.04.2023, Hoima).

#### **4.2.2 The Nature of God**

COU theology adheres to the Nicene Creed, affirming the doctrine of the Holy Trinity—one God existing in three co-equal and distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Ware, 1993; Gunton, 1993; Webster, 2003). This belief is fundamental to Christian understanding of divine unity and diversity, and it influences COU worship and prayer. However, findings from theological tutors and lay leaders revealed a direct contradiction of this Trinitarian understanding by FOUR's doctrine. T04 stated, "Their monotheistic emphasis completely disregards the Trinitarian understanding central to COU theology. They had a singular focus on a belief that in God there are three major spirits: The Lord God of Hosts, The Lord God of the Holiness of God and The God of Power (Bisaka), with Bisaka being the most immediate, active, and accessible manifestation of the divine, effectively elevating him to the pinnacle of their pantheon" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). LR02, a COU lay leader, reinforced this, revealing, "They always talk about 'God the Creator' in a singular way, but then they refer to Bisaka as 'God of Power' or 'God of this Age.' They don't seem to acknowledge Jesus and the Holy Spirit as part of the same God like we do, or they see them as lesser spirits or manifestations that culminated in Bisaka, who is now the ultimate divine presence" (OI, 18.12.2022, Kagadi). Scholars like Ukah (2018) similarly observe how the deification of Bisaka integrates various spiritual entities into his person, challenging established Christian pneumatology and trinitarianism.

This fundamental difference in the conception of the divine being posed a major theological challenge to the COU understanding of God, leading to deep doctrinal confusion and theological disorientation. COU congregants, particularly those with a limited grasp of Trinitarian doctrine, found themselves perplexed by a seemingly more straightforward, more tangible divine figure. OC03 explicitly shared her struggle: "It's so confusing to hear them say Bisaka is God, and our God is somehow outdated. My mind battles because I was taught Father, Son, Holy Spirit, but they make it sound so different and more powerful" (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube). Clergy faced significant challenges in articulating the nuances of their Trinitarian faith against this leader-centric framework. CL08 expressed profound frustration: "How do you explain the mystery of the Trinity... when people are being taught that God is now essentially embodied in a man from their own region, diminishing Christ and the Spirit? It fundamentally changes who we worship" (OI, 05.04.2023, Hoima Oil City). LR05 lamented that during catechism, some members influenced by FOUR "just look blankly. They already have a different picture of God in their minds, and it makes our teaching feel irrelevant to them" (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi). This directly challenged COU worship and devotion, causing internal doctrinal conflict. T01 underscored the gravity, observing, "This isn't just a minor theological disagreement; it's a completely different understanding of who God is, which means it's a different religion by definition. It attacks the very foundation of Christian belief" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This requires COU teaching to explicitly re-emphasize classical Trinitarian doctrine, contrasting it with what could be perceived as henotheism or polytheism from an orthodox Christian viewpoint.

#### **4.2.3 The Person of Christ**

Central to COU belief is the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is understood to be fully God and fully human, the unique Savior of humanity through his atoning death and resurrection

(Bauckham, 2008; McGrath, 2006; Wright, 2011). This singular, irreplaceable role of Christ is a cornerstone of Christian salvation and worship. In sharp contrast, findings indicated FOUR presented a fundamentally different view of Jesus, often elevating their own leader, Bisaka, to a position of paramount spiritual authority, thereby diminishing and outright denying the unique status and role assigned to Christ in Christian theology. CL07 noted that FOUR adherents proclaimed "that the age of Jesus expired, it is now a new age of oneness of Bisaka, and his message is the ultimate truth and salvation for humanity" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). Furthermore, Bisaka himself explicitly denied the salvific role and even the historical existence of Jesus, stating in his book, "Jesus was not a Savior, and never existed" (Bisaka, 1987). OC04, another ordinary COU Christian, reported, "They say Jesus was just a prophet for a short time, but Bisaka is the real God for eternity, who walks among us and provides true deliverance. It shocked me to hear that, as it goes against everything, I learned in Sunday school" (OI, 28.02.2023, Hoima). This substitution of Christ's role with that of the founder is a common feature in new religions seeking to establish a unique theological identity (Wilson, 1990; Dawson, 2007).

This radical difference in Christology represented a core and irreconcilable point of divergence between the COU and FOUR. LR02 noted, "They spoke of their leader in ways that we reserve for Jesus Christ. Their view of Jesus diminished compared to our belief in his divinity and saving power. It's like they replaced Jesus with Bisaka as the central figure of adoration and reliance, making our Christ-centered faith seem irrelevant to them" (OI, 18.12.2022, Kagadi). This directly undermined the central message of COU evangelism, which is Christ-centered, and made effective Christian catechesis difficult, as the very foundation of Christ's identity and salvation was rejected. T05 emphasized the profound theological implications: "If Jesus is not the unique Son of God, and Bisaka has taken his place, then the entire narrative of salvation as we know it collapses. It's a

different religion altogether, not merely a sect of Christianity, challenging the very essence of the Nicene Creed” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This forced COU teaching to explicitly reaffirm Christ's unique identity, divine authority, and singular salvific work in light of this theological displacement.

#### **4.2.4 The Way of Salvation**

The COU doctrine clearly emphasizes salvation as a gift of grace received through faith in Jesus Christ, highlighting the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross as the only way for humanity to be reconciled with God (McGrath, 1988; Packer, 1973; Stott, 1986). This doctrine of *sola gratia* (grace alone) and *sola fide* (faith alone) is central to Protestant Anglicanism, emphasizing God's initiative and mercy in salvation. In contrast, findings showed that FOUR presented a different path to spiritual fulfillment or salvation, focusing on obedience to their leader's teachings and active participation in their unique rituals. T05 noted that FOUR teaches “that good deeds lay a firm foundation for spiritual life which is enough to save you, and that these deeds, combined with strict obedience to Bisaka and participation in specific communal rites, are the true path to salvation” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). LR09 added, “They tell their followers that if you obey Bisaka and come to the *Itambiro* on the special days, your salvation is secured. This directly contradicts everything we preach about Jesus' sacrifice being sufficient and complete for salvation” (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima Oil City). This shift toward a works-based view of salvation echoes Pelagian or semi-Pelagian heresies from a traditional Christian perspective (Chadwick, 1993).

This fundamental difference in soteriology created a major gap in how salvation was understood, directly opposing a core belief of COU theology and the message of the Gospel. CL01, a COU priest, said, "Their emphasis on allegiance to their leader and adherence to their specific practices

as the means of salvation was a direct contradiction to our doctrine of salvation through grace by faith in Jesus Christ. It's a works-based righteousness, not faith-based, putting the burden squarely on human effort rather than God's freely given grace" (OI, 15.01.2022, Hoima). OC03 confirmed, "They believe that following their leader's instructions and attending their gatherings is what saves you. They don't talk about Jesus dying for our sins at all like we do in our church; it's all about Bisaka's power and what you do for him" (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube). LR05 noted, "They have specific prayers and ceremonies they must perform to be right with God, which is different from our understanding that it's about believing in Jesus. It shifts the burden from God's grace to human effort and compliance with Bisaka's demands" (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi). This directly affected evangelistic efforts, as the core message of salvation was fundamentally different, leading to internal conflicts for COU Christians struggling with FOUR's alternative path to spiritual well-being and raising concerns about spiritual manipulation.

#### **4.2.5 Prayer Practices**

COU prayer practices are traditionally aimed at God the Father through Jesus Christ's mediation, often following established liturgical forms within church services and personal devotions (Cullmann, 1995; Peterson, 2000; Merton, 1962). This Christ-centered approach to prayer is a key characteristic of Christian spirituality. However, observations from FOUR worship centers, such as Kyenzige Itambiro, showed markedly different prayer practices where supplications mainly appeared to be directed toward their leader, Bisaka, reflecting his perceived divine status and role as an intermediary (Observation, 12.12.2022, Kagadi). CL05 explicitly stated, "Our members had observed that FOUR prayers were directed toward their leader Bisaka, unlike our prayers, which are directed to God through Jesus Christ. It's a fundamental shift in who is addressed in divine communication" (OI, 10.11.2022, Hoima).

This divergence revealed a key difference in devotional practices and the focus of worship. LR08 explained, "When we asked some of the FOUR members about their prayers, they said they call upon their Bisaka's name for blessings and guidance, which differs from our teachings in the COU. We pray to God through Jesus, not to any man, regardless of how revered" (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima Oil City). OC05 concurred: "Praying to a person feels wrong, even if they are revered. Our prayers are directed to God alone, through Christ, as we're taught since childhood. Their practice makes us uncomfortable" (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi). T05 stated, "They have specific times and places for prayer, with their leader Bisaka central to receiving these prayers, unlike our direct approach to God through Jesus. This creates a dependence on Bisaka for divine access and intercession, bypassing Christ's unique mediation" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This difference makes shared worship incompatible, clearly defines the object and orientation of spiritual devotion, and challenges the COU's doctrine of praying directly to God as the Triune God, raising serious concerns about idolatry from a COU perspective.

#### **4.2.6 Moral Teachings**

COU moral and ethical principles are mainly based on biblical teachings, interpreted through tradition and reason, emphasizing love, justice, and compassion. They support monogamous marriage as the ideal and normative structure for Christian families (O'Donovan, 2008; Hauerwas, 1983; Yoder, 1972). However, findings show significant differences in FOUR's moral teachings and ethical framework, especially regarding family issues, marital fidelity, and obedience to authority. OC02 stated, "They have different rules about family matters, especially concerning marriage; for example, Bisaka matches the couples, and a man can marry as many wives as he wants as long as he can support them all to reduce prostitution, which is not aligned with what the church teaches about fidelity, the sanctity of marriage, and the biblical standard of one man, one woman" (OI,

30.11.2023, Kikuube). LR03 added, "FOUR's emphasis on absolute obedience to Bisaka overrides individual conscience in ways that may seem ethically questionable, especially when it conflicts with basic human decency and core Christian ethics" (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube).

These differences in moral teachings caused significant conflicts with established COU ethical principles and societal norms. T01 suggested, "While both traditions value community, their approaches to ethical decision-making differ greatly; FOUR's ethics are based entirely on Bisaka's pronouncements, which can seem arbitrary, whereas COU ethics come from a broader theological framework involving Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. This is clear in Bisaka's directive prohibiting his followers from participating in Christian prayers, social gatherings, and other religious functions, including family events like weddings of COU relatives, which leads to social isolation" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). CL09 added, "We had to counsel many families struggling with the moral dilemmas posed by a spouse joining FOUR and adopting practices like polygamy, which directly contradict our Christian marriage vows and cause significant family distress" (OI, 23.09.2023, Hoima). This directly affected how COU Christians viewed and interacted with FOUR followers on ethical and social issues, creating moral dilemmas for individuals and straining community relationships, exposing a clear ethical disagreement.

#### **4.2.7 Worship and Sacramental Practices**

COU worship services often feature a structured liturgy, including Scripture reading (lectionary), communal prayer (such as collects and litanies), preaching (homily), and the celebration of sacraments like Holy Communion and Baptism as central means of grace and visible signs of Christian identity and community (Davies, 1996; Wainwright, 1980; Jasper & Bradshaw, 2017). However, findings consistently show that FOUR's worship largely differs from traditional Christian

sacraments and established liturgical formats, emphasizing leader-centric devotion and alternative rites. CL03 explicitly stated, "They don't have anything resembling our Holy Communion or Baptism. Their gatherings involve energetic singing, dancing, and honoring their leader, not the sacraments we hold so dear as essential for Christian life and grace, linking us to Christ's sacrifice" (OI, 14.06.2022, Kagadi). This absence of core Christian sacraments marks a significant theological shift.

This marked a fundamental departure from COU liturgical and sacramental practices, undermining the COU's understanding of visible signs of invisible grace and communal identity, as well as the very means by which grace is often believed to be given. LR06 stated, "Their worship doesn't follow any set order like ours; it's more spontaneous and centered on their leader's presence, almost like a direct performance for Bisaka, rather than a structured worship of the Triune God in response to His word and grace" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). OC01 added, "They don't have the same kind of structured prayers or responses that we use in our services, making it hard for a COU Christian to participate meaningfully and see it as Christian worship. It feels foreign to our tradition" (OI, 30.11.2022, Kikuube). T03 pointed out, "The absence of sacraments, especially Holy Communion, which is central to COU identity and our understanding of grace, marks a major difference in their worship practices, effectively disconnecting them from a key aspect of Christian spiritual life and fellowship with the broader Church. It indicates a different view of how God relates to humanity" (FGD, 27.04.2023, Hoima). These differences made shared worship incompatible and challenged the COU's focus on sacramental life and traditional means of grace, causing confusion and spiritual dislocation for former COU members.

#### **4.2.8 Church Structure and Leadership**

The COU functions within a well-structured hierarchy, with leadership roles such as bishops, priests, and deacons, and governance based on canon law. This structure guarantees pastoral care, maintains theological continuity through apostolic succession, and includes a system of accountability and collegiality (Chadwick, 1993; Sykes, Booty, & Knight, 1998). In contrast, findings showed that FOUR's leadership model was highly centralized around its founder, Bisaka, whose authority was seen as absolute and divinely authorized—a trait often linked to Max Weber's (1947) idea of charismatic authority. LR06 observed, "all key decisions within FOUR emanated solely from Bisaka; there was no sense of a council or synod making collective decisions, unlike our COU, which has many levels of consultation and shared decision-making from the local parish to the provincial level" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale).

This profound difference in governance models contributed to a "crisis of unity" and "divisiveness" within the broader religious landscape, as described by Nwadiolor & Udezo (2017) and Ojoniyi Bode (2020). CL01 explained, "Our COU system is characterized by shared leadership and accountability, extending from the local parish council up to the Provincial Assembly, with checks and balances to prevent abuses of power and ensure broad representation" (OI, 15.01.2022, Hoima). T02 further noted, "The pronounced concentration of authority in a single individual within FOUR, and the subsequent hereditary succession, stood in significant contrast to the COU emphasis on collegiality, shared governance, and adherence to established canonical processes. It's a top-down, unquestioning system that lacks the accountability and democratic principles we find crucial in church governance" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This challenged the COU system of shared leadership and accountability, impacting inter-organizational collaboration and raising concerns among COU leaders about potential authoritarianism and the cult of personality within the new religion (Bryan Wilson, 2001; Eileen Barker, 1989).

### **4.3 Practical Impacts on Church of Uganda Ministry**

The emergence and growth of the FOUR not only presented theological challenges but also clearly affected the COU ministry within the Bunyoro sub-region across various practical areas.

#### **4.3.1 Impact on Attendance**

Findings from church leaders and members consistently indicated a direct decline in COU attendance where FOUR was present, significantly affecting the vibrancy and sustainability of COU worship life. This decline is measurable and is reflected in noticeable shifts in congregational numbers over time. For instance, CL04 lamented, “We saw a noticeable drop in our Sunday congregations, especially in parishes closer to Bisaka's main centers like Kapyemi. Some of our long-term members were no longer attending regularly; their absence is deeply felt and changes the dynamic of our services, making the church feel emptier. In 2018, before FOUR’s widespread presence in our area, our average Sunday attendance was around 150 Christians, but by late 2022, the number reduced to approximately 90, representing a 40% decline” (OI, 30.10.2022, Kagadi). This sharp decline was confirmed by LR03: "Our church used to be full, with people filling the pews, but now many are empty. People openly talk about going to the 'Itambiro' instead, where they say they feel more engaged and see direct miracles through Bisaka's presence. We’ve seen our congregation shrink from an average of 200 members in 2017 to just about 110 Christians by early 2023” (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube). OC06 further shared, “My neighbor, who was a regular churchgoer, stopped coming. She told me since her brother joined FOUR, she now goes there with him, saying it feels more lively and directly connected to God's power” (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale).

This observable shift is summarized in the table below, illustrating the attendance changes in selected COU parishes within areas impacted by FOUR’s presence:

**Table: Decline in average Sunday attendance in Selected COU parishes 2017/2018 vs 2022/2023**

Parish Location	Sunday Attendance 2017/2018	Sunday Attendance (2022/2023)	Percentage decline
Kyabaranzi (Kagadi)	150	90	40%
Kyangwali (Kikuube)	200	110	45%
Katikara (Hoima Oil City)	180	100	44%
Nyamarunda (Kibaale)	120	70	42%

*Source: Researcher’s Data May 2023*

This shift directly reflects religious economies theory, where individuals choose organizations offering more valued “goods and services” (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Iannaccone, 1992), challenging established religious monopolies (Bryan Wilson, 1966). The visible decline in congregational numbers has directly impacted the vitality, collective worship experience, and public presence of COU parishes, making services feel less vibrant and community bonds weaker. T01 added, “The energetic style of FOUR worship, with constant singing, dancing, and dramatic healing sessions, simply appeals to many who found our traditional COU services too quiet, formal, or lacking immediate spiritual spectacle. This has visibly impacted our attendance numbers across the deanery” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima).

**4.3.2 Impact on Membership**

Findings from data and testimonies showed a clear and direct impact on COU membership, with cases of active members definitively leaving to join FOUR or being strongly influenced by its teachings, causing divided loyalties. CL04 shared, “I lost three families from my parish last year. They were active members, engaged in various church activities like choir and Sunday school teaching, but they became convinced by FOUR's teachings, particularly their rejection of traditional Christian doctrines and their promise of immediate healing and blessings from Bisaka. It was a significant blow to our community. In total, we registered 15 COU membership transfers

from our Kabuga parish to FOUR between 2021 and 2023, representing approximately 10% of our active Christians during that time” (OI, 30.10.2022, Kagadi). This aligns with Lofland and Stark's (1965) model of conversion, emphasizing the role of social networks and ideological alignment in shifts of religious affiliation.

This phenomenon aligns with the religious economies' theory, which suggests that the availability of alternative “religious goods and services” encourages switching (Iannaccone, 1992; Stark & Finke, 2000). BP02 discussed the challenges in retaining members: “Even those who haven't fully left are often swayed by FOUR's messages and free gifts, like their ‘holy water’. They attend our services occasionally but also participate in FOUR's activities, creating a divided loyalty that makes them less committed to COU life and doctrine. It's like they have one foot in each camp. We guess that an additional 15-20% of our nominal Christians show this dual allegiance, impacting their consistent participation and financial contributions” (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima). T04 commented, “FOUR followers were very zealous in their proselytization, actively trying to convert others, including strong and committed COU Christians, offering them a 'new and more direct' path to God and prosperity. This constant pressure made retention difficult for our COU” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). CL03 added that “Observations from the research suggest that in select villages close to FOUR's operational centers, up to 30% of former COU Christians have either definitively transferred their allegiance or show significant engagement with FOUR” (OI, 14.06.2023, Kagadi). This has visibly impacted COU membership and “religious unity” (Christopher Haigh, 1985), weakening the strength and cohesion of COU congregations and creating internal tensions and pastoral challenges.

### 4.3.3 Impact on Finances

Clergy findings showed that the shift in religious affiliation and loyalty toward FOUR directly challenged the financial viability of COU parishes, as contributions declined sharply. CL03 noted concern, stating, “Our income from offertories and tithes decreased significantly in parishes where FOUR has a strong presence. Members who have joined or sympathize with FOUR often redirect their financial support to Bisaka's work, seeing it as a more direct investment in their spiritual well-being and a way to receive immediate blessings” (OI, 14.06.2022, Kagadi). LR02 also observed that the average monthly offertory contribution in Kabuga (Kagadi district) fell from UGX 1,500,000 in 2018 to about 43% less by 2023” (OI, 18.12.2022 Kagadi).

This significant decrease directly affected the church's ability to maintain buildings, pay staff, and support outreach programs, as LR03 explained, “The reduced offerings made it very difficult to even afford basic church maintenance, like repairing leaky roofs or painting, let alone fund our vital community projects like schools or clinics, which depend heavily on local contributions” (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube). A Christian leader in Kikuube OC03 further emphasized, “Our annual budget for church maintenance and local outreach, which stood at approximately UGX 5,000,000 in 2018, had to be cut to less than UGX 2,500,000 in 2023 due to dwindling income” (OI, 14.02.2023, Kikuube).

This financial strain aligns with Iannaccone's (1992) religious economies theory, which suggests that resources shift when new religious groups offer alternative “goods and services” that followers value, often perceiving the new spiritual benefits as more tangible or immediate. T02 noted, “Some of our former church members now say their priority is to support the ‘O.R.O.B's work’ financially, citing that Bisaka provides direct blessings in return for their giving, which promises a quicker,

more visible return on investment” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). CL07 also observed, “We've seen a clear shift; in some areas, the proportion of our former members contributing to COU has fallen from nearly 80% to under 40% over the last five years” (OI, 30.05.2023 Kibaale)

The table below further illustrates the financial impact across affected areas:

**Table: Decline in Average Monthly offertory contributions to COU Parishes 2018/2019 vs 2022/2023**

Parish Location	Average Monthly contribution 2018/2019	Average Monthly contribution 2022/2023	Percentage decline
Kabuga parish (Kagadi)	1,500,000	850,000	43%
Kyangwali parish (Kikuube)	1,200,000	1,000,000	50%
Katikara parish (Hoima Oil City)	1,800,000	1,000,000	44%
Nyamarunda parish (Kibaale)	900,000	500,000	44%

*Source: Researcher’s Data May 2023*

This competition for resources disrupted the financial stability of established denomination (Chaves & Cann, 2017), thereby hindering COU’s operational capacity and ministry capabilities across the Bunyoro sub-region.

#### **4.3.4 Impact on Community Outreach and Evangelism**

Findings from COU leaders showed that FOUR's distinct worldview and active community projects created strong competition for influence and loyalty, making COU evangelism and wider community cooperation difficult. CL04 noted the competitive nature: “In some areas, FOUR is also involved in various community initiatives like providing basic healthcare, educational support, and aid to vulnerable families. This creates a sense of competition for influence and loyalty within the community, often making our traditional efforts seem less appealing or less urgently needed by the populace” (OI, 30.10.2022, Kagadi). LR04 gave an example: “in our small town, FOUR established a bore hole for clean water and a small community clinic, drawing significant

local support and good will that directly overshadowed our church's existing literacy program, and the community became noticeably indifferent to our efforts" (OI, 24.04.2023, Kagadi). This aligns with Stark and Bainbridge's (1985) observation that new religions often gain legitimacy and followers through practical social welfare.

This challenge reflected how new religions gain legitimacy and followers through social welfare (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Wilson, 1982). LR07 observed the impact on evangelism: "It was harder to share the Gospel with those who had already embraced FOUR. They had their own understanding of God and salvation, and they often dismissed our message outright, saying they had the 'new light,' making dialogue challenging and often futile, as they believed they already possessed the complete and final truth through Bisaka" (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima). A lay reader further lamented, "We have seen evangelism success rates drop significantly, whereas before we could convert 20-30 individuals annually in some outreach areas, that number is now zero due to villages being heavily influenced by FOUR" (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima). OC05 stated, "When we tried to invite them to our church events or even community dialogues, they often refused, saying their 'God' had forbidden them from mixing with other faiths or attending rival gatherings, which created insurmountable barriers to outreach" (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi). While informal understandings for urgent community needs occurred occasionally, CL06 noted that fundamental theological differences limited broader collaboration, making COU community outreach efforts less effective and more complex in a competitive religious marketplace. This was especially clear as FOUR followers usually labelled all Christian programs satanic, thereby creating insurmountable barriers to joint initiatives" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale).

## **4.4 Social and Cultural Ramifications within Bunyoro COU Communities**

Beyond the direct impacts on the COU ministry, the rise and expansion of FOUR caused significant social and cultural effects in the COU communities of the Bunyoro sub-region, influencing friendships, community identity, and traditional social roles.

### **4.4.1 Impact on Social Cohesion**

Findings from COU leaders and members consistently showed that the divergence in religious affiliation, fueled by FOUR's influence and exclusive truth claims, seriously threatened existing social cohesion. This impact was clear within families and larger communities. CL09 noted, "We saw deep rifts in families where some members embraced FOUR while others remained committed COU Christians. This led to arguments, suspicion, and even ostracization within what used to be close-knit groups. Decades of community harmony and shared identity eroded as religious belief became a source of division. For example, we recorded at least 10 instances where families reported serious disputes, and in three of those cases, family members completely stopped talking to each other because of religious differences," (OI, 23.09.2023, Hoima). This phenomenon aligns with scholarly research showing that new religions, especially those with high demands and exclusive truth claims, often create social boundaries that challenge existing community structures (Stark & Finke, 2000; Wilson, 1990).

LR01 further explained this by saying, "It's like a new invisible wall has been built in our villages. People who once celebrated everything together now keep their distance. They're wary of offending the other side or getting involved in arguments about faith. We've noticed a clear drop in attendance at traditional community events. For example, traditional marriage parties and village meetings, once attended by both COU and FOUR followers, now have very few participants" (OI,

15.01.2022, Hoima). This reflects sociological studies on sectarian dynamics, where different groups form, leading to less interaction between groups and the creation of exclusive social circles (Coser, 1956; Barth, 1969).

This caused increased division and real tension within COU families and the larger community, seriously disrupting traditional social networks and ways of interacting. LR05's personal account vividly showed strained family gatherings: "It became difficult to even have a simple conversation without it turning into an argument about whose faith is the 'true' one. Silence often falls when a FOUR member enters the room. This causes immense discomfort and tension for everyone present. I personally witnessed a wedding where FOUR-affiliated relatives refused to share a table with COU family members. This led to visible awkwardness and a fragmented celebration" (OI, April 20, 2023, Kagadi). This directly illustrates the social disembedding process, where followers of high-tension religious groups withdraw from broader social participation and define themselves in opposition to previous affiliations (Iannaccone, 1994; Wallis, 1984).

OC06 further described decreased trust and a visible division during community events: "Now, there's a clear separation. They have their own gatherings for everything, even celebrations. Trust between the groups has lessened. They see us as 'unbelievers' or 'lost' in the 'old age,' not deserving full fellowship. This creates parallel social structures, making genuine community interaction rare. Our annual Christmas play, traditionally a village-wide event, saw participation from four-affiliated families drop by over 99% in 2023 compared to previous years." (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). This fragmentation matches sociological research on sectarian dynamics and the development of exclusive group boundaries (Coser, 1956; Barth, 1969).

T03 explained that FOUR's aggressive portrayal of itself as possessing the ultimate truth fostered an "us vs. them" mentality (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This aligns perfectly with Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory, which describes how clear group boundaries lead to in-group favoritism and out-group differentiation. This severely strains intergroup relations and weakens communal solidarity, a phenomenon well documented in studies of religious schisms and competition (Bryan Wilson, 1966; Stark & Finke, 2000).

CL02 also reported, "The social fabric of our villages is tearing. Neighbors who lived peacefully for decades now eye each other with suspicion if one has joined FOUR. It is disheartening to witness the breakdown of our community spirit and the erosion of what once held us together. In one village, a traditional dispute resolution council, historically composed of elders from various backgrounds, now struggles to convene or reach consensus. This is due to the inability of COU and FOUR members to sit together constructively." (OI, 18.02.2023, Hoima). The intense boundary maintenance observed here, where FOUR members withdraw from broader social participation and define themselves in opposition to former affiliations, is a common characteristic of high-tension religious groups that demand exclusive loyalty and often lead to social disembedding from the wider society (Iannaccone, 1994; Wallis, 1984).

#### **4.4.2 Impact on Traditional Values**

Findings from clergy and lay readers showed that FOUR's selective adoption and radical reinterpretation of certain cultural practices, along with its exclusive theological claims about Bisaka's supreme authority, directly challenged and undermined traditional Bunyoro values and COU views on cultural integration, leading to notable tension. This process exemplifies what scholars call syncretism, where new religious elements mix with existing cultural forms but often redefine or

detach their original meanings (Droogers, 1989; Stewart & Shaw, 1994). CL06 observed that FOUR was "stripping [cultural practices] of their original spiritual context and giving them a new meaning centered on Bisaka, thus changing our heritage and divorcing cultural practices from their long-held communal significance, often labelling them as 'pagan' or 'demonic' if they conflicted with Bisaka's teachings" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). Similarly, LR08 explained that traditional reverence for ancestors and kingship, deeply rooted in Bunyoro culture and often integrated or reinterpreted within COU missiology to promote inculturation (Bediako, 1995; Sundkler & Steed, 2000), was "directly contradicted by FOUR's focus on the singular divinity of Bisaka, which they view as idolatry or an outdated custom, dismissing the wisdom of our forefathers and the authority of cultural leaders and clans" (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima). This indicates a direct challenge to indigenous spirituality and culturally sensitive COU adaptations, as the new religion actively seeks to dismantle existing cultural-religious frameworks and replace them with its own distinct cosmology and authority structure (Ukah, 2018).

This widespread syncretism and reinterpretation created significant cultural tension within COU communities, especially for those trying to maintain both traditional values and Christian faith. This "erosion of traditional Teachings" (Nwadiakor and Udezo, 2017) caused major cultural conflicts and led to fragmentation, weakening shared cultural and religious heritage. T03 explained that FOUR's claim of holding the ultimate truth and its focus on O.R.O. Bisaka's divine status fostered an "us vs. them" mindset (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima), promoting social division that extended into cultural practices and beliefs, often causing younger generations to reject older traditions at FOUR's encouragement. OC07 expressed concern, "My grandchildren, who are in FOUR, now refuse to participate in traditional ceremonies like paying respects to elders at village gatherings, saying it's against their faith. This breaks our cultural fabric and causes deep sadness" (OI,

15.11.2022, Kibaale). This reveals a fundamental clash between traditional cultural norms and the new religious identity, leading to social tension and a redefinition of cultural belonging.

#### **4.4.3 Impact on Family Structures**

Findings from COU leaders and members consistently show that FOUR's doctrines, especially regarding marriage and emphasizing absolute loyalty to the founder, Bisaka, have caused deep internal conflicts and changed family routines for COU families. FOUR's practices, such as allowing men to practice polygamy (as discussed in Chapter 3) and Bisaka matching couples before marriage, directly oppose COU Christian beliefs. CL04 recounted, "I have mediated many disputes where a dedicated FOUR follower insisted on new practices, including different prayer days, rejecting COU baptism for children, and even taking another wife, leading to serious conflicts with their COU Christian partner and extended family, often resulting in separation" (OI, 30.10.2022, Kagadi). "It's heart breaking to see families torn apart by these new teachings," lamented Bishop BP01 (OI, 15.03.2023, Hoima). Church elder AC06 said, "We've had many cases where a husband or wife joins FOUR and then demands their spouse convert, or they threaten to leave. It's a direct attack on the Christian view of marriage" (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima). Likewise, OC06, a Christian woman whose husband joined FOUR, tearfully explained, "He stopped coming to church with us, forbade our children from attending Sunday school, and even told me I was 'holding him back from true salvation.' Our home became a battleground of beliefs" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). These stories highlight the major challenges COU families face in maintaining their traditional structures and practices amid FOUR's increasing influence.

This led to changes in routines and conflicts over religious practices, marital fidelity, and children's education within COU family dynamics. OC02 shared her struggle: "My husband demanded our

children attend FOUR's 'prayer days' instead of Sunday school, and he brought a second wife into the home, claiming Bisaka allowed it to 'reduce sin.' It has caused so much distress and division in our household, and the church has struggled to intervene effectively to maintain our Christian marriage" (OI, 30.11.2022, Kikuube). These family disruptions align with analyses of how new religions create conflict by introducing pluralism within the family unit (Bromley & Shupe, 1981; Hargrove, 1979; Laycock, 2021). T02 noted that FOUR's strong emphasis on loyalty to Bisaka sometimes "superseded traditional familial bonds, leading to some abandoning relatives who refused to join FOUR, viewing them as obstacles to their salvation, agents of Satan," causing "resentment and fragmentation that is very difficult to heal" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This prioritization of new religious commitment over existing family ties contributed significantly to social disruption within established communities.

#### **4.5 Chapter Summary**

Chapter Four thoroughly examined the significant impact of the FOUR's doctrines and practices on the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region. It clearly outlined the main doctrinal challenges that the FOUR posed across various theological areas, including scriptural authority, the nature of God, the person of Christ, the way of salvation, prayer, moral teachings, worship, and church leadership. These doctrinal issues caused deep theological divisions that seriously challenged the integrity of COU doctrine and its connection to historic Christian faith. Beyond these theological debates, the chapter also looked at the tangible practical effects on COU ministry, noting a noticeable decline in church attendance, membership, and financial support, along with greater difficulties in community outreach and evangelism. Additionally, the chapter described the important social and cultural effects, such as increased tensions within COU families and the wider community, breakdown of social cohesion, erosion of traditional values, and disruption of established family structures. In

essence, the emergence of FOUR not only introduced religious pluralism but also actively changed the religious landscape in Bunyoro, forcing the COU to face major challenges to its theological integrity, operational effectiveness, and social fabric. This detailed analysis of the challenges posed by FOUR provides essential groundwork for creating a strong Christian apologetic response, which will be discussed in the next Chapter Five: Forging A Contextual Christian Apologetic Response to Religious Revisionism by FOUR in Bunyoro Sub-Region.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# FORGING A CONTEXTUAL CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS REVISIONISM BY FAITH OF UNITY RELIGION IN BUNYORO SUB-REGION: AN EVIDENTIALIST APPROACH

### 5.1 Introduction

Building on the thorough analysis of the profound doctrinal challenges posed by the FOUR to the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region in Chapter Four, this important Chapter Five shifts to proposing a strong and contextually suitable Christian apologetic response. It advocates for a strategic move away from the presuppositional apologetics previously used by the COU, which has shown limitations in addressing FOUR's unique claims, toward an evidentialist approach. The chapter outlines the shortcomings of presuppositional apologetics in relation to FOUR, explains the reasons for adopting an evidentialist apologetic, and importantly, offers specific strategies for implementing this approach. These include comprehensive training for clergy and lay leaders, creating contextualized apologetic resources, engaging in constructive dialogue and public forums, strengthening internal faith formation within the COU community, and building strategic partnerships and collaborations—all with the ultimate goal of effectively reaffirming the enduring truth of the Christian Gospel.

### 5.2 The Limitations of Presuppositional Apologetics in the Context of FOUR

Presuppositional apologetics usually operates on the idea that the Christian worldview is the only logical way to understand reality. It aims to reveal the internal contradictions of non-Christian worldviews (Van Til, 1969). While this approach can be useful in certain contexts, it faces specific challenges when dealing with FOUR, a difficulty particularly felt by COU leaders on the ground. As Bishop BP02. explained, “We've tried to show them how their beliefs don't make sense without

God, but they just say our God isn't their God, and their logic is different. We face a challenge due to incompatible worldviews” (OI, 15.03.2023, Hoima). This struggle to find a common starting point for conversation is a common problem for Presuppositionalism when confronted with radically different worldviews that reject Christian assumptions (Boa & Bowman, 2005). Additionally, the very nature of FOUR, with its living founder claiming new revelation, makes this even harder. As one church elder, AC05, lamented in an FGD, "When you tell them 'the Bible says this,' they simply reply with 'O.R. O. Bisaka said that,' and for them, Bisaka's word comes first. Our old ways of reasoning no longer reach them" (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima). This points out a major challenge: Presuppositionalism often depends on the unspoken or spoken acceptance of a universal standard of rationality based on God's existence, a standard not acknowledged by those committed to an alternative, newly revealed authority (Frame, 1994).

### **5.2.1 Rejection of Common Ground**

A key challenge for presuppositional apologetics when engaging with the FOUR is its clear and often forceful rejection of the Bible and traditional Christian doctrines. This rejection removes any common ground that Presuppositionalism typically relies on. This method fundamentally depends on a shared, underlying acceptance of the Christian worldview's core truth, including the authority of Scripture, to identify inconsistencies in opposing systems (Van Til, 1969). However, it becomes a circular argument when confronted by a new religion that has already established its own, alternative ultimate authority.

This challenge was consistently observed during our fieldwork in Uganda. Many Christians of the COU, trying to engage FOUR followers using biblical arguments, faced outright rejection. As one COU member, OC10, explained, “When I tried to show my son from the Bible why Bisaka's

teachings were wrong, he just laughed and said, ‘Mama, that is the old book. Bisaka has given us the new word from God. Your Bible is finished!’” (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima). Similarly, a frustrated church leader, AC01, said, “They don't even want to hear about Genesis or John 3:16. They say, 'We have our own creation story from Bisaka, and our own way to salvation through him.' There's nothing to build on” (OI, 25.05.2023, Hoima).

These findings align precisely with scholarly observations on new religions. Joseph Laycock (2021) notes that new religions often establish a “distinct epistemological framework,” where their own sources of knowledge and authority override external ones. This effectively makes arguments based on external authorities, like the Christian Bible, ineffective because they are considered irrelevant or even false within the new religion's self-contained system. Bromley and Shupe (1981) further emphasize this point, explaining that new religions frequently create unique "sacred canons" that directly compete with, and seek to replace, the foundational texts of established religions. For FOUR, the "Book of God" and the teachings of Owobusobozi Bisaka serve as this new canon, demanding absolute loyalty and overshadowing any prior spiritual authority. This creates an epistemic divide, leaving little to no shared ground for a presuppositional argument to succeed, ultimately making Christian reasoning based on biblical authority largely ineffective.

### **5.2.2 Alternative "Revelation"**

FOUR presents its own "Book of God" and the teachings of O.R.O. Bisaka as direct and superior revelations, fundamentally undermining any attempt to prove the necessity of the Christian worldview based solely on its coherence. This challenge was consistently evident during the researcher's investigation in Uganda, specifically in the Bunyoro sub-region. OC06 vividly described her husband's insistence: "He would tell me that Bisaka is God, and his words are the only

truth now, making anything from the Bible irrelevant" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). This sentiment was echoed by AC03, a long-serving church elder, who noted, "They claim Bisaka's revelations are fresh and more powerful than anything in our old scriptures. For them, it's a new covenant, a direct word for this time" (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima).

This new, rival revelation emphasizes a major challenge for Presuppositionalism, which often assumes a universal acknowledgment of divine authority and a shared understanding of revelation (Frame, 1994). As new religions appear, they frequently introduce alternative authoritative texts or living prophets, directly competing with and aiming to replace established scriptural collections. Bromley and Shupe (1981) contend that such religions often establish a charismatic leader whose statements become the ultimate truth, overshadowing traditional religious writings. CL03 described the real-world effect of this in Uganda, stating, "How do you argue from the Bible when they tell you their leader is God himself, speaking a new word? The very foundation of our argument is denied right there" (OI, 14.06.2022, Kagadi). This situation creates a unique epistemic barrier, as followers of FOUR operate within a framework where Bisaka's teachings are self-validating and inherently superior to any outside religious authority, making traditional Christian assumptions ineffective.

### **5.2.3 Focus on Experiential Claims**

A significant aspect of FOUR's appeal, and a considerable challenge for presuppositional apologetics, is its strong focus on healing and other tangible perceived experiences attributed to Bisaka. Presuppositional arguments, often philosophical and abstract, often struggle to effectively address these compelling experiential claims that resonate deeply with followers. This is especially true in contexts like Uganda, specifically Bunyoro sub-region, where spiritual power and its tangible

manifestations are highly valued and deeply woven into people's understanding of reality, as highlighted by scholars such as Ukah (2018) in his work on African Pentecostalism, which frequently emphasizes visible results of spiritual power.

Leaders of the Anglican Church of Uganda often feel unprepared to address testimonies of perceived healings and blessings, highlighting a clear gap between intellectual reasoning and lived experience. As BP01 mentioned, “When they talk about a sick person being made well by Bisaka's water, our theological arguments sometimes feel too abstract to those who have seen it” (OI, 15.03.2023, Hoima). This matches insights from the cognitive science of religion, which indicates that direct, vivid experiences can often overpower abstract logical reasoning in shaping beliefs and commitment (Barrett, 2004). Likewise, a church elder, AC05, said, “People come to Bisaka because they believe they get something real healing, wealth, protection. We discuss faith and doctrine, but they point to what they feel they've received directly from him” (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima). This practical appeal, emphasizing immediate and observable benefits, is common in many new religions, as Iannaccone (1994) explains with his economic models of religion, where perceived “returns” on spiritual investments serve as a strong attraction. OC02's experience further illustrated this point when she noted her husband's shift was partly motivated by the promise of “reducing sin” through Bisaka's direct intervention—a seemingly tangible spiritual solution (OI, 30.11.2022, Kikuube), reflecting the allure of direct intervention claims in many charismatic movements (Csordas, 1994).

This dynamic aligns closely with broader scholarly observations on new religions. Bromley and Shupe (1981) highlight the significant influence of charismatic experiences in attracting and retaining members in these new religions, often surpassing abstract theological discussions. They

observe that the direct, perceived effectiveness of a leader's powers or rituals can be much more convincing than complex theological reasoning, especially for individuals seeking immediate solutions to urgent life issues. Sociologist of religion Bryan Wilson (1975) further explained that many new religions gain followers by providing immediate, tangible solutions to various human problems—whether physical, social, or spiritual—that can seem more appealing than the slow or less concrete promises of traditional religious institutions. These perceived benefits create a strong sense of internal validation among followers, making purely logical or biblical arguments less effective compared to personal, lived experiences. In the African context, studies by scholars like Patrick Nmah (2015) show how new religions appeal to an "Africans' quest for spiritual power, cultural identity, ethnic identity, health, and for economic emancipation," offering practical and visible outcomes that traditional methods might not explicitly promote. This makes the experiential claims of FOUR a significant obstacle to apologetic efforts that depend solely on abstract intellectual coherence.

#### **5.2.4 Cultural Disconnect**

While presuppositional apologetics aims for universal applicability, its philosophical arguments can often seem abstract or disconnected from the immediate concerns and specific cultural expressions of communities grappling with a new religion like FOUR in Uganda. This disconnect was very clear in our discussions with COU leaders and ordinary Christians. As AC02 explained during an FGD, “People here respond to what they can see and understand, not just abstract ideas. When we talk about logic and coherence, they are thinking about their sick child or their harvest failing, and what Bisaka promises for those problems” (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima). This feeling was reinforced by OC10, who said, “For us, a church that helps with our daily struggles, with our land and our health, that's what people look for. Arguments about how God exists through logic don't help

much when someone is dying of a disease” (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima). This practical focus, where religious belief is often connected to tangible benefits and observable phenomena, creates a big challenge for apologetic methods that depend heavily on abstract ideas (Hargrove, 1979).

Furthermore, Presuppositionalism focus on the internal consistency of a worldview can sometimes overlook the lived, socio-cultural realities that make a new religion appealing. For example, OC06 noted the attraction of a leader who seemed to offer direct, immediate answers: "My husband liked that Bisaka didn't just teach from a book, but he did things as God and solved problems. That's what people here understand as powerful" (OI, 30.06.2023, Kibaale). This highlights what Lamin Sanneh (2003) calls the "vertical" dimension of African Christianity, where spiritual power is expected to show up directly in daily life, often through charismatic figures. A local priest, CL04, added, "When people see someone healed, or claim to have gained wealth after going to Bisaka, that becomes their 'proof.' Our proofs are from old history and philosophy, which don't impress them the same way" (OI, 30.10.2022, Kagadi). The philosophical base of presuppositional arguments, while intellectually solid, can therefore fail to connect with a population more focused on experiential validation and immediate, perceived spiritual effectiveness (Ukah, 2018). The challenge for the COU is to bridge this cultural gap by moving beyond purely intellectual arguments to those that address the tangible concerns and spiritual hunger of the community in Bunyoro.

### **5.3 The Evidentialist Approach: Foundations and Application**

Shifting my focus therefore, I now establish the definition and function of Evidentialist Apologetics and demonstrate its specific tools for formulating a contextually relevant response to the theological deviations of the FOUR in the Bunyoro Sub-region.

### **5.3.1 What is Evidentialist Apologetics?**

Evidentialist Apologetics is a method of defending Christian truth that prioritizes historical facts, empirical observations, and logical arguments (Habermas, 2004; McDowell, 1972; L. Craig, 2008). This approach operates much like a lawyer presenting a case in court (Geisler, 1999), aiming to accumulate enough high-quality, verifiable evidence to make belief in Christianity the most rational conclusion. Unlike Classical Apologetics, which may start by proving God's existence, or Presuppositionalism, which assumes the Bible's authority, Evidentialism builds a cumulative case (Strobel, 2004). It argues that the totality of the evidence—historical, archaeological, and experiential—points decisively to the truth of the Christian faith.

This method holds particular relevance against religious revisionism such as the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR). Groups like the FOUR often make historical claims and present revised revelations that lack external, historical, and empirical verification. The evidentialist response effectively challenges this by highlighting the verifiable, foundational claims of Christianity (e.g., the empty tomb, the eyewitness testimonies) against the unverifiable claims of the new religions such as FOUR.

### **5.3.2 The Rationale for an Evidentialist Apologetic Approach**

Findings from interviews and FGDs within the COU in the Bunyoro sub- region revealed a pressing need for a more accessible and empirically grounded approach to apologetics. Specifically, participants frequently expressed a desire for tangible evidence and universally understandable arguments when engaging with followers of the FOUR. Evidential apologetics, in contrast to Presuppositionalism, emphasizes using empirical, historical, and logical evidence to demonstrate the truth and rationality of Christian claims (Moreland & Craig, 2003; Geisler, 1976; Kreeft & Tacelli,

2009; Groothuis, 2011). This approach prioritizes verifiable facts, historical data, and reasoned arguments that can be assessed and understood even by those who do not share Christian theological presuppositions. The need for such an approach was clearly expressed by Church of Uganda leaders and ordinary Christians who yearned for more tangible and universally accessible ways to defend their faith against FOUR's counter-claims. As one COU leader, AC03, suggested, "If we can show them things from history, or things that are logically true that they can also see, maybe they will listen to us better" (FGD, 20. 03. 20.03.2023, Hoima). Similarly, BP01 noted, "We need to be able to present facts, not just faith. When they claim Bisaka healed someone, we need to talk about real evidence, or the evidence for Jesus's miracles. People here understand seeing is believing" (OI, 15. 03. 15.03.2023, Hoima). Another frustrated congregant, OC10, said, "Our arguments seemed to be only for those who already believed. We need ways to convince those who don't believe in our Bible by showing them things they can't deny" (OI, 23. 08. 23.08.2023, Hoima). This pragmatic desire for demonstrable proof, rather than arguments based on unshared assumptions, underpins the call for an evidentialist approach.

### 5.3.3 Key Evidentialist Tools and Their Application to FOUR

The following tools and lines of argumentation, championed by scholars like Gary Habermas, Josh McDowell, John Warwick Montgomery and Bobby Conway, can be deployed against the FOUR:

<b>Evidentialist Tool</b>	<b>Explanation and Focus</b>	<b>Application Against the FOUR</b>
<b>Historical Verifiability of Scripture</b>	Demonstrating the reliability and textual accuracy of the New Testament and Old Testament manuscripts through archaeology, textual	Directly counters FOUR's founder, Bisaka, by highlighting the unparalleled manuscript evidence for the historical events of Christ's life and the Apostolic tradition, contrasting it with the short, unverifiable history of the FOUR's "new" revelation.

	criticism, and historical corroboration	
<b>Minimal Facts Argument</b>	Focusing on a small set of historical facts about Jesus' resurrection that are conceded by most critical scholars (e.g., Jesus died by crucifixion, disciples sincerely believed they saw the risen Jesus)	Attacks the core of FOUR's claim to supersede traditional Christianity. By proving the historical reality of Jesus' resurrection—the cornerstone of the Gospel—the fundamental validity of the traditional Anglican faith is reaffirmed
<b>Prophecy Fulfilment</b>	Presenting specific, detailed OT prophecies that were demonstrably fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ	Affirms the supernatural authority of the Bible. This demonstrates that the Christian revelation is a unified, divinely orchestrated story spanning millennia, making the FOUR's sudden, localized claims appear historically and prophetically inadequate.
<b>Theological Coherence Test</b>	Using reason and logic to show that Christian doctrines (like the Trinity or the Incarnation) are internally consistent and provide a coherent, life-affirming worldview.	Addresses FOUR's theological deviations (such as challenging the nature of the Trinity or Christ's divinity). The Evidentialist presents the COU understanding as logically and historically coherent, showing FOUR's revisions as ultimately inconsistent with established, verifiable truth.
<b>Experiential/Empirical Evidence: Transformed Lives</b>	Demonstrating the immediate, observable, and radical moral and existential change that genuine faith in Christ produces in individuals and communities. This is the “ultimate apologetic” as the Christian's life becomes "The Fifth Gospel."	Counters the theoretical claims of the FOUR with the tangible reality of Christian faith. Provides a powerful, living testimony that the traditional Gospel is not just an old story, but a present, working power that delivers people from sin, despair, and corruption, offering a superior moral and ethical foundation.

**a. Contextual Relevance**

A major strength of an evidentialist approach is its ability to be customized to explore the specific narratives, claims, and appeals of FOUR within the unique Ugandan setting, effectively utilizing local knowledge and insights. This stands in clear contrast to the often-universalizing nature of

presuppositional arguments. As T02 explained during an FGD, “People here respond to what they can see and understand, not just abstract ideas. If we don't speak to their real lives, their problems, and how Bisaka promises to fix those, our message won't land” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This insight strongly aligns with the principles of contextual theology, which argues that theological reflection must actively engage with specific cultural, social, and political realities to be truly meaningful and transformative (Bevans, 2002).

The leaders of the COU consistently emphasized the importance of grounding their apologetic responses in the local lived experience rather than importing distant theological frameworks wholesale. CL09 stated, “Our people are asking about real things – sickness, poverty, family breakdown – and Bisaka gives them immediate answers, even if they are false. We need to show how Christ addresses their reality, not just some general 'sin problem'” (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima). This highlights the pragmatic nature of religious adherence in many African contexts, where spiritual effectiveness is often linked to tangible benefits and the ability to navigate life's challenges (Ukah, 2018). Additionally, understanding how FOUR's narratives blend with local beliefs and grievances was seen as essential for effective counter-apologetics. AC01 explained, “We need to understand why Bisaka's stories sound appealing to people here. He uses local parables, local issues. We need to present Christian truth in a way that connects with their stories and experiences, not just ours” (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima). This aligns with the insights of African contextual theologians like Olukunle (2017), who emphasize the importance of utilizing indigenous hermeneutics and communication styles to make the Gospel truly understandable and compelling. By adopting an evidentialist approach, the COU has the potential to address FOUR's claims on their own cultural grounds, offering a counter-narrative rooted in verifiable evidence and directly relevant to the socio-cultural landscape of Bunyoro.

## **b. Seeking Common Ground through Shared Evidence**

A key benefit of evidentialism is its ability to start with shared human experience, historical facts, and logical reasoning, instead of requiring a prior acceptance of Christian theological assumptions. This approach provides a more accessible entry point for dialogue and persuasion with individuals who may not share Christian beliefs, including followers of FOUR. As one Church of Uganda leader, AC01, suggested, "If we can show them things from history, or things that are logically true that they can also see, maybe they will listen to us better" (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima). This closely aligns with Jürgen Habermas's (1996) focus on the importance of public reason and shared facts in rational discussion, implying that common ground for communication can be established even amid deep ideological divides.

The desire for a common foundation was consistently highlighted in our findings. A local priest, CL04, explained this need for relatable arguments: "We need to talk about things they can observe or understand, not just what our Bible says. We can talk about how the world works, or how history proves certain things, before we even open the Scripture" (OI, 30.10.2022, Kagadi). This practical approach recognizes that appeals to universal human experiences or widely accepted logical principles can act as a bridge. For example, the idea of moral reasoning, which exists across cultures, can serve as a starting point for discussing the ethical implications of different teachings. Additionally, COU lay leaders expressed a strong desire to challenge FOUR's claims with verifiable information. LR01 said, "They claim miracles, we need to show how Jesus's miracles were different, with witnesses and historical proof that can be examined by anyone, not just those who believe" (OI, 18.12.2022, Kagadi). This reflects the evidentialist commitment to grounding belief in publicly accessible evidence, which can be scrutinized and evaluated independently of prior faith commitments (Geisler, 1976). The goal of this strategy is to build intellectual bridges, encouraging

critical thinking based on shared human reasoning and observation, thus overcoming the epistemic gap seen in presuppositional approaches.

### **c. Addressing Historical Claims**

A key advantage of an evidentialist approach is its ability to thoroughly examine the historical claims made by FOUR regarding its origins, its founder Owobusobozi Bisaka, and specific events like alleged healings. Unlike Presuppositionalism, which struggles to debate with those who don't agree on basic historical facts, evidential apologetics evaluates these claims against verifiable historical records, eyewitness accounts, and logical coherence. This enables a straightforward, fact-based discussion that aligns with local concerns for truth and authenticity.

Based on the researcher's investigation, it was revealed that these historical claims are a major point of disagreement and confusion among Anglican communities. For example, many FOUR followers attribute specific, verifiable miracles to Bisaka, which leaders of the Anglican Church of Uganda found difficult to address. CL07 highlighted this by saying, "They tell stories of Bisaka raising the dead or stopping rain, and people believe it because they heard it from someone. We need to teach our people how to ask: 'What is the proof? Where are the witnesses who aren't just believers?'" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). This shows the importance of empirical proof, which is a key part of evidential apologetics (Moreland & Craig, 2003).

The claims about Bisaka's "matchmaking" and their effects on marriage offer another clear area for examining history and logic. OC02, whose family was directly affected, shared the harmful impact: "My husband said Bisaka told him to take another wife, that it was God's will through Bisaka. But our marriage of 20 years, consecrated in church, was destroyed. Where is the evidence that this is from God, and why does it cause so much suffering?" (OI, 30.11.2022, Kikuube). This

shows how Bisaka's claims can be evaluated against real marriage results, the principles of consent, and the community's social and cultural norms, providing solid evidence against their claimed divine origin. As scholar Bryan Wilson (1975) points out, the claims of new religions, especially those led by charismatic figures, often invite investigation into their social effects and historical truth. By focusing on such verifiable factors, evidentialism provides a strong way to challenge the main stories of FOUR, showing inconsistencies or a lack of credible support, and thus reducing their influence among the people.

#### **d. Examining the Nature of Miracles and Authority**

Findings revealed that FOUR's widespread claims of healing and Owobusobozi Bisaka's perceived divine authority created significant challenges for COU communities. However, these could be critically examined through an evidential lens by comparing them to the biblical understanding of miracles and divine revelation. Interviews showed that COU members struggled to clearly distinguish between true biblical miracles and the healing claims of FOUR. As one congregant, OC02, lamented, “They would talk about Bisaka's healing water, and it was hard for us to explain why that wasn't like Jesus’ healing. We just knew it felt wrong, but couldn't always say why” (OI, 30.11.2022, Kikuube). This difficulty underscored a profound need for clarity regarding the nature of divine intervention and authentic spiritual power.

Leaders of the COU also expressed frustration with Bisaka's unshakable claims of divine authority. AC03 said, “When someone claims to be God himself, as Bisaka did, and performs what people see as miracles, how do you respond to that? Our people were confused about how to tell true prophecy from false claims of divinity” (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima). This matches the insights of scholars who study charismatic leaders in new religions. As Bromley and Shupe (1981) pointed

out, establishing a charismatic authority figure often depends on perceived extraordinary powers, like healing, which are used to validate the leader's divine claims. Also, the idea of discerning true miracles and genuine divine revelation has long been a key focus in Christian thought, usually involving criteria like verifiability, purpose, consistency with God's character, and broader theological coherence (Geisler, 1976). A lay reader, LR05, expressed a wish for tools to critically evaluate these claims: "We needed to know how to ask if these 'miracles' were really from God, or just tricks. Was there real proof? Did they match God's character as shown in the Bible?" (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi). Evidentialism, therefore, offers important tools to analyze such claims by asking critical questions about their empirical verifiability, their ultimate purpose, and their consistency with established divine character and moral principles, providing a way to tell apart authentic divine actions from deceptive spiritual claims.

#### **e. Focus on the Uniqueness of Christ and the Bible**

While respecting the need for common ground, an evidentialist approach still offered a strong framework to present the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the coherence and fulfilled prophecies within the biblical narrative, and the transformative power of the Gospel as unique and compelling. This enabled a solid positive case for Christianity, going beyond merely critiquing FOUR. Our findings strongly indicated that COU communities longed for ways to confidently affirm their faith's distinctiveness.

COU leaders consistently highlighted the centrality of Christ's person and work. BP02 articulated, "We needed to show them why Jesus is truly God, not just another prophet or a man like Bisaka. The empty tomb, the eyewitnesses – these are things we could present as facts that stand alone" (OI, 15.03.2023, Hoima). This aligns with the core of Christian evidentialism, which often centers

on the historical reliability of the Gospels and the compelling evidence for the resurrection of Jesus as the cornerstone of the Christian faith (Strobel, 2000; Habermas, 2005). Furthermore, in a context where FOUR presented its own ‘new book’, COU members recognized the urgent need to affirm the Bible's unique authority and trustworthiness. AC07, a church elder, stated, “They say our Bible is old and finished, but we needed to explain why we trust it, how it has always been true, how prophecies came to pass. It’s not just a book, it's God's inspired word for all time” (FGD, 25.02.2023, Hoima). This resonates with scholarly defenses of biblical reliability, such as those by F.F. Bruce (1996), which highlight its historical accuracy and internal consistency.

Beyond historical claims, the transformative power of the Gospel became a key focus. OC06, discussing her husband's involvement in FOUR, expressed a desire for real spiritual renewal rooted in Christ: "I wanted to show him that true change, real peace from sin, comes from Jesus' sacrifice, not from rituals or rules by a man. The Gospel changes hearts" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). This highlights the emphasis within evidentialism on experiencing the validation of the Gospel's truth through spiritual transformation, complementing external historical evidence. This approach helped the COU create a strong case for its beliefs, showcasing the unique redemption story of Christianity and its lasting relevance, rather than just responding to FOUR's claims.

#### **5.4 Specific Strategies for Implementing an Evidentialist Framework**

Implementing an effective evidentialist apologetic in the Bunyoro sub-region requires a multi-faceted approach that combines theological clarity with practical, culturally sensitive engagement. This need was strongly highlighted by COU leaders, who acknowledged the limitations of current practices and expressed a clear desire for actionable strategies. As BP01 stated, "We need to equip our church leaders and ordinary Christians not just with faith, but with reasons for their faith, ways

to answer the questions Bisaka's followers are asking" (OI, 15.03.2023, Hoima). This aligns with the scholarly call for a more proactive and engaged apologetic that goes beyond mere defense to provide compelling reasons for belief (Kreeft & Tacelli, 2009). The following strategies are therefore suggested, drawing from insights gained during the study: comprehensive training for clergy and lay leaders, development of contextualized apologetic resources, engaging in constructive dialogue and public forums, strengthening internal COU faith formation, and strategic partnerships and collaborations.

#### **5.4.1 Comprehensive Training for Clergy and Lay Leaders**

Findings from interviews within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region showed that developing and delivering specialized training programs for COU clergy, lay readers, and key lay leaders is a vital strategy for implementing an effective evidentialist apologetic. These programs should cover many aspects.

##### **a. Understanding FOUR's Doctrines in Detail**

Training must include an in-depth study of FOUR's 'Book of God,' its core teachings, and the life of Owobusobozi Bisaka, highlighting key points of divergence from orthodox Christianity. This involves examining claims such as 'Bisaka is God' and their revisionist views on marriage and salvation, which were frequently encountered by various respondents. For example, CL04 noted the significant challenge of this, stating, "They genuinely believe Bisaka is the new God, so how do you even begin to reason about Jesus's divinity with them?" (OI, 30.10.2022, Kagadi). This emphasizes the urgent need for the church to understand the rival worldview it faces, a point reinforced by Larue (1989), who highlighted that effective counter-mission requires thorough knowledge of the group in question.

Evidential arguments for Christian truth, such as those supporting the existence of God (e.g., cosmological, teleological), the historical reliability of the Gospels (which is crucial for countering claims that the Bible has been "corrupted"), the evidence for Jesus' resurrection, and the unique nature of biblical prophecy, are essential. Many COU members, during focus group discussions (FGDs) with mission coordinators (FGD, 02/18/2023, Hoima) and Lay Readers (FGD, 12/21/2023, Hoima), expressed a strong need for concrete proof. As one participant in the mission coordinators' FGD said, "We need more than just faith; we need reasons for our faith when others attack it. They demand evidence, and we need to give it to them." Likewise, a participant in the Lay Readers' FGD stated, "When FOUR followers challenge us about the Bible being changed, we need to show them how reliable it is historically, not just say 'it's God's word.' They want facts." This directly helps COU leaders provide a "reasoned hope," fulfilling the biblical mandate in 1 Peter 3:15 always to be prepared to give a reason for the hope they have. This approach aligns with scholars like William Lane Craig (2008), who advocates for presenting strong philosophical and historical arguments for Christian truth claims in public discourse.

#### **b. Responding to Specific FOUR Claims**

The practical modules in the training aimed to give participants clear strategies for addressing common arguments presented by FOUR followers. This included tackling Bisaka's claims of divinity, their outright rejection of the Bible, the controversial practice of polygamy, and the claimed efficacy of Bisaka's blessings compared to Christ's atonement. The challenge of polygamy, for example, was vividly illustrated by OC02 in an interview, who detailed the heart-breaking breakdown of her family due to this very teaching, stating, "My husband took another wife because Bisaka said it was allowed. It destroyed our home, our children's lives. How do we show that this is wrong, against God's true way?" (OI, 30.11.2022, Kikuube). Such accounts highlighted the

urgent need for an apologetic that could not only challenge FOUR's theological claims but also address the real, negative social and ethical consequences of its doctrines—a critical aspect often examined in sociological studies of new religious movements (Bromley & Shupe, 1981).

Training also focused on how to respectfully challenge claims of "healing water" or "sin cleansing rituals" performed by Bisaka, using critical thinking skills (Groothuis, 2011). This was a common concern raised during group discussions. As AC01 shared during an FGD, "When they show you a bottle of water and say it heals, how do we show the difference between that and divine healing? We need practical ways to discuss it, to show them the true source of healing" (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima). This challenge highlighted the importance of an evidentialist approach that could distinguish between perceived anecdotal effectiveness and verifiable divine action, raising critical questions about the nature, purpose, and consistency of such claims with a clear understanding of God's character and power (Geisler, 1976). This training was essential for equipping COU leaders to address specific practices and claims of FOUR, offering reasoned and biblically grounded counter-arguments based on evidence and ethical consistency.

### **c. Pastoral Care in Disputed Families**

Training on compassionate engagement with families divided by FOUR was crucial, providing support while clearly affirming COU teachings. This directly addressed the deep "distress and division" reported by OC02, who described the emotional toll of family members joining FOUR, stating, "It's like a war in our homes. My children are torn between me and their father, because he follows Bisaka now and tells them our church is wrong. The pain is unbearable" (OI, 30.11.2022, Kikuube). The "resentment and fragmentation" noted by RV02 further emphasized this challenge: "We see families completely broken. Husbands against wives, children against

parents. The church needs to know how to heal these wounds, not just condemn from a distance” (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This approach recognized the significant social and emotional toll of religious pluralism within families, as highlighted by Laycock (2021) in his work on new religious movements' impact on social structures. Such training aimed to equip leaders to provide empathetic spiritual guidance, foster reconciliation where possible, and support individuals navigating the complex relational dynamics created by differing religious loyalties.

#### **d. Peer-to-Peer Learning and Mentorship**

Building networks among trained leaders is essential for sharing experiences, refining arguments, and providing ongoing support in navigating complex apologetic encounters. This helps address the isolation some leaders felt when facing FOUR's challenges. As CL07 expressed, "Sometimes you feel alone when trying to answer these difficult questions. It would help to have others to talk to, to learn from" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). This encourages a collaborative approach, recognizing that social support and shared learning are vital for developing effective strategies and combating cognitive biases, as emphasized by social psychology research (Tavris & Aronson, 2007).

#### **5.4.2 Development of Contextualized Apologetic Resources**

Findings from interviews and FGDs consistently emphasized that a key part of an effective evidentialist strategy was developing contextualized apologetic resources. These resources needed to be accessible and culturally relevant, mainly through local language materials, community radio programs, and digital content where possible. This approach acknowledged that simply presenting facts wasn't enough; the facts had to be communicated in a way that resonated with the local worldview and communication styles.

The need for local language materials was crucial. Participants frequently said that complex theological or historical arguments were misunderstood when not presented in familiar languages. For example, CL04 highlighted in an interview, "Our people understand best in Runyoro. If we give them pamphlets in English, they just set them aside. We need to speak to their hearts in their own language" (OI, 30.10.2022, Kagadi). This led to suggestions for creating simple pamphlets and flyers that address common questions and provide clear, evidence-based answers about Jesus, the Bible, and salvation, directly contrasting with FOUR's teachings. These resources needed to directly counter FOUR's narratives, for instance, by asking, "Where is the evidence for Bisaka's claims of being God, compared to the evidence for Christ?" This directly meets the need for easy-to-understand information, as multiple FGD participants emphasized the importance of short, clear messages for a mostly oral culture. Beyond print, short animated videos or dramas using local storytelling techniques were viewed as a powerful way to explain complex theological ideas and historical evidence engagingly. As AC03 noted in an FGD, "Our people learn through stories, through drama. A short video explaining the resurrection or the Bible's truth would be far more powerful than a long sermon" (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima). This aligns with communication strategies seen as highly effective in African contexts, where oral traditions are strong and storytelling aids understanding and retention (Olukunle, 2017). Additionally, 'Truth Sheets' for specific FOUR claims- focused documents that directly refute particular assertions made by FOUR (such as the historical accuracy of Bisaka's prophecies, the morals of his teachings)- using logical reasoning, historical facts, and biblical rebuttals- were proposed. BP01 summarized this need in an interview, stating that leaders needed "clear facts to present, simple points that directly answer Bisaka's claims without getting lost in too much theology" (OI, 15.03.2023, Hoima).

Community radio programs were recognized as another essential channel for widespread outreach. Collaborating with local radio stations to host regular shows that discuss Christian faith, dispel common misconceptions, and provide a platform for questions and answers from an evidentialist perspective was seen as having significant reach—especially in rural areas where radio remains a key source of information. As LR05 explained in an interview, "Everyone listens to the radio, even in the villages. A program where we can talk about the truth of Jesus and answer listeners' questions about Bisaka, that would reach many" (OI, 20.04.2023, Kagadi). This approach leverages existing, easily accessible media outlets to overcome literacy barriers and connect with a diverse audience—a method commonly used by religious organizations in developing areas to spread their message (Larson & Lustig, 2011).

Finally, for areas with increasing smartphone and internet access, the development of Digital Content (Where Accessible) was also suggested. This included short social media posts, audio clips, and online articles that presented evidential arguments. This recognized the growing digital literacy, even in more remote areas, and used new media for outreach (Campbell, 2010), ensuring the message could reach younger generations and those with evolving access to information. An FGD participant from a more urbanized area emphasized this, saying, "Our youth are on their phones. If we want to reach them, we need short videos, clear messages on WhatsApp, Facebook. That's where the conversations are happening" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This multi-channel approach ensured that apologetic resources were not only relevant in content but also in their delivery methods, maximizing their potential impact across the sub-region.

#### **5.4.3 Engaging in Constructive Dialogue and Public Forums**

Findings from interviews with COU clergy, lay readers, and ordinary Christians, as well as FGDs with archdeacons, consistently revealed a strong desire for more direct and constructive engagement with communities affected by FOUR. This highlighted the urgent need for strategies involving open community dialogues, interfaith dialogue (with caution), and sharing powerful testimonies of life transformation.

#### **a. Open Community Dialogues**

Organizing public forums, debates, or question-and-answer sessions in communities where FOUR is prevalent has become a crucial strategy. These events, led by trained COU leaders, create a respectful space for discussion focused on presenting evidence and logical arguments rather than aggressive confrontation. Several FGD participants expressed a desire for such open discussions, with AC05 noting, "We need to talk about these things openly, otherwise people will just believe what Bisaka says without questioning" (FGD, 25.05.2023, Hoima). This highlights the importance of public square apologetics, where reasoned discourse can challenge dominant narratives and promote critical thinking (Kreeft & Tacelli, 2009; Habermas, 1996; Craig, 2008; Copan, 2017). These forums offer a platform for exchanging ideas, enabling the COU to proactively present its case and address misconceptions transparently.

#### **b. Interfaith Dialogue (with Caution)**

While engaging in direct theological debate with FOUR leaders may be difficult due to their foundational beliefs in Bisaka's divinity, opportunities for dialogue on shared moral values or community well-being could be pursued. The goal would be to build bridges where possible while respecting theological differences. This recognizes the desire for unity and peaceful coexistence expressed by some community members, even amidst doctrinal disagreements. For example, CL09

stated in an interview, "We might not agree on who God is, but we can talk about how to help our village with water, or how to stop domestic violence. That might open a door later for deeper conversations about faith" (OI, 23.08.2023, Hoima). This careful approach aligns with scholarly views on interfaith dialogue that promote finding common ground on ethical and social issues as a first step, even when core theological agreements are lacking (Griffiths, 2002; Knitter, 2002; Race, 1993; Phiri, 2008). Such dialogue focuses on practical cooperation and mutual respect without compromising essential beliefs.

### **c. Testimony and Life Transformation**

Encouraging and equipping COU Christians, especially those who may have been influenced by FOUR or have family members involved, to share their testimonies of faith in Christ was seen as a highly impactful strategy. These testimonies would emphasize how faith in Christ brings genuine, lasting transformation and freedom, directly contrasting it with any legalistic or manipulative aspects of FOUR. This approach directly counters the appeal of 'instant solutions' often offered by FOUR and highlights the experiential side of Christian faith (Strobel, 2000; Lewis, 1943; McDowell, 1979; Keller, 2008). OC06's experience, shared in an interview, powerfully underlined this need: "My husband was looking for answers, for healing. If he had heard more stories of how Jesus truly changed lives, brought real peace, maybe he would not have gone to Bisaka" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). Her testimony pointed out the vital need for stories of hope and genuine transformation within traditional Christian faith to show its living power, contrasting sharply with the appeals of new religious movements. Such personal stories provide compelling, real-life evidence of Christianity's effectiveness, which often resonates more deeply with people than abstract theological arguments.

#### **5.4.4 Strengthening Internal COU Faith Formation**

Findings from COU interviews and FGDs in the Bunyoro sub-region consistently showed that strengthening internal COU faith formation is very important for building resilience against the appeals of FOUR. This involved a multi-faceted approach centered on improving biblical literacy, implementing strong discipleship programs, and increasing visible pastoral presence and care.

##### **a. Deepening Biblical Literacy**

The importance of strong biblical teaching from the pulpit and in Sunday school programs was crucial. This aimed to ensure congregants understood why the Bible is authoritative and what its main message is, equipping them to identify false teachings. Many participants expressed concern about the vulnerability caused by a shallow understanding of Scripture. For example, AC07 said in an FGD, "If our people truly knew their Bible, knew why it's God's Word, they would not be easily swayed by a new 'Book of God' from Bisaka" (FGD, 25.02.2023, Hoima). This directly addressed the observation that a lack of deep biblical understanding makes some parishioners vulnerable to new doctrines, a point thoroughly examined by scholars like Bruce (1996), who emphasized the historical reliability and self-attesting nature of Scripture, and Carson (1996), who stressed the importance of theological education for laypeople.

##### **b. Discipleship Programs**

Implementing strong discipleship programs that go beyond basic religious instruction was also deemed essential. These programs aimed to foster a deep personal relationship with Christ and a clear understanding of Christian doctrine and ethics. This was seen as a key preventative measure against the "absolute loyalty to the founder" observed in FOUR. As T02 articulated in an FGD, "FOUR demands total devotion to Bisaka. We need to ground our people's loyalty firmly in Christ

through true discipleship, so they know who they believe in" (FGD, 20.03.2023, Hoima). This aligns with the understanding of robust discipleship as central to Christian formation, which cultivates a commitment to Christ that inoculates believers against charismatic cults (Barna, 2001; Willard, 1998). Such programs could provide the theological depth and personal conviction necessary to withstand external pressures.

### **c. Pastoral Presence and Care**

Increasing the visible and active presence of COU clergy and lay leaders in communities affected by FOUR was critically important. This involved offering empathetic pastoral care, counseling, and practical support to families in distress, thereby demonstrating the love of Christ in action. This directly countered the feeling among some COU members that the church “struggled to intervene effectively to maintain our Christian marriage,” as noted by OC02 (OI, 30.11.2022, Kikuube), who felt abandoned when their families were divided by FOUR's teachings on polygamy. LR01 echoed this sentiment in an interview, saying, “Our people need to see us, need to feel our presence in their suffering. If they see us caring for them in their troubles, they will trust the Church more than the promises of Bisaka” (OI, 18.12.2022, Kagadi). This fulfilled the church's vital role as a supportive community and a visible sign of God's care (Dulles, 1988; Hauerwas, 1981), offering a compassionate alternative to the often-demanding and isolating environment of new religious movements.

## **5.4.5 Strategic Partnership and Collaboration**

Findings from interviews within the Anglican Church of Uganda in the Bunyoro sub-region consistently showed that strategic partnership and collaboration were essential for a successful

evidentialist apologetic. This involved promoting inter-diocesan cooperation and forming alliances with Christian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and scholars.

**a. Inter-Diocesan Collaboration**

Encouraging resource sharing and best practices among Anglican dioceses in Uganda facing similar challenges from new religions was viewed as a crucial step. This strategy promoted a unified approach and made the most of limited resources. As BP01 stated in an interview, "We are not alone in this fight against these new religions. Other dioceses encounter similar issues. We need to communicate, learn from successful strategies elsewhere, and pool our strengths rather than each diocese trying to reinvent the wheel" (OI, 15.03.2023, Kampala). This reflects the scholarly focus on synergy and collective effort in mission and ministry, where united actions can achieve much greater results than isolated efforts (Snyder, 2004).

**b. Collaboration with Christian NGOs and Scholars**

Partnering with organizations that specialize in counter-cult apologetics or theological education was also seen as essential to access expertise, research, and resources. This specifically included seeking guidance from African scholars who had studied new religions in the region, ensuring culturally appropriate strategies. CL07 expressed this need in an interview: "We need external help. There are scholars who have studied groups like FOUR deeply; their insights could guide us. And NGOs specializing in apologetics have materials we might not even know about" (OI, 30.05.2023, Kibaale). This view aligns with the idea that addressing complex religious phenomena often requires interdisciplinary teamwork and using specialized knowledge (Robbins, 1988). Also, involving African scholars in particular provided important local context, helping to avoid forcing

Western frameworks that might not fit locally (Phiri, 2008). This collaborative approach aimed to improve the COU's ability to engage effectively and knowledgeably.

## **5.5 Summary**

This chapter, based on findings from interviews and FGDs within the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region, establishes a strong rationale for adopting an evidentialist apologetic approach. This approach, highlighted by the need for shared evidence and concrete arguments to counter the FOUR's claims, moves beyond mere theological assertion toward reasoned engagement. To implement this, key strategies are proposed: comprehensive training for clergy and lay leaders, development of contextualized apologetic resources, engaging in constructive dialogue and public forums, strengthening internal COU faith formation, and fostering strategic partnerships and collaboration. This comprehensive framework, informed by local experiences and supported by scholarly perspectives, offers a practical roadmap for the COU to navigate religious pluralism and reaffirm Christian truth. It sets the stage for the final chapter of this thesis, which will summarize overall findings, present conclusions, and provide recommendations based on this proposed framework.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This concluding chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the study's key results. It starts with a summary of the findings, capturing the main insights from the research regarding the COU, the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR), their interactions, and the developed contextual apologetic response. After the summary, a brief conclusion synthesizes these findings to address the main research questions and the thesis's core argument. Finally, the chapter provides practical recommendations for the COU in the Bunyoro Sub-Region, along with suggestions for future research, aiming to contribute both practically and academically to the discussion on religious revisionism in Uganda.

#### **6.2 Summary of Findings**

This study, conducted in the Bunyoro sub-region of Uganda, revealed important findings about the theology and practices of the COU, the unique doctrines and practices of the FOUR, the significant influence of FOUR's religious revisionism on the COU, and the development of a contextual Christian apologetic response to this religious revisionism.

##### **6.2.1 Church of Uganda: Theology and Practices**

The research established that the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region follows core Christian doctrines, including the Trinity, Incarnation, Justification by Faith, Atonement, and Resurrection. The Holy Bible is its ultimate authority, complemented by Tradition and Reason. Its practical expressions include sacramental celebrations, various ministries, liturgical worship guided by the church calendar, episcopal governance, community involvement, fellowship, and evangelism, with a

growing incorporation of local language and culture. However, the study also showed that there are different levels of theological understanding among various participant groups, especially regarding complex doctrines and creedal knowledge, highlighting an area for further attention.

### **6.2.2 The Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR): Distinct Doctrines and Practices**

The study described the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR) as a new, distinct religious movement with significant religious revisionism. Key findings indicated that FOUR's authority mainly relies on its founder, O.R.O. Bisaka, and his self-written "Book of God of the Age of Oneness," which explicitly overrides the Bible. A core belief of its doctrine is that O.R.O. Bisaka is God incarnate, a view that fundamentally differs from Christian Trinitarianism. FOUR's practices include a unique 23-question initiation ritual, acceptance of polygamy for men, a revised set of commandments, and a special symbolic language that rejects traditional Christian symbols. Its worship is lively and sensory-rich, focusing on O.R.O. Bisaka and including healing ceremonies. Salvation is seen through ethical behavior and ritual participation on specific days, which sharply contrasts with Christian teachings on grace.

### **6.2.3 Impact of FOUR's Religious Revisionism on the Church of Uganda**

Finally, the research showed that FOUR's religious revisionism has had a deep and complex impact on the COU in the Bunyoro sub-region. Doctrinally, FOUR's challenges to scriptural authority, Christology, and the nature of God have caused confusion and threatened the COU's doctrinal integrity. Socially, its presence has led to lower church attendance, financial difficulties, disrupted family and social bonds, and strained relationships due to differing worldviews and exclusive claims. Culturally, FOUR's intentional reclaiming of local language and indigenous practices has challenged the COU's linguistic dominance and Western-influenced traditions. Additionally, FOUR's unique governance structure and native naming practices mark a clear departure from

COU episcopal leadership and traditional naming customs. This wide-ranging impact highlights how FOUR's rise is actively reshaping the social fabric, cultural norms, and religious identities, thereby affecting the stability and identity of COU faith and community life in Bunyoro.

#### **6.2.4 Forging a Contextual Christian Apologetic Response: An Evidentialist Approach**

Building on the identified impacts of the Faith of Unity and the unique context of Bunyoro, this study developed a contextual Christian apologetic response using an evidentialist approach to strengthen the COU's ministry. This response is not fixed, but rather a flexible framework highlighting several interconnected strategies designed to provide reasoned and verifiable reasons for Christian truth. Key elements include the need for thorough training for clergy and lay leaders to equip them with evidential arguments, along with the creation of localized apologetic resources in native languages and formats to make these arguments accessible. The framework also encourages engaging in constructive dialogue and public forums, such as sharing impactful testimonies of life transformation, and enhancing internal COU faith formation through increased biblical literacy and strong discipleship. Finally, it stresses strategic partnerships and cooperation—within COU dioceses and with Christian NGOs and scholars—to optimize resources and expertise for a united and effective apologetic effort against religious revisionism.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

This study successfully investigated the significant challenges posed by the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR)'s religious revisionism to the Church of Uganda (COU) in the Bunyoro Sub-Region and developed a contextual Christian apologetic framework in response. The research established that FOUR is a distinct religious movement characterized by fundamental doctrinal reinterpretations concerning Scripture's authority and the divinity claims of its founder, O.R.O. Bisaka. This emerging movement has visibly impacted the COU's stability and effectiveness, resulting in

widespread consequences, including doctrinal fragmentation, social disruption (such as declining attendance and family conflict), and cultural challenges.

The resulting multi-dimensional framework is empirically grounded in the Banyoro context, moving beyond "one-size-fits-all" approaches by emphasizing lived faith experience and the Gospel's transformative power. This model, rooted in an evidentialist approach, integrates three strategic pillars: Intellectual and Doctrinal Clarity (providing reasoned, evidence-based responses), Relational and Experiential Ministry (fostering authentic spiritual commitment), and Visible Community Engagement (demonstrating the Christian faith's tangible relevance through social action).

This thesis makes a new and significant contribution to the fields of Christian apologetics, missiology, and the study of new religious movements. It addresses a notable gap in existing scholarship by providing an empirical, grounded, and nuanced understanding of the FOUR's unique theological deviations and socio-cultural impacts on COU Christianity in Uganda's Bunyoro Sub-Region. Furthermore, the developed framework offers a transferable model for addressing similar religious challenges posed by new religious movements across diverse contexts worldwide. The findings ultimately demonstrate that through strategic doctrinal development, intentional relational engagement, and tangible community service, the COU possesses a robust strategy to reinforce its identity and sustain its ministry within this complex religious landscape.

## **6.4 Recommendations**

Based on the comprehensive findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are suggested to address the identified challenges and promote effective engagement. These recommendations target specific stakeholders and also highlight areas for future academic research.

#### **6.4.1 For the Church of Uganda in the Bunyoro Sub-Region**

To effectively counter religious revisionism, especially from the FOUR, the COU in the Bunyoro Sub-Region should focus on strengthening doctrinal education. This includes implementing comprehensive and accessible theological programs for both clergy and laity, emphasizing core COU doctrines like the Trinity, Incarnation, Christology, and the authority of Scripture to promote a deeper and more consistent understanding of the Christian faith.

Secondly, a strategic and multifaceted apologetic approach is crucial. The Church must tailor its apologetic efforts by creating materials and training that are culturally relevant and directly address the specific doctrinal claims and practices of FOUR and other new religious movements within the Bunyoro context, using local languages and cultural expressions when suitable. At the same time, promoting relational evangelism and discipleship is essential. Focusing on personal testimony, mentorship, and small group discipleship will encourage deeper spiritual growth and stronger community bonds, providing a persuasive alternative to the appeal of revisionist doctrines.

Thirdly, the Church should expand its visible presence and collaborative efforts within the community. This involves improving community engagement and social action through greater participation in development projects such as education, healthcare, and water sanitation. These initiatives show the comprehensive impact of Christian faith and directly address the community's felt needs, greatly enhancing the church's social capital and witness. Additionally, fostering ecumenical dialogue is essential. Promoting respectful conversations and cooperation with other Christian denominations will present a united front against religious revisionism and enable collective efforts toward the common good of the entire region.

### **6.4.2 For Further Research**

For future scholarly efforts, several key areas require further investigation to deepen our understanding of religious revisionism in Uganda. First, a longitudinal study on FOUR's development is highly recommended. Such research would monitor the ongoing evolution of FOUR's doctrines, practices, and social influence over time. This approach is crucial for gaining deeper insights into its long-term progression, how it adapts to changing socio-religious contexts, and how its engagement with the broader community, including the COU, evolves over time.

Secondly, conducting a comparative study of apologetic approaches would be very helpful. This research should carefully analyze how effective different apologetic strategies used by various Christian groups in Uganda are when responding to new religions. By looking at various methods, from doctrinal arguments to community work and relational engagement, the study can find the best practices, evaluate where they work best, and identify areas where current responses could be improved or adjusted for greater effectiveness.

Thirdly, understanding the underlying societal dynamics is essential. Therefore, examining the specific socio-economic factors that lead individuals to join or leave movements like FOUR would enhance our understanding of religious commitment and disillusionment in the region. Additionally, researching the influence of digital media on religious revisionism is becoming increasingly relevant. This research would shed light on how online platforms and new technologies are affecting the spread and perception of religious revisionist messages, as well as shaping the responses and communication approaches of mainstream churches in Uganda.

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## APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW GUIDE 1 FOR CHRISTIAN RESPONDENTS

(For Ordinary Christians, Lay Readers, and Priests of the Church of Uganda)

### 1. Introduction

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Akankwasa Tibesigwa John Gad and I am a PhD Theology student at Uganda Christian University Mukono. I am conducting research to understand how Christian apologetics can be an effective response to new religious movements, specifically focusing on the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR) in the Bunyoro sub-region.

Your insights are invaluable to this study. This interview will take approximately [e.g., 45-60] minutes. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can choose not to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequences. All the information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous, meaning your name will not be linked to your responses in any report or publication.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Do you consent to participate in this interview? Do you give permission to record this conversation for accurate transcription and analysis? (If applicable)

**Study Title:** An Apologetic Response to Religious Revisionism in Uganda: A Case Study of the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR) in the Bunyoro Sub-Region.

**Date:** Interviewee **Role:** 1. Ordinary Christian 2. Lay Reader 3. Priest

**Interview Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview Start Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview End Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

### PART A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (BRIEF)

What is your decade of birth? (e.g., 1960s, 1970s, 1980s)

What is your gender?

How long have you been an active Christian within the Church of Uganda?

(For Lay Readers/Priests) How long have you served in your current role?

Which parish/location are you primarily affiliated with in the Bunyoro Sub-Region?

### PART B: CORE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Section 1: Awareness and Perceptions of Religious Revisionism (FOUR)

Are you aware of the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR) in your community or the broader Bunyoro sub-region?

*Probe:* How did you first become aware of them?

From your perspective, what are the main teachings or practices of FOUR that you are aware of?

*Probe:* How do these compare or contrast with COU teachings?

Have you observed any specific effects or impacts of FOUR's presence on your local COU (e.g., attendance, community relations, members' faith)?

*Probe:* Can you share any specific examples or stories?

*Probe (for Lay Readers/Priests):* How has it affected your ministry or the morale of your congregation/staff?

In your opinion, what attracts people from mainstream Christian churches to join groups like FOUR?

**Probe:** Are there specific needs or challenges in the community that you think FOUR addresses?

## **Section 2: Christian Apologetics as a Response**

How familiar are you with the concept of "Christian Apologetics" (defending or explaining the Christian faith)?

**Probe:** What does it mean to you in your own words?

How do you believe the COU in your area is currently responding to the presence or teachings of FOUR?

**Probe:** What are some strengths or weaknesses of the current approach?

What specific methods, strategies, or approaches do you think would be most effective for the COU to use when responding to FOUR?

**Probe:** Should the focus be on doctrinal arguments, practical action, relationship-building, or something else? Why?

**Probe (for Lay Readers/Priests):** What practical steps could the diocese/parish take?

What kind of support, training, or resources do you think COU members (including clergy and lay leaders) need to better understand and respond to religious revisionism?

**Probe:** Are there any specific topics or skills that should be prioritized in such training?

From your personal experience, have you ever engaged in discussions with followers of FOUR? If so, what were these interactions like, and what did you learn?

**Probe:** Were there specific questions or challenges that FOUR members raised that you found difficult to answer?

## **PART C: CLOSING REMARKS**

Thank you for sharing your valuable time and insights. Is there anything else you would like to add or any points you feel we haven't covered that are important to this topic?

Thank you again for your participation in this study.

## **APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE 2 FOR - FOUR FOLLOWERS**

**(For Ordinary Followers, Leaders of FOUR, and Apostates)**

### **1. Introduction**

"Good morning/afternoon. My name is Akankwasa Tibesigwa John Gad and I am a PhD Theology student at Uganda Christian University Mukono. I am conducting research to understand various religious perspectives in Uganda, including the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR). I am seeking to learn about people's experiences and beliefs from different religious backgrounds.

Your perspective is very important to this study. This interview will take approximately [e.g., 45-60] minutes. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can choose not to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequences. All the information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous, meaning your name will not be linked to your responses in any report or publication.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Do you consent to participate in this interview? Do you give permission to record this conversation for accurate transcription and analysis? (If applicable)"

**Study Title:** An Apologetic Response to Religious Revisionism in Uganda: A Case Study of the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR) in the Bunyoro Sub-Region.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewee Role:** 1. Ordinary Follower 2. Leader of FOUR 3. Apostate (Former Member)

**Interview Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview Start Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview End Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **PART A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (BRIEF)**

1. What is your decade of birth? (e.g., 1960s, 1970s, 1980s)
2. What is your gender?
3. Which community/location are you primarily affiliated with in the Bunyoro Sub-Region?
4. (For Leaders) How long have you served as a leader in FOUR?

### **PART B: CORE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

#### **Section 1: Experiences within the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR)**

1. Can you tell me about your spiritual journey and how you came to be involved with the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR)?

*Probe (For Followers/Leaders):* What initially attracted you to FOUR? What needs did it meet for you?

*Probe (For Apostates):* What initially attracted you to FOUR? What led you to eventually leave?

2. What are some of the core beliefs and practices of FOUR that are most significant to you?

*Probe (For Leaders):* How do you teach these beliefs to new members?

3. How has being a part of FOUR impacted your life, your family, or your community?

*Probe:* Can you give specific examples?

4. How does FOUR view other religious groups, particularly mainstream Christian churches like the COU?

*Probe (For Leaders):* What are the main differences you see?

*Probe (For Followers/Apostates):* Have you had any interactions with members of other religions? What were they like?

### **Section 2: Perceptions of Christian Churches (for ONLY: FOUR Followers/Leaders)**

5. What are your perceptions of the COU or other mainstream Christian churches in your area?

*Probe:* Do you feel they address the needs of the community?

*Probe:* Have you experienced any attempts from them to engage with FOUR or its members? If so, what were those interactions like?

### **Section 3: Reflections (for ONLY Apostates)**

6. Since leaving FOUR, what are your current spiritual beliefs or affiliations, if any?
7. What advice would you give to mainstream Christian churches about how to better understand or engage with former members of FOUR, or those still within the movement?

### **PART C: CLOSING REMARKS**

Thank you for sharing your valuable time and insights. Is there anything else you would like to add or any points you feel we haven't covered that are important to this topic?

Thank you again for your participation in this study.

## **APENDIX III: INTERVIEW GUIDE 3 FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

**(Separate for Church of Uganda Groups and FOUR Groups)**

### **1. Introduction & Informed Consent**

Good morning/afternoon everyone. My name is Akankwasa Tibesigwa John Gad and I am a PhD Theology student at Uganda Christian University Mukono. I am conducting research to understand (for COU groups: how Christian apologetics can be an effective response to new religions, specifically FOUR / for FOUR groups: various religious perspectives in Uganda, including the Faith of Unity Religion).

We are here today to have a group discussion. This is not a debate, and there are no right or wrong answers. We want to hear your honest opinions and experiences. Please feel free to share your thoughts, and also listen respectfully to others. This discussion will take approximately [e.g., 60-90] minutes. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can choose not to answer any question or withdraw at any time. All information shared will be kept confidential and anonymous.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Do you all consent to participate in this focus group discussion? Do you give permission to record this conversation for accurate transcription and analysis? (If applicable)"

**Study Title:** An Apologetic Response to Religious Revisionism in Uganda: A Case Study of the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR) in the Bunyoro Sub-Region.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FGD Group:** Church of Uganda (Lay Readers/Ordinary Members/Priests)

FOUR (Ordinary Followers/FOUR Leaders/ Apostates)

**FGD Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FGD Start Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FGD End Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Part A: Introduction / Warm-up (Brief)**

1. To start, could each of you briefly introduce yourselves by your first name and mention how long you've been a member of (COU / FOUR)?

## **PART B: CORE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **FOR COU FGDS:**

#### **Section 1: Collective Awareness and Perceptions of FOUR**

1. What are the general perceptions within your COU community regarding the FOUR?  
*Probe:* What are some common beliefs or assumptions people have about FOUR?
2. How do you, as a group, perceive the main differences between the teachings and practices of FOUR and those of the COU?  
*Probe:* Are there any specific doctrinal or practical areas where you see significant divergence?
3. From your collective observation, what has been the impact of FOUR's presence on the COU in your area? (e.g., membership, family relationships, community unity).  
*Probe:* Can you share any collective examples or stories of this impact?

#### **Section 2: Group Perspectives on Apologetic Response**

4. How do you feel the COU in your area is currently responding to the presence of FOUR?  
*Probe:* What are some challenges or successes in these responses?
5. In your opinion, what specific strategies or approaches would be most effective for the COU to use when responding to FOUR?  
*Probe:* Should the focus be on intellectual arguments, practical acts of service, fostering relationships, or a combination? How?  
*Probe (for Priests/Lay Readers groups):* What resources or training would be most beneficial for clergy and lay leaders in engaging with FOUR?
6. How can the COU foster understanding and respectful dialogue with individuals involved in FOUR, even when there are theological differences?  
*Probe:* What role can personal witness play? What about community projects?
7. What role do you see for inter-church collaboration (with other Christian denominations) in responding to new religious movements like FOUR?

### **FOR FAITH OF UNITY RELIGION (FOUR) FGDS:**

#### **Section 1: Collective Experiences and Beliefs within FOUR**

1. How do you collectively describe what the Faith of Unity Religion (FOUR) is about?  
*Probe:* What are the most important aspects of FOUR's teachings or practices for your group?
2. Can you share what initially attracted you, or people you know, to join FOUR?  
*Probe:* What needs do you feel FOUR uniquely addresses in the community?
3. How has being a part of FOUR collectively impacted your lives or your community relationships?  
*Probe:* Are there specific ways FOUR contributes positively to the community?
4. How do you perceive other religious groups, particularly mainstream Christian churches like the COU?  
*Probe:* What are the main differences you see between FOUR and these churches?

## **Section 2: Interactions and Future Outlook**

5. Have members of your group had interactions or discussions with followers of mainstream Christian churches? What were these interactions like?  
*Probe:* Were there any common points of discussion or disagreement?
6. What is your hope for the future of FOUR in the Bunyoro sub-region?  
*Probe (for Leaders):* What do you see as the biggest opportunities or challenges for the growth of FOUR?
7. What message or understanding would you like other religious groups to have about FOUR?

## **PART C: CLOSING REMARKS**

Thank you all for your active participation and insightful contributions. Your perspectives are very important for this study. Is there anything else anyone would like to add before we conclude?

Thank you again for your time and honesty.

#### **APPENDIX IV: A LIST OF BISAKA'S 1<sup>ST</sup> ORDAINED BAHEREZA**

1. Akugizibwe Francis
2. Asiiimwe
3. Bamwenda
4. Barwogeza Bonefansio
5. Bibohere Antonio
6. Bikanga Charles
7. Buhangamaiso Zowe
8. Businge
9. Byoleko Restetuta
10. Kaabagimu Anatolio
11. Kaitamyaaka Feredisi
12. Korotyo Sulumani
13. Mitooro Teopisa
14. Mugisa Krizestomu
15. Mugisa Tinka
16. Nnagawa Sesiria
17. Nnayiga Maria Regina
18. Nnaziwa
19. Nyangireke
20. Nyanzi Leonard
21. Tibakanya Maria
22. Yatuwa

***Source: Mayaga Agaba Elisa, a former Chaplain to Bisaka, provided all Christian names that had been dropped due to followers' new faith (oral interview, 20.12.2023, Kagadi).***

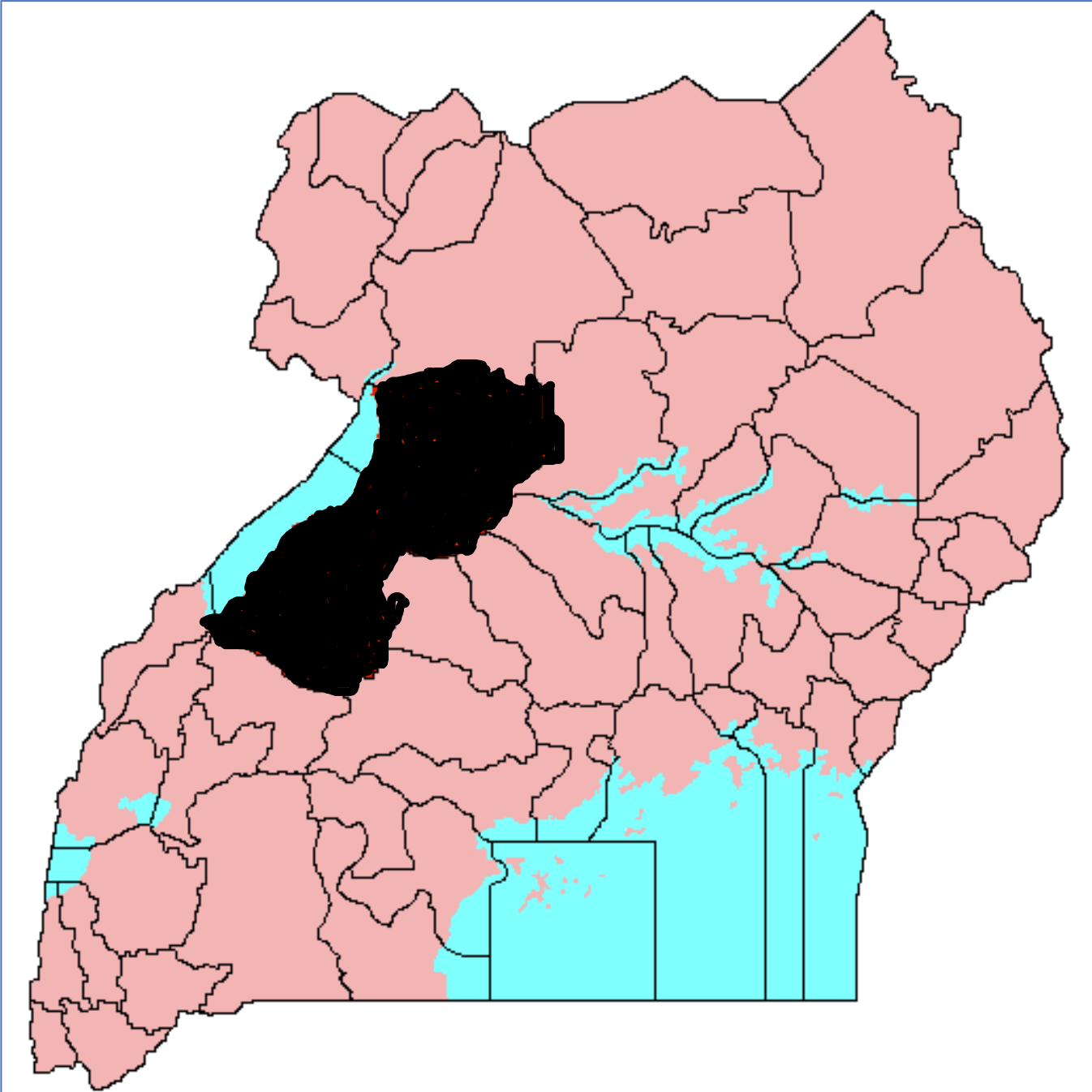


**APPENDIX VI: MAP OF KAGADI DISTRICT SUB-COUNTIES**



*Figure 2 MAP OF KAGADI DISTRICT SHOWING THE POSITION OF KAPYEMI*

**APPENDIX VII: MAP OF UGANDA SHOWING BUNYORO SUB-REGION**



*Figure 3 MAP OF UGANDA SHOWING BUNYORO SUB REGION*

**APPENDIX VIII: MAP OF AFRICA SHOWING THE LOCATION O UGANDA**



*Figure 4: MAP OF AFRICA SHOWING POSITION OF UGANDA*

## APPENDIX IX: A SIGNED POST VIVA FORM

UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF RESEARCH & POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

### THESIS CORRECTION COMPLIANCE FORM BY THE CANDIDATE (POST VIVA FORM)

**Date:** 17<sup>th</sup> September 2025.

**Name of Candidate:** TIBESIGWA Akankwasa John Gad. **Reg. No:** RM21P35/002

**Title of Thesis:** A CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS REVISIONISM IN

**UGANDA: A CASE OF FAITH OF UNITY RELIGION IN BUNYORO SUB-REGION**

SN	COMMENTS BY EXTERNAL EXAMINER	ACTION TAKEN	INDICATOR
1	Literature review: The candidate should rework on are overly detailed examples, limited explicit connection to the case study, and insufficient critical engagement or theoretical framing.	Increased explicit connection to the case study and the thesis's purpose; increased critical engagement and explicit connection to the case study (FOUR); Reduced detail on non-essential historical points and increased critical engagement/connection; Reduced detail on internal structure and focused on the key mechanisms of revision relevant to the thesis; and critical engagement.	E.g., Page 20, 21,23
2	This needs a biblical support content “The balance of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason is essential for theological understanding, but often it is difficult to find the perfect balance.	Added biblical-theological analysis	Page 47
3	This also needs biblical support “The observed variations in practical application and interpretation highlight crucial dynamics of biblical reception and engagement with tradition and reason.”	Added biblical-theological analysis	Page 47
4	The Pulpit/Lectern emphasizes the Word of God, highlighting Anglicanism's	Added biblical-theological analysis	Page 69

	dedication to biblical proclamation (McGrath, 2007).		
5	And this:- Sermons by clergy or lay leaders provide biblical interpretation relevant to local life.	Added biblical-theological analysis	Page 60
6	And: This shift directly challenged the Anglican view of biblical supremacy and the role of tradition and reason in theological interpretation (as discussed in Chapter Two). RV04 noted, "The followers treat the words of O.R.O.B. as if they are direct commands from God, even more so than biblical teachings" (FGD, 10.02.2023 Hoima), a sentiment RV08 echoed by stating, "They have their own book which they value more than the Bible" (FGD, 10.02.2023 Hoima).	Added biblical-theological analysis	Page 83
7	With minor refinements, particularly tightening the language, clarifying the structure, especially on repetition and length, see for example the words: contextually grounded apologetic framework is repeated several times. Streamlining could make the conclusion more concise and impactful. Similarly, there is a need to balance the tone. At points, the writing leans toward a pastoral/advocacy tone, for example: "promote genuine connections," "compassionate engagement". This is powerful but may need more academic neutrality, it could serve as an exemplary conclusion in theology and missiology.	Worked on three main areas for refinement: reducing repetition, streamlining length, and balancing the tone toward greater academic neutrality (e.g., rephrasing "compassionate engagement").	Page 180 – 182
8	Issues regarding formatting inconsistencies	Formatted Bibliograph using APA format	Page 184-188
9	Some serious issues of redundancy	Corrected	Page 158
10	There are questionable sources; Here I have noted: As mentioned earlier <i>Wikipedia</i> is not generally acceptable in academic work, though obviously it can point to Pew's report. Better to cite the original pew research center document. See also similar issue on Bisaka's: <i>The Book of God of the Age of Oneness</i> may raise	Wikipedia removed  Bisaka's book treated as a primary text (in sources of information, literature review & Findings)	Page 186  Page 18, 28, 66

	credibility issues, if included, clarify its relevance as a primary source rather than as scholarship.		
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SN	COMMENTS BY INTERNAL EXAMINER	ACTION TAKEN	INDICATOR
1	After signing the Report, the student should include the Date. It is important	Date was inserted	E.g., page i
2	The Abstract does not appear in Table of Contents.	Corrected	E.g., page v
3	The preliminary pages before Chapter one need to be well numbered.	Preliminary page numbered properly	Pages i-xii
4	The Table of Contents should be properly written	The table content properly written	Pages v-viii
5	Work on line spacing all over	Worked on line spacing throughout the work	All the work
6	Chapters are supposed to begin on fresh or new page	All Chapters begin on fresh page	All the work
7	I suggest that, that bolded subheadings should have been numbered	Bolded subheadings have been numbered	E.g., page 22, 23, 27, 28, and 29
8	Methodology: There are some interacting sentences which cannot be read.	Corrected	E.g., page 31

SN	COMMENTS BY VIVA VOCE PANEL	ACTION TAKEN	INDICATOR
1	Defining the “Evidentialism Apologetic”	Defined Evidentialism Apologetics.	E.g., Page 133
2	The functions of Evidentialist approach	The functions of Evidentialist approach were highlighted.	E.g., Page 134
3	Key Evidentialist tools and their applications	The Key Evidentialist tools and their applications were given.	E.g., Page 134

Candidate's name: **Tibesigwa Akankwasa John Gad**

Signature:




Supervisor's Name: **Prof. Christopher Byaruhanga**

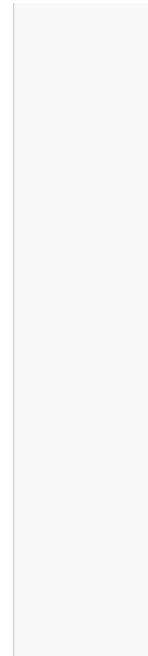
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# APPENDIX X: PLAGIARISM REPORT

**Gad Akankwasa**

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