THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF SACRED LITURGY

THE SYMBOLISM OF *MUTHIGI* OF THE A*GIKUYU* ELDERS OF KENYA AND THE PASTORAL STAFF OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOP: TOWARDS LITURGICAL INCULTURATION.

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Theology in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for a Doctorate in Theology with Specialization in Sacred Liturgy

STUDENT: DANIEL M. KARAU, OFM CAP.

REG. NO. 1039358

SEPTEMBER, 2026

Nairobi – Kenya

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders of Kenya and the Pastoral Staff of the Catholic Bishop, exploring possibilities for liturgical inculturation within the *Agĩkũyũ* Catholic community. The study seeks to understand how the cultural meaning attached to the *Mũthĩgi* can contribute to a deeper appreciation of episcopal ministry and the symbolic significance of the Pastoral Staff. It investigates the historical, theological, anthropological, pastoral, and liturgical dimensions of both symbols to establish areas of convergence and distinction. The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter One presents the background of the *Agĩkũyũ* people of Kenya by examining their geographical, historical, social, cultural, religious, and Christian contexts. It provides the foundation for understanding the meaning of the *Mũthĩgi* and its possible contribution to liturgical inculturation of the Pastoral Staff. Chapter Two examines the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* among the *Agĩkũyũ* elders, explaining its relationship with authority, wisdom, leadership, responsibility, communal identity, and the institution of elderhood. Chapter Three explores the Biblical and ecclesial understanding of the Staff, tracing its meaning from the Old Testament, New Testament, Church Tradition, and the development of the Pastoral Staff as a symbol of episcopal ministry. Chapter Four provides a comparative analysis of the *Mũthĩgi* and the Pastoral Staff by identifying their similarities and differences in cultural, theological, symbolic, pastoral, and liturgical dimensions. It evaluates how these two symbols can enter into meaningful dialogue towards an inculturated expression of episcopal ministry among the *Agĩkũyũ* without compromising Catholic Liturgical Tradition. Chapter Five presents recommendations for promoting an inculturated Pastoral Staff in Kenya, emphasizing liturgical, theological, anthropological, pastoral, spiritual, and historical considerations. The research employs the Liturgical Method as proposed by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and other Church documents, incorporating theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral, and juridical approaches. Since the study focuses on cultural symbolism and inculturation, it also applies anthropological and comparative methods. These approaches enable a deeper examination of how the *Mũthĩgi* can contribute to understanding and expressing the pastoral ministry of the bishop within the *Agĩkũyũ* cultural context. The study concludes that authentic liturgical inculturation allows cultural symbols that harmonize with the Gospel to enrich Christian identity and strengthen the participation of local communities in worship. The research acknowledges and duly cites all sources consulted, including biblical texts, Church documents, theological writings, historical works, and anthropological studies, according to accepted academic standards.

DECLARATION

I, Daniel M. Karau, OFM Cap., declare that this dissertation is my original work and has been prepared in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctorate in Theology with specialization in Sacred Liturgy at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa. I confirm that this work has not been submitted previously, either wholly or partly, for the award of any other academic qualification. I acknowledge that all sources consulted in the preparation of this dissertation have been appropriately recognized and referenced according to academic standards. I take full responsibility for the content, arguments, and conclusions presented in this research.

Signed: _____

Rev. Fr. Daniel M. Karau, OFM Cap.

Reg. No. 1039358

Date: 31-08-2026

Approved by: Rev. Msgr. Prof. John Mary Lukwata

Signed: _____

1st Supervisor: Rev. Msgr. Prof. John Mary Lukwata

Date: 31-08-2026

Signed: _____

2nd Supervisor: Rev. Dr. John Bosco Asiimwe

Date: 31-08-2026

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA
FACULTY OF THEOLOGY
Dept. of Sacred Liturgy
P. O. BOX 62157 - 00200, NAIROBI

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the Capuchin Franciscan Friars of the Custody of St. Francis in Kenya for their unwavering encouragement which they gave me. In a very special way, I single out my Custos Br. Arnold Shirima, OFM Cap. for his support and faith in me. May this work contribute to a deeper appreciation of African cultural heritage within the life and mission of the Church.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I give thanks to Almighty God for the gift of life, wisdom, strength, and perseverance throughout the process of undertaking this research.

I sincerely express my gratitude to my supervisors for their guidance, encouragement, critical insights, and academic support during the development of this dissertation. Their commitment and expertise greatly contributed to the completion of this work.

I also appreciate The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, particularly the Faculty of Theology and the Department of Sacred Liturgy, for providing the academic environment and resources necessary for this research.

My gratitude extends to my Franciscan Capuchin community, family members, friends, and all individuals who offered prayers, encouragement, and assistance throughout this journey. I acknowledge the Agĩkũyũ elders, scholars, and communities whose cultural knowledge and experiences inspired this study.

Finally, I thank all researchers and authors whose works contributed to the development of this dissertation and enriched my understanding of liturgical inculturation, symbolism, and cultural identity.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAS *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*

CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church

CIC *Codex Iuris Canonici* (Code of Canon Law)

CMA Catholic Men Association

CWA Catholic Women Association

GIRM General Instruction of the Roman Missal

OFM Cap. Order of Friars Minor Capuchin

SC *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii
DECLARATION ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
DEDICATION iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT v
ABBREVIATIONS vi
GENERAL INTRODUCTION 1
CHAPTER ONE 1
THE BACKGROUND OF THE *AGĨKŨYŨ* PEOPLE OF KENYA 1
Introduction 1
1.1 Geographical Location 2
1.2 Population Distribution 3
1.3 Ethnic Groups 3
1.4 The *Agĩkũyũ* People 5
1.4.1 Origins 6
1.4.2 Political Organization 11
1.4.3 Social-Cultural aspects 12
1.4.4 Rites of Passage 16
1.5 Economic Context 24
1.6 Religious Beliefs and Practices 27
1.6.1 Core Beliefs 29
1.6.2 Intermediaries between God and Man 33
1.6.3 Worship of *Ngai* 36
1.7 The *Agĩkũyũ* and Christianity 38
1.7.1 Early Evangelization of Kenya mong the *Agĩkũyũ* 39
1.7.2 Establishment of Dioceses Among the *Agĩkũyũ* 39
1.7.2.1 Archdiocese of Nyeri 40
1.7.2.2 Diocese of *Murang'a* 40
1.7.2.3 Archdiocese of Nairobi 41
1.7.2.4 Diocese of Embu 41
1.7.2.5 Diocese of Nyahururu 41

1.7.2.6 Diocese of Nakuru 42
1.7.3 Hierarchy and Diocesan Structures 42
1.7.3.1 The Bishop: Head of the Diocese 43
1.7.3.2 The Priests 43
1.7.3.3 Deacons 44
1.7.3.4 Consecrated Religious 44
1.7.3.5 Diocesan Curia 44
1.7.3.6 Deaneries 45
1.7.3.7 The Parish 45
1.7.3.8 Social Organization of the Diocese 46
1.8 Relevance of these Dioceses to the study of an Inculturated Pastoral Staff 47
1.9 Challenges Towards Liturgical Inculturation of the *Mũthĩgi* 47
1.9.1 Traditional Religion versus Christianity 48
1.9.2 Waning of the Traditional Authority Structures 48
1.9.3 Politicization of *Kĩama* and the *Mũthĩgi* 48
1.9.4 Fragmentation and Leadership Wrangles 49
1.9.5 Cultural Erosion and Modernization 49
1.9.6 Ethical Concern and Misuse 50
1.9.7 Colonial and Missionary Legacy 50
1.9.8 Inadequate Formation of Clergy and Liturgical Ministers 50
1.9.9 Limited Liturgical Guidelines from the Bishops 51
Conclusion 51
CHAPTER TWO 53
SYMBOLISM OF *MŨTHĨGI* OF THE *AGĨKŨYŨ* 53
Introduction 53
2.1 The Meaning of the *Mũthĩgi* 54
2.1.1 Symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* 56
2.2 Origin of the *Mũthĩgi* 65
2.2.1 Historical Origin 66
2.2.2 Functional Evolution: From Utility to Symbol 66
2.2.3 Development within the Institution of the *Kĩama* 67

2.2.4 Origin from Traditional Socio-Political Organization of the *Agĩkũyũ* 70
2.2.5 Development from the Age-Set System 71
2.2.6 Origin from the Broader African Tradition 71
2.2.7 Origin from the *Agĩkũyũ* Religious Beliefs 72
2.2.8 Origin from the Rituals 72
2.2.9 Other Origins 73
2.2.9.2 From the Mythic and Cosmological Foundation 73
2.2.9.3 Origin within the *Agĩkũyũ* Oral Tradition 74
2.3 Physical Characteristics and designations of the *Mũthĩgi* 75
2.3.1 Dimensions of *Mũthĩgi* 75
2.3.2 Length 75
2.3.3 Thickness 76
2.3.4 Material, Craftsmanship, and Weight 76
2.3.5 Forms of *Mũthĩgi* 76
2.3.6 Y-shaped *Mũthĩgi* 77
2.3.7 Head or Top design *Mũthĩgi* 77
2.3.8 Carved Decorative *Mũthĩgi* 78
2.4 Designations of the *Mũthĩgi* 78
2.4.1 *Mũthĩgi wa Mũthamaki* – Staff of Leadership 78
2.4.2 *Mũthĩgi wa mũhũga* (Staff of newly initiated youth) 79
2.4.3 *Mũthĩgi wa Gĩkũyũ* (Clan or Lineage Staff) 79
2.4.4 *Mũthĩgi wa Gũcokia Mbũri* (Staff of Atonement) 79
2.4.5 *Mũthĩgi wa Wendo* (Staff of Love) 79
2.4.6 Ceremonial or Decorative *Mũthĩgi* 80
2.5 The *Agĩkũyũ Kĩama* (Council of Elders) 80
2.5.1 The Making of an Elder 82
2.5.2 Ceremonies of making an Elder 83
2.5.3 Preparation of the *Mũthĩgi* 84
2.5.3 Assembly of the *Kĩama* Elders 85
2.5.4 Gathering Site 86
2.5.5 Admission into the *Kĩama* 87

2.5.6 Invocation of *Ngai* 89
2.5.7 A proposed Form of Blessing the *Mũthĩgi* 89
2.5.8 Bestowal of *Mũthĩgi* 91
2.5.6 Oath and Communal Blessing 92
2.6 Ceremonies with *Mũthĩgi* Usage 93
2.6.1 Birth Rites 93
2.6.2 Naming 93
2.6.3 Initiation Rites of Circumcision 94
2.6.4 Rites of Marriage 95
2.6.5 Death Rituals 96
2.7 The *Mũthĩgi* in the *Agĩkũyũ* Sacrifices 96
2.7.1 Rain Making 97
2.7.2 The Planting Ceremony 97
Conclusion 98
CHAPTER THREE 101
THE STAFF IN THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCH TRADITION 101
Introduction 101
3.1 The Staff in the Old Testament 103
3.1.1 Pre-Biblical Biblical Witness 104
3.1.2 The Staff of Jacob 105
3.1.3 The Staff of Judah 107
3.1.4 The Staff of Moses 107
3.1.5 The Staff of Aaron 114
3.1.6 The Staff Among the Prophets 116
3.1.7 Messianic Staff 117
3.1.8 Wisdom Books and Psalms 118
3.1.9 Symbolism of the Staff 119
3.2 The Staff in the New Testament 125
3.2.1 Jesus and the Staff 125
3.2.2 The Apostles 128
3.2.3 The Book of Revelation 129

3.3 Church Tradition on the Pastoral Staff 131
3.3.1 Apostolic Period 131
3.3.2 Patristic Period 131
3.3.3 Early Middle Ages 132
3.3.4 Carolingian Reform 133
3.3.5 Middle Ages 134
3.3.6 Scholastic Period 135
3.3.7 Reformation Period 135
3.3.8 Council of Trent 135
3.3.9 Vatican II 136
3.4 Pastoral Staff in the Rite of Ordination of a Bishop 136
3.4.1 Early Evidence (Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus) 136
3.4.2 Sacramentaries 138
3.4.3 The Current Rite of the Ordination of a Bishop 140
3.5 The Symbolism of the Pastoral Staff 144
3.6 Usage of Pastoral Staff in Liturgical Celebrations 146
3.6.1 The Pastoral Staff in the Celebration of the Eucharist 147
3.6.2 Ordination of Priests and Deacons 147
3.6.3 Confirmation 147
3.6.4 Dedication of a Church and Altar 148
3.6.5 Pastoral Visitations 148
3.6.6 Religious Profession 149
3.7 Liturgical Norms Governing the use of the Pastoral Staff 149
3.8 The Pope and the Pastoral Staff 150
3.9 Theology of the Pastoral Staff in the Rite of the Episcopal Ordination 152
Conclusion 153
COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE *MŨTHĨGI* AND THE PASTORAL STAFF 155
Introduction 155
4.1 Comparative Study: The *Mũthĩgi* and the Pastoral Staff 157
4.1.1 Similarities 157
4.1.2 Differences Between the Mũthĩgi and the Pastoral Staff 162

4.2 Concepts of Inculturation and Liturgical Inculturation 167
4.2.1 The meaning of Inculturation 168
4.3 John Paul II Message to the Bishops of Kenya 174
4.4 African Theologians on Inculturation 175
4.4.1 John S. Mbiti (2031-2019) 175
4.4.2 Charles Nyamiti 1931-2020) 176
4.4.3 Bénézet Bujo (1940-2021) 176
4.4.4 Laurenti Magesa (1946-2022) 177
4.4.5 Engelbert Mveng (1930-1995) 177
4.4.6 Patrick N. Wachege 177
4.5 Concept of Liturgical Inculturation 178
4.5.1 Magisterial Documents on Liturgical Inculturation 180
4.5.2 Qualitative Understanding of Liturgical Inculturation in the Study 181
4.6 Necessity of Liturgical Inculturation 182
4.6.1 The Gospel must become Intelligible within particular cultures 183
4.6.2 Liturgy Should Engage the Whole Person 184
4.6.3 Inculturation is necessary for authentic active participation 185
4.6.4 Respect Legitimate Cultural Identity 186
4.6.5 Development of Genuine African Christianity 187
4.6.6 Preservation and Purification of Valuable Cultural Values 188
4.6.7 Symbols Facilitate Theological communication 188
4.6.8 Strengthening Ecclesial Identity and Belonging 189
4.3.9 Exercise of Genuine Ecclesial Catholicity and Deepening the Missionary Effectiveness of the Church 190
4.7 Areas of Inculturation 191
4.7.1 Local Languages in Liturgy 191
4.7.2 Music, Rhythm, and Dance 192
4.7.3 Symbols and Gestures 192
4.7.4 Procession and Offertories 193
4.7.5 Liturgical Art, Vesture, and Sacred Space 193
4.7.6 Indigenous Symbols of Authority and leadership 194

4.8 An Inculturated Pastoral Staff 194
4.8.1 Inculturated Pastoral Staff in Africa 195
4.9 Promotion of an Inculturated Pastoral Staff in Kenya 198
4.9.1 Field-Based Considerations for Promotion in Kenya 199
4.9.2 Theological Basis for Promotion 200
4.9.3 The Theology of Inculturation 200
4.9.4 Qualitative Synthesis of the Theological and Field Evidence 203
Conclusion 204
CHAPTER FIVE 206
PROMOTION OF AN INCULTURATED PASTORAL STAFF IN KENYA 206
Introduction 206
5.1 Liturgical Recommendation 207
5.1.2 Promote Catechesis on the Bishop as Elder 208
5.1.3 Focus on Common Values Instead of External Similarities 209
5.1.4 Develop an inculturated Design of the Pastoral Staff 209
5.1.5 Ecclesiastical Approval for Liturgical Adaptations 209
5.1.6 Incorporate *Agĩkũyũ* Artistic Symbols 210
5.1.7 Encourage Inculturated Liturgical Celebrations 211
5.1.8 Establish Liturgical Commissions on Inculturation 211
5.1.9 Preserve the Christological Meaning of the Crozier with Ongoing Liturgical Formation 212
5.2 Theological Recommendations 212
5.2.1 Maintain the Christological Foundation of the Staff 213
5.2.2 Preserve the Ecclesiological Meaning of the Episcopal Ministry 213
5.2.3 Avoid Syncretism 214
5.2.4 Interpret the *Mũthĩgi* in the light of the Gospel 214
5.2.5 Strengthen Biblical Formation on the Symbolism of the Shepherd 214
5.2.6 Encourage African Contextual Theology 215
5.2.7 Safeguard the Unity of the Roman Rite 215
5.2.8 Encourage Ongoing Theological Dialogue 215
5.3 Athropological Suggestions 216

5.3.1 Promote Anthropological Research on the Symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* 216
5.3.2 Dialogue between Anthropologists and Theologians 217
5.3.3 Promote Community Participation in Cultural Discernment 217
5.3.4 Differentiate Cultural Symbols from Religious Worship 217
5.3.5 Promote Indigenous Artistic Expressions 218
5.3.6 Encourage Cultural Dialogue within Evangelization 218
5.3.7 Discern Cultural Elements Suitable for Liturgical Inculturation 218
5.3.8 Use Indigenous Agikuyu Wood 219
5.4 Pastoral Recommendations 219
5.4.1 Foster Dialogue Between Church Leaders and the *Agĩkũyũ* Elders 219
5.4.2 Integrate the Symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* into the Pastoral formation 220
5.4.3 Encourage Community Participation in the Inculturation Process 220
5.4.4 Maintain Fidelity to the Catholic Doctrine 220
5.4.5 Formulate Catechetical Teaching Materials on the Symbolism of the Pastoral Staff 221
5.4.6 Integrate Inculturation into Parish Catechesis 221
5.4.7 Strengthen the Formation of Catechists 222
5.9.8 Promote Ongoing Mystagogical Catechesis 222
5.5.1 Develop a Servant Leadership Spirituality 223
5.5.2 Promote Prayer Rooted in the Scripture 223
5.5.3 Promote a Spirituality of Reconciliation 224
5.5.4 Promote Holiness by the Example of the Elder 224
5.5.5 Strengthen Communion within the Church 224
5.5.6 Integrate Indigenous Spiritual Values through Christian Discernment 225
5.5.7 Promote Spiritual Formation for Pastoral Ministers 225
5.5.8 Encourage Continuous Discernment Under the Guidance of the Holy Spirit 226
5.6 Historical Recommendations 226
5.7.1 Promote Historical Research on the Origin and Development of the *Mũthĩgi* 227
5.7.2 Study the Historical Development of the Episcopal Pastoral Staff 227
5.7.3 Preserve Historical Authenticity in Inculturation 227
5.7.4 Document Oral Historical Tradition 228
5.7.5 Recover the History of Early Evangelization among the *Agĩkũyũ* 228

5.7.6 Promote Historical Awareness among the Clergy and Catechists 228
5.7.7 Establish Ecclesiastical and Cultural Archives 229
Conclusion..... 229
GENERAL CONCLUSION 232
BIBLIOGRAPHY 235

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Since the reforms of Vatican II especially in the area of liturgy and how it could be celebrated bearing in mind the cultural contexts of each particular place, the Church has gone ahead and implemented the recommendations given especially in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. This study aims at exploring how the *Mũthĩgi* a cultural symbol of leadership carried by an elder among the *Agĩkũyũ* people of Kenya can illuminate the dimensions of episcopal ministry that may not always be suffieciently expressed through purely Western cultural interpretation of the Pastoral Staff. The researcher therefore explores how the encounter between this two symbols can become an avenue for developing an authentic liturguical expression of episcopal Pastoral ministry among the *Agĩkũyũ*.

The Purpose of the Dissertation

To explore ways through which the Pastoral Staff of a bishop can be localized within the *Agĩkũyũ* community in order for them to truly identify themselves with their pastor as an elder.

The Rationale

The main reason for undertaking this research work springs from the researcher's profound concern and interest in matter inculturation especially in the liturgy presided over by the Bishop among the *Agĩkũyũ* Catholics of Kenya. The researcher has noted that the Pastoral Staff of the bishop which carries profound symbolic liturgical significance and meaning, does not communicate fully from the cultural point of view within public worship his role as an elder. There are many Agĩkũyũ Christians who have no idea about the symbolic meaning of the "Western" Pastoral Staff carried by the bishop during Mass.

The other reason for carrying out this research is because the various Pastoral agents within the Church such as priests, deacons and catechists according to the researcher have not taken serious effort to educate the Christians what the Pastoral Staff stands for. The researcher opines that if a bishop would adopt the *Mũthĩgi*, the message would be obvious. After all, the Pastoral Staff as we have it today does not communicate in an obvious way the *munus docendi* of a bishop among the *Agĩkũyũ* Catholic Christians of Kenya. The researcher has seen especially some missionary bishops who use locally made Pastoral Staff which reflects the culture of the place where they minister. Can this be replicated in others dioceses especially among the local bishops?

In the Liturgy, *Sancrosanctum Concillium* of Vatican II affirms that, man's sanctification is signified by signs perceptible to the senses and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs.[1] For full, active and conscious participation the Pastoral Staff belongs to the signs perceptible to the senses. This finds its strongest recommendation from in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) and General Instructions of the Roman Missal (GIRM) in their exposition on "perceptible signs, by which the faith is nourished, strengthened and expressed."[2] Thus, "those forms and elements proposed by the Church are chosen and arranged, which, given the circumstances of persons and places, more effectively foster active and full participation and more aptly respond to the spiritual needs of the faithful."[3]

[1] Cf. Vatican Council II, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium*, December 1963, in *AAS* 56 (1964) 7.
[2] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 59.
[3] General Instructions of the Roman Missal, 21.

The Central Question of Investigation

How can the symbolism of *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders contribute towards a deeper understanding of the Pastoral Staff?

Working Hypotheses

(i) Maybe, profound and ongoing catechesis on liturgical inculturation is required so that the bishop is truly perceived as a pastor to his people.

(ii) Whether, promoting the *Agĩkũyũ* cultural heritage would help the *Agĩkũyũ* people feel quite at home with the Catholic faith which they profess.

(iii) A deeper liturgical catechesis of the Pastoral Staff of the bishop could make the *Agĩkũyũ* people appreciate him as an elder.

Methodological considerations

Cognizant of the fact that any research methodology is geared towards the expansion of knowledge in a particular area of study, the researcher follows the Liturgical Method as proposed in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy - *Sacrosanctum Concilium* - of Vatican II, numbers 16 and 23, and also *Optatam Totius*. Here, the documents propose that any liturgical research should take into consideration Theological, Historical, Spiritual, Pastoral and Juridical dimensions. Beside this, the research, being focused on inculturation, also employs Anthropological and Comparative methods. By subjecting the research to these methods, it becomes clear whether the use of *Mũthĩgi* by a bishop in place of the Western made Pastoral Staff would be a better way to enhance the faith among the *Agĩkũyũ* of Kenya.

Theological Investigation

The way of worshiping has a long tradition with a liturgical reality of doing things. A bishop has the fullness of priesthood and hence his office is of paramount importance to the worshiping community. As a person and as minister during worship, he impacts strongly on the community placed under his care. Hence, his vesture should rhyme with the culture of the people he shepherds as much as possible.

To address the concern of the above paragraph, the investigation involves specific theological area. This is informed by a variety of sources: Bible, the teachings of the Church Fathers, Councils, Popes, Liturgical documents especially Ordination Rites, the Code of Canon Law, Catechism of the Catholic Church, the local Church pronouncements (if available) and finally selected Theologians.

Historical Investigation

Here, the research seeks to establish the origin of the Pastoral Staff, its symbolic significance, its evolution across the centuries up to today noting stable features and changeable elements. It also examines the origin, meaning and development of *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders and see how it could be adopted in the Ordination Rite of a bishop so as to communicate his chief role as a leader of both temporal and spiritual matters.

Pastoral Investigation

Without watering down our rich Catholic Tradition on how the liturgy should be celebrated, the aim of this research is to remain faithful to all these and at the same time invite liturgical-Pastoral inputs which can enhance how the person of a bishop is perceived. It looks into

those concrete liturgical situations in which the Pastoral Staff is used and the challenges, opportunities and possible adaptations.

Since this research is geared towards the inculturation of the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder in place of the Pastoral Staff of the bishop, the following magisterial pronouncement of of immense support: *"... Anything in these people's way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy, and, if possible, preserves intact. She sometimes even admits such things into the liturgy itself, provided they harmonize with its true* and authentic spirit."[4]

Juridical I

This approach, investigates the juridical connotations which accompany the reception of either the Pastoral Staff or the *Mũthĩgi*.

The Anthropological Approach

This section demonstrates that in every community there are people who are vested with leadership of whichever kind. There are, for example, spiritual leaders who lead in matter spiritual and many other issues which would require their arbitration. Thus, this research includes the study of cultural symbols and rituals that express leadership. Informed by this study, it endeavors to investigate how the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders could be a possible alternative of the Western type of the Pastoral Staff of the bishop.

[4] Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, in *AAS* 56 (1964): 37.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into Five Chapters preceded by a General Introduction and a General conclusion. Each chapter has its introduction and conclusion. The Bibliography appears at the end. The chapters are divided as follows:

Chapter One: The Background of the *Agĩkũyũ* People of Kenya

This chapter examines the historical, geographical, social, political, economic, religious and cultural background of the *Agĩkũyũ* people of Kenya as a foundation for understanding the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder and its possible contribution to the liturgical inculturation of the bishop's Pastoral Staff. The chapter situates the *Agĩkũyũ* within the broader historical and cultural context of Kenya, paying particular attention to their traditional homeland around Mount Kenya and the central highlands, their patterns of migration and settlement and the development of their social institutions. Particular attention is given to the organization of *Agĩkũyũ* society through the family, *mbarĩ* (clans), *mũhĩrĩga* (lineage), *riika* (age-sets) and *kĩama* (councils of elders), which constituted important structures for maintaining social cohesion, justice, moral order and communal leadership.

This chapter further explores the traditional *Agĩkũyũ* understanding of God, commonly referred to as *Ngai*, and the relationship between religious belief, ancestral memory, ritual practice and ordering of communal life. It examines significant rites of passage, including birth, naming, initiation, marriage, Elderhood and death as expressions through which the community transmitted its values, identity, responsibilities and worldview from one generation to another. It also focuses on the *Agĩkũyũ* and Christianity especially the dioceses which are predominantly occupied by the

Agĩkũyũ. Finally, the author outlines challenges which are to be addressed in the process of realizing an inculturated Pastoral Staff.

Chapter Two: Symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ*

This chapter examines the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi*, the traditional Staff associated with the *Agĩkũyũ* people of Kenya. It investigates the *Mũthĩgi* not merely as a physical object but as a culturally significant symbol through which the *Agĩkũyũ* expresses concepts of authority, wisdom, leadership, justice, responsibility, protection, continuity and communal identity. The study situates the *Mũthĩgi* within the traditional institution of Elderhood and the wider social, political, religious and moral structures of *Agĩkũyũ* society. Particular attention is given to the relationship between the *Mũthĩgi* and the *Kĩama*, the council of elders, through which elders exercised responsibilities concerning mediation, reconciliation, adjudication, social order and the preservation of communal values.

Chapter Three: The Staff in The Bible and Church Tradition

This chapter examines the biblical and ecclesial foundations of the Staff as a significant religious and symbolic object, with particular attention to its development from biblical tradition, its reception within the liturgical and Pastoral tradition of the Church. The study investigates the various uses and meanings of the Staff in the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament the Staff appears in association with shepherding, leadership, authority, protection, divine power and the exercise of responsibility.

This chapter subsequently traces the historical development of the Pastoral Staff in the tradition of the Church. It considers the emergence and gradual adoption of the Staff as a sign of episcopal authority, particularly through the development of ecclesiastical ceremonies,

sacramentaries and pontificals. Attention is given to the medieval development of *baculus Pastoralis* or crozier and to the gradual clarification of its liturgical and symbolic significance.

Chapter Four: Comparative Study Between *Mũthĩgi* and The Pastoral Staff

This chapter presents the similarities and differences between the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders and the Pastoral Staff of the Bishop. These similarities are not merely descriptive as they are meant to establish the theological, cultural, symbolic, Pastoral and liturgical basis for proposing an inculturated Pastoral Staff in the *Agĩkũyũ* context.

Chapter Five: Promotion of an Inculturated Pastoral Staff in Kenya

This chapter intends to attain an authentic synthesis between the Catholic theological meaning of the episcopal Staff and the legitimate symbolic values embodied in the *Mũthĩgi*. Its purpose is not merely to introduce an indigenous artistic design into the liturgy, but to facilitate a genuine encounter between the Gospel an *Agĩkũyũ* culture. Through this process, the Pastoral Staff can become a culturally meaningful expression of the bishop's ministry of Pastoral leadership, guidance, protection, teaching, governance and service.

Difficulties

The researcher is fully aware that difficulties will be there especially from the conservative wing of the Church. Ranging from different challenges like modernism which is opposed to what is "cultural or traditional" may raise its objections. Other difficulties could arise from consumerism, bureaucracy, autocracy and social media. The researcher intends to address these difficulties by having recourse to what the Church stipulates in *Sacrosantum Concilium* numbers 21 and 37 which states that: "*Liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted and changeable elements subject to change and these should change with time", (SC 21).*

Again,

> Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community; rather does she respect and foster the genius and talents of the various races and peoples. Anything in these people's way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, so long as they harmonize with its true authentic spirit (SC 37).

In order to achieve this, the researcher provides recommendations which can aid in giving birth to an inculturated Pastoral Staff in the liturgy without compromising its beauty and integrity.

Review of Related Literature

a) Wachege P. N., *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Eldership as Mũthamaki.* Kiambu: Little Eden Publishers Ltd., 2020.

In this book, Fr. Wachege looks at Jesus from the perspective of a Kikuyu Eldership *(Ũthamaki)*. Here, the author makes a very thorough effort to inculturate biblical theology within the context of the *Agĩkũyũ* and Africa as such. He explains in very fine details what the A*kikuyu* elderhood is all about. He goes on to say that, "… it is interesting to bear in mind that the term *mũthuuri* (elder) comes from the term *gũthuraa* (to Choose). *Mũthamaki* (ideal elder) is derived from the verb *gũthamaka* (to choose, reign and rule distinctively well). As such, being a *mũthamaki* signified that one was beyond a *mũthuuri*, i.e. one is not only an elector but also a distinctive ruler and one who reigns pre-eminently."[5] Though Wachege has dedicated some pages of his work explaining who the *Agĩkũyũ* elder is, he does not bring out clearly how elderhood was acquired

[5] Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Eldership as Mũthamaki*, 158.

and the symbols associated with it though he mentions *Mũthĩgi* as a symbol of elderhood among the *Agĩkũyũ*. In this research, the author intends to address this gap in greater detail.

(b) Paul Ngige Njoroge, A People Called THE AGĨKŨYŨ, Yesterday and Today… and Tomorrow? Nairobi: Sycamore Tree Publishers, 2017.

This book delves far back into history beyond the point of the national consciousness that created a people called the *Agĩkũyũ*. According to him, the *Agĩkũyũ* and their cousins, namely the *Aembu*, the *Amerũ*, and the *Akamba* descended from the *Bantu Thagicũ* ancestors.[6]. This happened within the story of the *Bantu* people about 4000 years ago.

Ngige goes ahead to present the *Agĩkũyũ* people as organized with their own rich cultural heritage. They had their own organized ways of addressing their *Ngai* (God) through distinguished elders who also intervened in both social and divine engagements. These elders were composed of men only. They had their mode of dressing especially when they went to represent their people to their *Ngai of Kirinyaga* (Mount Kenya). *Mũthĩgi* was one of their distinguished attires.

Though Ngige is quite elaborate in bringing to our awareness how the Agĩkũyũ elderhood was arrived at he does not treat in detail how this elderhood was conferred. He portrays the elder as a leader in various circumstances of the life of the *Agĩkũyũ* but he does not articulate how. This research delves into how the elderhood was conferred on a person and the ritual involved together the accompanying symbols given to the elder especially the *Mũthĩgi*.

[6] Paul Ngige Njoroge, *A People Called the Agikuyu*, xiv.

(c) Lukwata, J., "Challenges and Opportunities for Liturgical Inculturation in Africa", in *African Christian Studies*, Vol. 26, number 3, (2010): 73 - 86.

In the above article written almost 50 years after Vatican II, the author looks into what has been achieved and what has not been achieved in Liturgical inculturation in Africa. He provides a very clear roadmap towards this noble endeavor. Though he is very much aware of the many challenges which have been there in making this possible, he appreciates that a lot has been done. Quoting *Sacrosanctum Concillium* and other magisterial/Papal documents as well as theologians, the author has addressed the issue of Liturgical inculturation in Africa superbly though he is very much concerned that a lot need to be done. The researcher has not addressed the issue of the presider and how he should be vested. This is the gap which the researcher wishes to address by looking at the possibilities on how the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders may be a worthy alternative of the Pastoral Staff of the bishop.

(d) **Chupungco, A. J., *Liturgical Inculturation: The Future that Awaits us*, https://www.valpo.edu/institute-of-liturgical-studies/files/2016/09/chupungco2.pdf, (accessed 15.1.2023).**

This article by Chupungco discusses two methods or instruments to be deployed in liturgical inculturation which I find very useful to bear in mind while developing my study. The two are creative assimilation and dynamic equivalence. These are necessary tools to be used depending on the local situation of each place or locality. He goes on to explain that creative assimilation of liturgical inculturation should begin by considering what is there in a given culture while dynamic equivalence which is a form of translations focuses in transmitting what is contained in a given liturgical rite in the cultural pattern. Though he is aware that these expositions have their challenges in being implemented in any local situation, he has no doubt that this is the way to go for liturgy to have a local face which encourages full participation of the worshiping

community. The inculturated worship transmits the riches of liturgical tradition and practices in language and symbols the people are able to understand and identify with.

Despite the fact that this article is very scholarly and very helpful to the researcher, the author does not address any specific area as such to be liturgically inculturated. By applying his two methods of liturgical inculturation, the researcher fills this gap by suggesting a specific area especially the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders may be an alternative in place of the Pastoral Staff of the bishop.

(e) Kenyatta: Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu, London: Heinemann, 1938.

Jomo Kenyatta's Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the *Gĩkũyũ* remains one of the most outstanding works for the study of traditional *Agĩkũyũ* social, religious and cultural life. First published in 1938, the work the work was written at a time when African societies were being interpreted largely through colonial and missionary categories. Kenyatta sought to present the *Agĩkũyũ* from within their own cultural world and to demonstrate the coherence, complexity and social significance of their institutions. The book provides valuable material for understanding *Agĩkũyũ* kinship, political organization, religious beliefs, rites of passage, economic life, marriage and institution of elders.

In his treatment of the *Agĩkũyũ* political and social organization the understanding of *Mũthĩgi* is pretty important. Traditional *Agĩkũyũ* society was structured around institutions of kinship, age and Elderhood. Elders were entrusted with responsibilities concerning the ordering of community life, the settlement of disputes, the preservation of traditions and the conduct of important communal affairs. The symbol which embodied these traits was the *Mũthĩgi*.

Kenyatta refers to the Staff using forms such as *mũtirima* or *Mũthĩgi* and identifies particular trees from which the Staff was made. However, he does not give us a detailed physical description of the *Mũthĩgi*, its symbolism, why the Staff represent Elderhood and how it was used in individual ceremonies. The researcher is going to address these concerns by providing the necessary answers.

(f) Muriuki, G., *A History of the Kikuyu, 1500-1900*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1974.

The historian Muriuki in his work *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, explores the pre-colonial Kikuyu. The work is a thorough and serious piece of historical research providing insights into the history of Kikuyu, their cultural and religio-political configuration. In his historiography, Muriuki underlines that the Kikuyu had a historical consciousness and were the agency of their own cultural making. This is demonstrated by his theory of migration and settlement which contends that *Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga* was not the cradle of the Kikuyu.

In adopting this method, Muriuki ignores important details. For example, he disregards the myths of origin especially those of the father (*Gĩkũyũ*) and mother (*Mũmbi*) of the *Agĩkũyũ* people, but accepts the myth of the matriarchy. He does not accept the myth that explains the cultural transmission between the Kikuyu and their neighbors. This last myth is important because it denotes that although the Kikuyu have a history of cleavages, there exist a harmonious relationship evidenced through intermarriage and the sharing of common beliefs and practices. In fact, Muriuki's work gives an impression that the oral tradition did not really facilitate the enterprise of the reconstruction of Kikuyu ethnicity.

(g) Cagnolo, C., (Fr. IMC), *The Agikuyu: Their Customs, Traditions & Folklore*, Torino: Wisdom Graphics Publication, 1933.

Fr. C. Cagnolo's book The *Agĩkũyũ*: Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore is of particular value because it provides an earlier missionary-ethnographic account of *Agĩkũyũ* social organization, customs, religious practices, rites of passage and Elderhood. The original English edition was published in Nyeri in 1933 by the Mission Printing School of the Consolata Fathers. A revised and enhanced edition was published in Nairobi by Wisdom Graphics Place in 2006.

Cagnolo's work is particularly important for a study of the *Mũthĩgi* because it documents aspects of Agikuyu social organization, traditional beliefs, rite, interpersonal relationships and the institution of elders during colonial period. While the work does not constitute a systematic study of the *Mũthĩgi* as an independent cultural symbol, it provides contextual information from which the place of the elder and the symbolic significance of his Staff can be investigated.

Though Fr. Cagnolo's work is of immense value to this study, he does not provide a systematic theology of Elderhood, no comprehensive definition of the *Mũthĩgi*, no etymology of *Mũthĩgi*, no physical description of the *Mũthĩgi*, nothing about its symbolic meaning is given, no relationship between *Mũthĩgi* and the *Kĩama* and does not explain the *Mũthĩgi* as an insignia of office in the theological sense. The researcher will address these gaps in this research work.

(h) Francis, M. R., Shape A Circle Ever Wider: Liturgical Inculturation in the United States, Chicago: Liturgy Training Publication, 2000.

One of the most important form of liturgical inculturation is the use of the local language in the liturgy. But, as Francis says in his book, there are many symbols used in the liturgy which are

nonverbal.[7] The bishop's Pastoral Staff falls under the category of these nonverbal liturgical symbols. Though the writer of this book does not address the inculturation of the Pastoral Staff of a bishop as such, he believes that inculturation is a serious business which should be given the liturgical weight it deserves.

This book is written for a multicultural ambience of the Church in the United State of America. But it addresses liturgical struggles which are experienced world over as far as the implantation of the Catholic faith is concerned.

The presence of the bishop in a liturgical celebration is always highly regarded by the faithful. Hence, all the symbols associated with the person of a bishop should be comprehended by the faithful within their respective cultural environment. The Pastoral Staff as it is today among the *Agĩkũyũ* faithful is a beautiful piece of mental designed in a way that may not be comprehensible to many people who cannot understand its significance. When an *Agĩkũyũ* elder is leading his people in prayer for example he carries *Mũthĩgi* and people understand fully its cultural importance. The failure to identify themselves with symbols of leadership as we currently have them in the Church is what the author wishs to develop and propose that the *Mũthĩgi* be a fitting alternative.

(i) Leakey, L. S. B., *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903* (Volumes I, II and III), London: Academic Press, 1977.

Leakey's book The Southern *Kikuyu* before 190 is one of the most extensive historical and ethnographic sources for reconstructing the traditional social and cultural organization of the Agikuyu. The work was completed in 1939 but published posthumously by Academic Press in

[7] Mark R. Francis, *Shape a Circle Ever Wider: Liturgical Inculturation in the United State*, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publication, 2000), 105.

three volumes in 1977. The three volumes contain 1,369 pages and covers a remarkably broad range of subjects, including social organization, family life, leadership, religion, agriculture, rites of passage, marriage, medicine, law. political organization, ritual practices and the institution of elders.

For this study of the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* of the Agikuyu elder, Leakey's work is particularly important because it situates Elderhood within the wider structure of the Agikuyu society. Rather than considering the elder as an isolated individual, Leakey's work enables the researcher to examine Elderhood in relation to family, age, groups, political organization, council of elders, law, religion and communal responsibility, His discussion of the *Kĩama*, leaders of the people, elders and traditional law is especially significant for interpreting the *Mũthĩgi* as a symbol of office and authority.

Although Leakey's work contains extensive information relevant to the *Mũthĩgi*, he does not provide a systematic definition of Elderhood as a symbolic institution, he does not explain the *Mũthĩgi* as a symbol, does not provide an account of its manufacture, no catalogue of occasions on which the *Mũthĩgi* was carried and does not fully explain the relationship between the *Mũthĩgi* and the *kĩama* as symbolism. This research addresses these gaps by addressing each one of them.

(j) Bourdillon, M., *Religion and Society: A Text for Africa,* Zimbabwe: Mambo Press 1991.

This book deals primarily with issues pertaining to Africa and Africans. It endeavors to expound on religious practices and beliefs influence and are influenced by a variety of other factors in social life. The author delves deeply into all areas of religion form the African point of view. For example, he defines what a symbol is and goes on to dedicate a whole chapter on symbols and

their meaning in the African religion. This is very vital to me as far as the topic I am developing is concerned. The power of symbols in any religion cannot be underestimated in making people embrace and live what that religion transmits to her members.

African Religions are full of symbols which helps their adherents to grasp fully what is said or communicated to them. Sometimes, even without verbal communication, the symbols communicate by themselves. They communicate what role a certain individual play as far as his involvement in issues is concerned. Since different individuals may hold variant roles, the symbols they use differentiates one from the other. The symbols used is not addressed by the author. Thus, the researcher strives to bring out the symbols used in this study.

(k) Mbiti, J. S., *Introduction to African Religion*, Oxford: Heinemann, 1991.

This book as the title asserts introduces the existence and reality of Religion in Africa. Though general in its approach, it systematically leads one to the origin of African Religion and how it has progressed in history. It systematically develops a topic on how God is approached in the context of worship by Africans.

It has a whole chapter on rituals and their meaning as well as importance. He defines what a ritual or a rite as a set form of carrying out a religious action or ceremony.[8] There are no sacred books in the African Religion as their religion is written in the lives of people. The ritual word is powerful since it is spoken by a person vested with the power to lead with seriousness and solemnity.[9] Mbiti goes further to elaborate on the importance of objects or symbols used in African

[8] John S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, 126.
[9] John S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, 126.

Religious worship. He underscores the value of a religious leader as well. Here, he does not address the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders and its symbolism though it is implied in his remarks on symbols used in African Religious worship. The researcher fills this gap by dwelling more specifically on elderhood among the *Agĩkũyũ* and the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi*.

(l) Mbiti, J. S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Limited, 1969.

Here in this book, Mbiti presents a religious reality among the Africans which has its own priests, prophets and religious founders. Among their many duties, priests must be religious or God-fearing individuals. A Kikuyu elder, though not referred to as a priest presides over the religious ceremonies as well. Thus, he qualifies the title priest as one who intercedes on behalf of others before God. While holding the *Mũthĩgi,* he plays his rightful role of leading or shepherding, praying for the group, and directing them with his God given wisdom.

Mbiti does not go into the details of how one is made an *Agĩkũyũ* elder. He does not tell us how or what qualifies one to be given the *Mũthĩgi*. The researcher fills this gap which Mbiti does not address by giving details on the making of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder.

(m) Ronzani, R., *Apostolic Ministries: Sacraments of Holy Orders*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2010.

In the above-mentioned book on the Apostolic Ministries: Sacraments of Holy Orders, Ronzani looks at the way these ministries have been conferred throughout the history of the Catholic Church as well as the theology associated with each Order. In his exposition on the ordination of a Bishop, he treats in detail the Vestments and the Episcopal Insignia. He affirms that the ontological transformation that takes place in the newly ordained is expressed in a visible

manner through the vestments and insignia that are given to them[10]. The episcopal insignia where the Pastoral Staff is included are a sign of the office proper to him. They also reveal that the ordained minister has clothed himself with Christ. At his ordination, a bishop is given the Pastoral Staff as the last insignia which as part of his ministry symbolizes his guiding and governing role as a shepherd entrusted to him by the Church.

Ronzani does not mention at all whether the Pastoral Staff may be liturgically inculturated. In this work the researcher endeavors to present ways through which the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders could fittingly illuminate the Pastoral Staff of the bishop for a better understanding of the office of the bishop and the symbolism of the Pastoral Staff.

(n) Medina, N., *Christianity, Empire and the Spirit,* Boston: Brill, 2018.

In *Christianity, Empire and The Spirit,* Néstor Medina uncovers the cultural processes that play a crucial role in influencing how people understand reality, express the Christian faith, and think about God. He uses decolonial thinking, Latina theology, and Pentecostal theology to show how the cultural dimension is a central feature in the biblical text; was the force that co-opted Christianity from the imperial era of Constantine onwards; and undergirded Western European colonialism and the missionary project. He engages with Protestant and Catholic articulations on "culture" and demonstrates how most theologians perpetuate Eurocentric frames for considering the relation between Christianity and the cultural dimension. Alternatively, he offers a theological proposal that recognizes the Spirit at work in the phenomena of cultures.

[10] Rinaldo Ronzani, *Apostolic Ministry: The Sacraments of Holy Orders*, 181.

Medina is point on, as far as the culture is concerned but he does not explain how the various cultures should find their expression in the Church. Thus, the researcher fills this gap on how the various cultures can find expression in the Church by focusing on the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder can enter into conversation with the Pastoral Staff to make the people understand better and appreciate the Gospel massage in their own setup.

(o) Mellor, A. "Karl Rahner, Culture and Evangelization: New Approaches in an Australian Setting", in *Theology and Mission in World Christianity,* Volume 13 (Brill: Boston, 2019): 104-125.

The situation of religious institutional diminishment in many Western countries requires new approaches to the proclamation of Christian faith. As a response to these complexities, Karl Rahner suggested a "mystagogic" approach as a future pathway for theology. A mystagogical approach seeks modes of spiritual and theological conversation which engage the religious imagination and draws upon personal experiences of transcendence and religious sensibility.

In *Karl Rahner, Culture and Evangelization: New Approaches in an Australian Setting*, Anthony Mellor develops a reflective process of contemporary "*mystagogia*", describing how different fields of engagement require different patterns of mystagogical conversation.

While focusing on the Australian setting, these different arenas of engagement can also be applicable to other cultural settings and offer fresh perspectives for evangelization today. Given this scenario, the researcher wishes to show whether deeper catechetical instructions can help the *Agĩkũyũ* in particular to address the cultural heritage on how the Pastoral Staff and the *Mũthĩgi* can engage in meaningful conversation.

(p) Niebuhr, H. R., *Christ and Culture*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1951.

Niebuhr begins his book with definitions which he deems to be of vital importance for Christianity to be at home in every culture. Who is Christ? He is the New Testament figure, crucified and raised from the dead, the One whom Christians accept as their authority. "Belief in him and loyalty to his cause involves men in the double movement from world to God and from God to world".[11] What is culture? It is the social life of humanity, the environment created by human beings in the areas of "language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values".[12]

Niebuhr turns next to various ways in which Christians have sought to live faithfully under the authority of Christ as they relate to the culture surrounding them. There are three major choices: opposition to culture (Christ against culture); agreement between Christ and culture (Christ of culture); and a combination that incorporates insights from both of these two views (Christ above culture).

Within the third framework, there are three variations: a synthetic type that sees Christ as the fulfillment of culture; a dualistic type that sees an ongoing tension between Christ and culture; and a conversionist type that portrays Jesus as the converter of culture and society.

The author does not give the way forward on how the culture of the people can be incorporated into Christianity and its different expressions. Here, the researcher gives the way

[11] Helmut Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 29.
[12] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 32.

forward by presenting the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder as one way through which Christianity can truly be at home with the people.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BACKGROUND OF THE *AGĨKŨYŨ* PEOPLE OF KENYA

Introduction

This chapter provides the foundational background necessary for understanding the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders and its possible contribution to the liturgical inculturation of the Pastoral Staff of the Catholic bishop. It examines the geographical, historical, social, cultural, religious and Christian contexts of the Agĩkũyũ people, recognizing that symbols can only be understood within the worldview and lived experience of the community that gives them meaning.

The chapter further explores the origins and development of the *Agĩkũyũ* people, their systems of social organization, traditional leadership structures, religious beliefs, rites of passage, economic life and relationship with Christianity. Particular attention is given to institutions such as the family, clans, age-sets and councils of elders because these structures provide the context within which the Mũthĩgi emerged as a symbol of authority, wisdom, responsibility and communal identity.

A comprehensive study of the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder and its relevance for the liturgical inculturation of the Pastoral Staff of a Catholic bishop demands a profound understanding of the historical, cultural, religious and social background of the *Agĩkũyũ* people. Since symbols derive their meaning from the communities that create them the *Mũthĩgi* cannot be adequately interpreted apart from the worldview, social organization, religious beliefs, and institutions of the *Agĩkũyũ*. This chapter therefore provides the historical and anthropological

context necessary for understanding the emergence, development and significance of the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* society.

It further argues that understanding the historical development, social institutions, religious beliefs and cultural values of the *Agĩkũyũ* is indispensable for any theological reflection on the liturgical inculturation of the Pastoral Staff. Since inculturation presupposes a respectful dialogue between the Gospel and culture, a careful examination of the *Agĩkũyũ* worldview provides the necessary foundation for assessing bow the positive symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* may illuminate the episcopal ministry without compromising the doctrinal and liturgical integrity of the Church. Accordingly, this chapter examines the geographical location and distribution of the *Agĩkũyũ*, origin, social and political organization, religious beliefs, rites of passage, economic context and concludes with the foreseen challenges towards liturgical inculturation of the *Mũthĩgi*.

1.1 Geographical Location

The *Agĩkũyũ*, also known as the Kikuyu, are the dominant tribe in the central highlands of Kenya.[13] Their land is naturally marked by four mountains at the northern, western, eastern, and southern extremes: Mount Kenya (*Kĩrĩnyaga*), the *Nyandarũa* mountain range, *Kilimambogo* (*Kianjahĩ*), and Ngong Hills (*Kiambirũirũ*).[14] This region borders the *Amerũ*, *Ambeere* and *Akamba* to the East and the *Maasai* to the South. Their ancestral land mainly covers five civil

[13] Costanzo Cagnolo, *The Agĩkũyũ: Customs, Traditions and Folklore*, (Torino: Istituto Missioni Consolataa, 1933), 6.
[14] Paul Ngigi Njoroge, *A People Called the Agĩkũyũ: Yesterday, Today ... and Tomorrow?* (Nairobi: Sycamore Tree Publishers, 2017), 28.

counties according to the new administrative units occasioned by the new Constitution promulgated in 2010: *Kiambu, Murang'a, Nyeri, Kĩrĩnyaga,* and *Nyandarũa*.[15]

After independence in 1963, the *Agĩkũyũ* started to move to other parts of the country in search of land because their land had been taken by colonialists. This has resulted in having *Agĩkũyũ* who have settled in other counties such as *Laikipia, Nakuru, Uasin Gishu,* and others where they are found in great numbers, if not the majority, like in the researcher's county of Lamu.

1.2 Population Distribution

According to the last Kenya Population and Housing Census of 2019 (carried out every 10 years), the population of the *Agĩkũyũ* stood at approximately 8,148,668 people spread across the country of Kenya.[16] As an ethnic group, they are the largest in Kenya among the officially recognized 43 ethnic groups. They are estimated to be about 17 percent of the entire population of about 50 million people.

1.3 Ethnic Groups

In the modern anthropological understanding, the *Agĩkũyũ* people, in their traditional social organization are structured and not divided into "ethnic groups" but rather, around clans (*mĩhĩrĩga*), lineages (*mbarĩ*) and age-groups (*riika*).[17] It is the clan system which forms the

[15] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*. (Kiambu: Little Eden Publishers Ltd., 2020), 39.
[16] Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from https://www.knbs.or.ke > 2019-kenya-population-and-housing-results (accessed 17.05.2024).
[17] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903, Vol. 1* (London: Academic Press, 1977), 12.

foundational structure of their identity as a people, marriage rites and regulations, participation in the rituals and political organization.

Their social organization was founded on three important factors which were family (*Nyũmba*), clan (*Mũhĩriga*) and age group (*Riika*). The family was composed of all those who were related by blood and reigned supreme over individual interests. The clan (*Mũhĩrĩga*) brought together in one group a number of *Mbari* units which shared the same clan name such as *Ambũi* or *Aceera* among others. The origin of clan names was from the names of the daughters of *Gĩkũyũ* and *Mũmbi*, the founders of the *Agĩkũyũ* tribe.[18]

There is a tradition which claims that, at one time the *Agĩkũyũ* society was matriarchal and men had to stage a *coup d'etat* which brought the female rule to an end.[19] This tradition, though widespread among the *Agĩkũyũ* has remained unsubstantiated though.[20] The *Agĩkũyũ* people, being few in number might have borrowed some of their features from their neighbouring communities especially the *Gumba*. The *Mariika* system which with time gave birth to the *Agĩkũyũ* elderhood is one such feature which might have been copied from the *Gumba*.[21]As the population of the *Agĩkũyũ* who had now settled around Mount Kenya region increased, they formed strong blood related group called *Mbarĩ.* The *Mbarĩ* would occupy a substantial swath of land which was good in wading their enemies off whenever an attack visited them especially from the *Masaai*.

For the affairs of *Mbarĩ* to run smoothly, each *Nyũmba* (family) which was regarded as a social and administrative unit was under the headship of a father. Where a father was not available

[18] John Njenga Mbugua, *Funeral Rites Reformation for Any African Ethnic Community based on the Proposed New Funeral Practices for the Agĩkũyũ*, (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2016), 20.
[19] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (Nairobi: Kenway Publication, 1978), 9.
[20] Godfrey Muriuki, *The History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1974), 110.
[21] Godfrey Muriuki, *The History of the Kikuyu*, (1977), 111.

because of death, for example; the fatherly duties would be taken up by the eldest son or the eldest son in case of an extended family.[22] The head of a family was the only person who could handle issues pertaining to the family. In case of a son, he would always consult his brothers or close relatives before he could settle on what was to be done. The council of *Mbarĩ* which comprised all the initiated males who had attained elder status was in charge of all the *Mbarĩ* affairs.[23]

The *Agĩkũyũ* society, as it has been for many centuries and as we have it today, is organized and functions under a patrilineal system.[24] The man of the house is the head of the family and is called *baba* (father). The father is the owner and in charge of everything. He is respected and obeyed by all in the family. His place in society is determined to a greater extent by how he keeps his homestead because a well-kept and managed family is a clear indication or testimony that one has the capacity to manage public affairs.[25] The mother, on the other hand, is called *maitũ* and is regarded highly. Once a girl has become a mother, no one can address her with her maiden name. She is always referred to as the mother of so and so.

1.4 The *Agĩkũyũ* People

The *Agĩkũyũ* who are commonly referred to as the kikuyu, belong to the larger *Bantu*-speaking peoples of Eastern Africa with a rich cultural and religious heritage which is shaped by agriculture, oral tradition and ancestral structures. The appellation *Agĩkũyũ* is derived from a tree called *Mũkũyũ* (Pl. *Mĩkũyũ*) or Fig Tree in English[26]. This tree is regarded highly by the *Agĩkũyũ*

[22] Godfrey Muriuki, *The History of the Kikuyu*, (1974), 114.
[23] Godfrey Muriuki, *The History of the Kikuyu*, (1974), 115.
[24] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 10
[25] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 10.
[26] Samuel Gachuhi Kibicho, *The Kikuyu Concept of God* (Marshville: Tennessee, PhD Thesis, 1972), 7.

because it was (and still) under its shade that sacrifices were offered to God by the elders on behalf of the tribe, groups, families and individuals. Going by this derivation, the *Agĩkũyũ* are known as "the people of the fig tree"[27].

1.4.1 Origins

The origins of the *Agĩkũyũ* is constructed around the Bantu migrations and in myths.[28] They inhabit the central highlands of Kenya around the slopes of Mount Kenya. According to the *Agĩkũyũ* oral tradition, the community traces its origin to a man named Gikuyu and his wife Mumbi, the primordial ancestors whom *Ngai* (God) settled at *Mũkũrwe wa Nyagathanga* which is near *Mũrang'a* town. Later, *Ngai* blessed them with nine beautiful daughters from whom the nine principal clans of the *Agĩkũyũ* (m**ĩ**h**ĩ**r**ĩ**ga) emerged.[29] These clans formed the foundation of kinship and social identity among the *Agĩkũyũ*.

In addition to this myth, Wachege mentions other two traditions namely, Jewish ancestry and a tradition which explains that the *Agĩkũyũ* originated from a hole in *Mũkũrwe wa Nyagathanga*, though these two traditions have no widespread support among elders.[30]

1.4.1.1 Bantu Migration

According to history, the ancestors of the *Agĩkũyũ* are said to have been part of the Bantu migration from the regions of present-day West and Central Africa respectively. This Bantu migration in which the *Agĩkũyũ* ancestors were part of, is said by most historians to have taken place between 5000 to 3000 years ago starting their migration south-eastwards from the Niger-

[27] John Mugo Gatheru, *Child of Two Worlds* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1964), 7.
[28] Stefano Battignole, *Kikuyu Traditional Culture and Christianity* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1984), 30.
[29] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903*, Vol. 1 (1977), 12.
[30] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 40.

Benue River basin of western Africa which ultimately saw the gradual spread of the agricultural communities of Eastern and Southern Africa among which the *Agĩkũyũ* are found.[31]

They made their way to the central Kenya from northeast by possibly moving along river valleys such as the Tana River. The migration was gradual and it took place over several generations with the establishment of small groups settling and clearing forest land for cultivation.[32]

The most well-known and significant traditional site associated with early *Agĩkũyũ* settlement is found in *Mũrang'a* County, referred to as *Mũkũrwe wa Nyagathanga*. The *Agĩkũyũ* oral tradition holds this place as the original homeland where the first ancestors of the community were established by God.[33]

Linguistically, the *Agĩkũyũ* are categorized within the larger North-Eastern Bantu group referred to as the *Thagicu* cluster, in which the *Aembu*, *Ameru*, *Ambeere*, and other related communities residing around Mount Kenya are included. These communities are closely related in their languages and cultural traditions, which strongly suggests a common origin.[34]

1.4.1.2 Origin from *Gĩkũyũ* and *Mũmbi*

The most common and central myth of the origin of the *Agĩkũyũ*, which has been orally transmitted from one generation to the next by the *Agĩkũyũ* themselves, revolves around Gikuyu

[31] Paul Ngigi Njoroge, *A People Called the Agĩkũyũ: Yesterday, Today ... and Tomorrow?* (Nairobi: Sycamore Tree Publishers, 2017), 3.
[32] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, (1974), 18.
[33] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 6.
[34] Kevin Shillington, *History of Africa*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 45.

and Mumbi.[35] In this tradition, the *Agĩkũyũ* are portrayed as having originated from Gikuyu (deemed as the ancestral father of the *Agĩkũyũ*) and his wife M*ũ*mbi (considered as the ancestral mother of the *Agĩkũyũ)*. The origin of this couple is attributed to *Mũgai* (the Divider of the Universe), who called the man *Gĩkũyũ* and gave him the land with all its beauty. During this same time, he made a huge mountain, which the man named *Kĩrĩnyaga* (Mount Kenya) where he could dwell while on his inspection tour, and as a symbol of his grandeur.[36]

After this, God took *Gĩkũyũ* to the summit of this mysterious *Kĩrĩnyaga* and pointed out to him the land he had given together with its stunning beauty. While still on top of the mountain, he pointed out to *Gĩkũyũ* a particular spot that was full of fig trees (*Mĩkũyũ*) in the middle of his would-be dwelling. Before parting ways, God told *Gĩkũyũ* that whenever he found himself in need, he was to make a sacrifice and by raising his hands in supplication, the Lord of Nature would vouchsafe him.[37]

The tradition asserts that from the mountain, *Gĩkũyũ* got to the spot God had pointed out to him and found that God had already fashioned for him a beautiful woman whom he named *Mũmbi* (creator or molder), and took her as his wife and settled at *Mũkũrwe wa Nyagathanga*, which is regarded as the original home of the *Agĩkũyũ* in the present day M*ũ*rang'a County. Once settled at *Mũkũrwe wa Nyagathanga*, they acquired their livestock and gave birth to nine daughters and no sons[38] (these daughters are referred to as being nine but when listing they are ten. This is because the *Agĩkũyũ* do not count their children as they deem that as limiting God who is their source. The

[35] Paul Ngigi Njoroge, *A People Called the Agĩkũyũ: Yesterday, Today … and Tomorrow?* (Nairobi: Sycamore (2017), 25.
[36] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 5.
[37] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 5.
[38] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Mũthamaki*, (2020), 40.

number ten is therefore referred to as *kenda mũiyũrũ*, 'full nine' meaning ten. This mode of expression was informed by the *Agĩkũyũ* aversion for magical reasons, from counting what Ngai had given them especially livestock and human beings as this would demonstrate lack of gratitude and lead to calamity.[39]

The fact that *Gĩkũyũ* did not have sons and his daughters had reached the age of bearing children made him experience some disturbance. In his despair, he called out to his God who had told him to do so whenever he was in need. God commanded him saying:

"Go and take one lamb and one kid from your flock. Kill them under the fig tree near your homestead. Pour the blood and the fat of the two animals on the trunk of the tree. Then you and your family make a big fire under the tree and burn the meat as a sacrifice to me, your benefactor. When you have done this, take home your wife and daughters. After that go back to the sacred tree, and there you will find nine handsome men young men who are willing to marry your daughters under any condition that will please you and your family."[40]

Gĩkũyũ followed faithfully as he was commanded by God and upon his return to the sacred tree, to his bewilderment, he found the promised nine young men. After a very warm greeting, he took them to his homestead and introduced them to his family.

The nine girls were pleased to have male companions and soon they got married and established their own family sets. They all lived in the same compound together with *Gĩkũyũ* and *Mũmbi*. Thus, they were referred to together as *Mbarĩ ya Mũmbi* (*Mũmbi's* family group) in honour

[39] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, (1974), 113.
[40] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 6.

of their mother *Mũmbi*.[41] These nine small families continued to live together and as time unfolded each family increased greatly and Gikuyu and Mumbi had many grand grandchildren. When *Gĩkũyũ* and *Mũmbi* died the daughters inherited their parents' properties which they shared equally.

Soon after the burial of their parents and after going through the period of mourning, and since each family had grown exponentially, the daughters decided that for easy stay as a family, they form nine clans named after each of them. From here, the nine *Gĩkũyũ* clans (*mĩhĩrĩga*) were found. The main names of these clans are: 1. *Aceera* 2. *Agacikũ* 3. *Airimũ* 4. *Ambũi* 5. *Angari* 6. *Anjirũ* 7. *Angũi* 8. *Ethaga* 9. *Aithirandũ*.[42] Each daughter married to a man (9 in number), mysteriously sent by God after *Gikuyu* sought His intervention and established a clan that later formed the foundation of the *Agĩkũyũ* social organization.[43]

1.4.1.3 The Jewish Ancestry

This tradition which is passionately fronted by some of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders, attaches the origin of the *Agĩkũyũ* to the Israelites.[44] From the researcher's verbal communication with some of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders, coupled with what Wachege asserts in his book, this view is supported after drawing out things that are common to the Jews and are as well found among the *Agĩkũyũ* such as the Agĩkũyũ way of life, world-view and elements in the Jewish Scriptures.[45] This tradition is corroborated Consolata Missionaries who, working among the *Agĩkũyũ* occasionally noted

[41] Paul Ngigi Njoroge, *A People Called the Agĩkũyũ: Yesterday, Today … and Tomorrow?* (Nairobi: Sycamore Tree Publishers, 2017), 26.
[42] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 7.
[43] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Volume 1* (1977), 22.
[44] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 40.
[45] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 42.

perceived parallels between *Agĩkũyũ* customs and some Old Testament practices, leading to speculative connections with the Israelites. In fact, Fr. Cagnolo who was a Consolata missionary himself says, "the *Agĩkũyũ* community is divided into ten clans (*mihiriga*) similar to the twelve tribes of Israel. It was hard to ascertain whether they originated from one or different stocks, yet the names and membership were strictly observed."[46] There are other similarities such as monotheism, sacrificial practices, covenant-like traditions and male circumcision which are found between the way of life of these two communities but we need not go into them.

As far as these two traditions of the origin of the *Agĩkũyũ* people is concerned, a great number of the elders the researcher has interacted with and interviewed, are united in supporting the first tradition which insinuates that the *Agĩkũyũ* people have their origin from their primordial ancestors, namely, Gikuyu and Mumbi. When the researcher was growing up in the village this tradition was passionately shared that though created by God, our first parents as a people were *Gĩkũyũ* and *Mũmbi*. Wachege affirms, it is this tradition which expounds better the world-view of the *Agĩkũyũ*.[47]

1.4.2 Political Organization

According to Muriuki, by the end of the nineteenth century, the political organization of the *Agĩkũyũ* society before the colonial rule was patriarchal, decentralized and egalitarian-based, and was profoundly connected with age-set systems, councils of elders, kinship structures and communal consensus.[48] Unlike centralized kingdoms such as those of Baganda or the Zulu, the *Agĩkũyũ* had no kings or paramount chiefs. Political leadership and authority were never found in

[46] Costanzo Cagnolo, *The Agĩkũyũ: Customs, Traditions and Folklore*, (1933), 19.
[47] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 44.
[48] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Agĩkũyũ 1500-1900*, (1974), 110.

a single ruler but was distributed among families, clans, council of elders (*kiama*), and age-set institutions who governed through consensus and communal participation.[49] Leadership was largely based on seniority, wisdom, ritual status, wealth and moral integrity rather than hereditary monarchy. This system guaranteed and maintained social order, addressed issues to do with land ownership, settled disputes of every nature, and preserved the moral and religious values of the community.[50]

1.4.3 Social-Cultural aspects

In order to understand fully the concept of elderhood among the *Agĩkũyũ*, it is significantly important to look into how they were socio-culturally organized as a people. The *Agĩkũyũ* social organization was based on two basic elements which were kinship and age-grade (*riika*).[51] The kinship was basically limited to all the individuals who were related to each other by blood. On the other hand, the age-grade unit was composed of all those individuals who went through the rite of circumcision the same time irrespective of the geographical location. The rite of initiation was so crucial for the *Agĩkũyũ* as it was "regarded as *conditio sine qua non* of the entire teaching of the tribal law, religion and morality.[52]

This initiation rite brought a boy or a girl to a status of manhood or womanhood respectively and ushered one into an age-set. This phenomenon made it possible for an individual to be eligible as a member to the councils such as social, political and religious. Incorporation into

[49] Philip W. Goetz, Editor-in-Chief, "Kikuyu" in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, Volume 6, 1985), 858.
[50] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Volume 1* (1977), 45.
[51] Kamuyu-wa-Kang'ethe, "African Response to Christianity: A Case Study of the *Agĩkũyũ* of Central Kenya" in *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, January 1988), 31.
[52] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 128.

these councils demanded that the individual go through various rituals and ceremonies. As one transited from one age-grade to another, he became ontologically higher in rank in hierarchy of beings.[53]

The *Agĩkũyũ* people have accepted and absorbed in a very big way the Western culture. This scenario has made the traditional tribal system experience great bashing and thus has significantly weakened. Notwithstanding this reality, among the *Agĩkũyũ* elders, the remembrance of the past with its values, attitudes and behaviours which marked the traditional life is very much alive and is carefully and scrupulously followed.

The myth of the origin of the *Agĩkũyũ* community, makes it easier to comprehend how the *Agĩkũyũ* relate with their *Ngai*. This myth reports how *Ngai* carried *Gikuyu* onto the summit of Mount Kenya a place which had never been visited by any other man before and pointed the beautiful landscape which spread for miles and miles at the foot of the mountain and told him that he was giving this land to him. In reply, *Gĩkũyũ* thanked *Ngai* singing thus:

> O my father, Great Elder, I have no words to thank you, but with your deep wisdom, I am sure you can see how much I prize your glorious gifts. O Great Elder, ruler of all things both on heaven and on earth, I am your warrior, and I am ready to act in accordance with your will. In response, God says to *Gĩkũyũ*: My good and brave warrior, your words have touched my heart and I am pleased. Within the great bowl formed by the mountains, your sons and daughters shall roam and multiply. You shall enjoy the beauty of the country and all his fruits. Always remember that it is I who have bestowed this upon you. My blessing shall be with you and your offspring wherever you go.[54]

Most public sacrifices were offered at the regional sacred tree (*mũgumo* or *mũkũyũ*) and the elders who had attained membership of the "Ceremonial Council", the highest council of elders

[53] Kamuyu-wa-Kang'ethe, "African Response to Christianity: A Case Study of the *Agĩkũyũ* of Central Kenya" in *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, January 1988), 31.
[54] Silvana Battignole, *Kikuyu Taditional Culture and Christianity*, (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books (EA) Ltd., 1984), 30.

officiated at these ceremonies. Public worship was made for special occasions such as: prayer for rain, planting, thanksgiving for harvest, protection from diseases and others.[55]

1.4.3.1 Kinship

The *Agĩkũyũ* kinship system is of such significance that it is the foundations of their social, political, economic, and religious organization. This kinship is so important that it defines how relationships within the family, clan, age-groups, age-group, and community. Given this scenario, it determines rights, obligations, inheritance, marriage, alliances, and ritual responsibilities. Kinship is seen not merely as confined to biological relatedness but as a sacred bond linking the living, the dead, and future generations. Through kinship, social cohesion and communal identity were maintained.[56]

This kinship is structured and firmly grounded on two aspects which are, the family (*mũciĩ*) and the clan (*mbarĩ*) system. The family being the most important social unit while the *mbarĩ* traces the origin from a common ancestor which in turn regulates social conduct, land tenure and marriage alliances.[57] The *Agĩkũyũ* society is patriarchal where inheritance and lineage pass through the male line.[58]

1.4.3.1.1 The Family

The smallest political unit of the *Agĩkũyũ* kinship is the family (*nyũmba*) in which descent and inheritance are traced through the father's line.[59] The father, as the head of the household

[55] Samuel Gichigi Kibicho *the Kikuyu Conception of God, his Continuity into the Christian Era, and the question it Raises for the Christian Idea of Revelation*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, (Colombia University, 1972), 34.
[56] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 3.
[57] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 1.
[58] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Agĩkũyũ 1500-1900*, (1974), 111.
[59] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 1.

exercised authority over his wives, children, dependents, land ownership, and religious sacrifices.[60] The mother on the other hand has occupied an important role as the nurture of children and custodian of domestic harmony.

Traditionally, the *Agĩkũyũ* homestead often consisted of an extended family. A man could marry several wives where each wife occupied her own hut within one big compound.[61] Children belong to the father's lineage and inherit property through him. Sons are particularly esteemed and valued because they ensure continuity of lineage and inheritance of ancestral land.

1.4.3.1.2 Clans (*Mĩhĩrĩga*)

Beyond the family boundaries, the *Agĩkũyũ* kinship was organized around clans. Each clan traced its origin from one of the nine daughters of *Mumbi*.[62] Political power within the clan was exercised through the councils of elders known as *kĩama*. The clan was so important as through the *kĩama*, it regulated marriage by prohibiting marriage between members of the same clan. The clan provided social security and solidarity and preserved genealogies and ancestral traditions. Furthermore, clan identity carried religious significance as the ancestors of the clan were honored through libations and sacrifices.[63]

1.4.3.2 Age-group (*Riika*)

The age group was perhaps the greatest for social cohesion and relationships. Commenting on this, Muriuki writes, "the all-embracing and institutionalized *mariika* (plural for *Riika*) system

[60] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Volume 1* (1977), 112
[61] Charles William Hobley, *Bantu beliefs and Magic* (London: Frank Cass, 1967), 107.
[62] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Volume 1* (1977), 104.
[63] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969), 84.

cut across lineage and territorial groupings";[64] this system made it possible for people from broad areas of territory, composed of different lineages and clans, to regard themselves as brothers and sisters.[65]

The *Agĩkũyũ* kinship also intersected age-grade and generational structures. Those individuals who were initiated together formed a strong bond which resembled kinship relations.[66] These young men served as warriors responsible for defending the community against raids and external aggressions.[67] Age groups provided social identity, political organization, and mutual support. Respect for elders was also central as they were regarded as custodians of wisdom, moral authority, and religious traditions. Thus, the younger members of the society were expected to obey and honour them.[68] As members aged, they gradually advanced into elderhood and eventually participated in governance through *kiama*.[69]

1.4.4 Rites of Passage

The rites of passage are at the core of the *Agĩkũyũ* life as they marked important transitions in human life. These rites integrated individuals into the society affirmed communal identity, moral responsibility, and belongingness. This flows from the *Agĩkũyũ* understanding of life as a sacred journey consisting of progressive stages from birth to death, each accompanied by rituals

[64] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Agĩkũyũ 1500-1900*, (1974) 116.
[65] Paul Ngigi Njoroge, *A People Called the Agĩkũyũ: Yesterday, Today … and Tomorrow?* (Nairobi: Sycamore Tree Publishers, 2017), 105.
[66] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Agĩkũyũ 1500-1900*, (1974), 71.
[67] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Agĩkũyũ 1500-1900*, (1974), 89.
[68] John Samuel Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 176.
[69] Harold Edward Lambert, *Kikuyu Social and Political Institution*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 54.

that linked an individual to the family, clan, ancestors, and *Ngai*.[70] Therefore, these rites of passage possessed social, religious, educational and moral significance within the *Agĩkũyũ* society.

The following are the principal rites of passage among the *Agĩkũyũ*: birth and naming, initiation through circumcision, marriage, elderhood, and death. Each of these rites which symbolized a movement from one social status to another was accompanied by rituals, sacrifices, prayers, feasting, and communal participation.

1.4.4.1 Birth and Naming

Birth among the *Agĩkũyũ* was and is still regarded as a great blessing from *Ngai* and the ancestors because it ensured continuity of the family lineage and preservation of the clan.[71] To be childless was traditionally viewed with great concern because it threatened the continuity of the family lineage and the remembrance of ancestors.[72]

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, childbirth is perceived as a liminal event that marks the transition of the child from the spiritual realm into the human community.[73] Symbolic expressions accompany this moment marked by ululations (*ngemi*) which are made by the woman or women birth attendants. They differ according to the sex of the child: five for a boy and four for a girl.[74] From the number of ululations, the father of the child who is not supposed to be present but can be nearby when his wife is giving birth immediately knows the gender of the child.

[70] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969), 112.
[71] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Volume 2* (1977), 760.
[72] Costanzo Cangolo, *The Agĩkũyũ: Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore* (1933), 58.
[73] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (1969), 110.
[74] Costanzo Cangolo, *The Agĩkũyũ: Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore* (1933), 61.

Each ululation has a meaning attached to it. The first *rũkemi* (ululation) signifies *ugo* (seer), the second *ũthamaki* (ruler/leader), the third *ũtonga* (wealth or riches), the fourth *ũrathi* (prophesy) and the fifth, from which women were exempted hence limiting theirs to four, *ũcamba* (worriorhood)."[75]

Naming ceremonies formed an important aspect of the birth rite. The children are commonly named after grandparents according to a traditional sequence. The first son was usually named after the father's father, while the first daughter was named after the father's mothers. The second children were named after the maternal grandparents. The children who follow after these are named after the paternal and maternal uncles and aunts.[76] Through naming, ancestral continuity and kinship bonds were reinforced.

Immediately after the child is born, the naming ritual takes place with the father of the child playing a key role in this process, reflecting the patrilineal orientation of the *Agĩkũyũ* society, though maternal lineage remains equally significant in the naming sequence.[77] The birth of this child affects the social standing of the father to that of fatherhood.

Naming constitutes a foundational rite of passage through which the newborn is integrated into the cosmic, social and ancestral order of its people. These practices are not merely carried out to fulfil a biological or social demand but are deeply embedded within the religious worldview, kinship structure, and metaphysical beliefs of the community. In a particular way, naming

[75] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 54.
[76] Costanzo Cagnolo, *The Agĩkũyũ: Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore* (1933), 65.
[77] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Volume 1* (1977), 121.

functions as a theological and ontological act linking the child to both the living and the "living dead" (ancestors), thereby ensuring continuity of life and identity.[78]

This new status of fatherhood invites another ritual known as *kũmathithia mwana* (harvesting in collaboration with the baby) which involved the entire family and the baby eating together to celebrate the gift of this new life and a gesture of welcome of the newly born into the family.[79] The other ritual which followed was referred to as the ceremony of *gucokio ihu-inĩ* or *gũciarwo rĩngĩ* (to return to the womb or to be born twice).[80]

Until now, the child was regarded as living in *thahu* (evil or sin). Just before circumcision at about 6 years since birth, the child underwent *gũtonywo ndũgĩra* (piercing of the upper lobes of both ears) which symbolized that one has entered boyhood or girlhood.[81] This ritual was followed by *gũtonywo matũ* (making cutting in the ears). The essence of taking through a young person this painful experience was to harden him so that later in life he could become a mature responsible person.[82]

All these rituals observances were absolutely important as they defined later the *Agĩkũyũ* Elderhood.[83] These varied stages of childhood initiation processes into the community of the *Agĩkũyũ* were of absolute importance as no one could become an elder unless he was taken through

[78] Jesse Mugambi, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* (Nairobi: Longman Kenya, 1989), 37.
[79] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 54.
[80]John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (1969), 113.
[81] Paul Ngigi Njoroge, *The People called the Agĩkũyũ, Yesterday and Today… and Tomorrow?* (2017), 101.
[82] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 107.
[83] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 55.

these rituals. It is very important to bear in mind that the male sex of the child was an indispensable condition for future elderhood.[84]

1.4.4.2 Circumcision

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, male circumcision (*irua*) as a central rite of passage marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is not just a physical operation like the one people today receive in order to lessen the transmission of HIV Aids, but it is a deeply religious, social, and moral institution that incorporates the initiate into the moral and political, age-set system (*riika*), and ancestral order of the community.[85]

For the *Agĩkũyũ*, circumcision marks the crucial passage from childhood to adulthood.[86] This rite signifies that the circumcised is expected to behave in a way that is acceptable to the society as one gets closer to becoming an elder. This rite of passage is of sublime significance in that just like the other rites which were already observed in the first stage of one's initiation formation process, it is a further vital preparation towards elderhood status.[87] When the boys had attained adolescence, the elders came together and discussed when and where the circumcision was to take place. The cutting of the skin and the ensuing shedding of blood during the circumcision symbolizes death to the childhood, entrance into a new social identity and the readiness to participate in the life of the community.[88]

[84] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 55.
[85] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 125.
[86] Paul Ngigi Njoroge, *The People called the Agĩkũyũ, Yesterday and Today… and Tomorrow?* (2017), 101.
[87] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 55.
[88] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (1969), 121.

After going through the rite of circumcision, the initiates were placed in one secluded place where they were taught many things on how to behave in accordance with their new stage of life. This rite was so crucial because it was through it that gradual incorporation into the community of adults was done. They were made aware of their social duties, rights and everything else that they were supposed to know. This stage was extremely vital for it prepared an individual for elderhood among the *Agĩkũyũ*.[89]

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, circumcision is inseparable from their religious worldview because it is performed under the invocation of Ngai. It connects the initiates to the ancestors and it marks the entry into the moral and spiritual order of the community.[90] Once healed after circumcision, the *Agĩkũyũ* youth were ushered into the privileged class the so called *Anake*. They could now engage in dancing and singing, warlike activities court girls. At the same time, the had well defined social responsibilities together with a code of conduct that they were to adhere to religiously. The *Agĩkũyũ* moral and ethical code of conduct rested upon *mĩgiro* (the dos and don'ts).

This class of the *Anake* was highly esteemed by all in the society as the defense force of the community. In case there was a war to engage in with the neighboring communities, such as the *Maasai* or *Wakamba*, the elders led the logistics, and the *Anake*, led by the boldest among them, rushed out to the assault. The many wars they engaged in prepared them to function better and fully later in life the elders of their people.

[89] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 59.
[90] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, (1969), 122.

1.4.4.3 Marriage

Marriage was another significant stage towards elderhood. It is a central social and religious institution because it constitutes the foundation of family life, continuity of the lineage, and ensures communal stability. It is never viewed merely as a union between two individuals but as a covenantal relationship between families, clans, the living, and the ancestors.[91]

Once a young man got married, he established his homestead and moved from the class of *anake* (warriors) and was thereby required to join the council of elders (*kĩama*). No one could be made an elder if he was not married though there were other requirements. It was only after marriage that *Agĩkũyũ* man was promoted to a *gĩthĩga* (a grade between that of a young man and that of an elder).[92] The fecundity of this union in bringing forth children was also "a vital determining factor for and elder's personality since it was basically through one's children that one could acquire elderhood status."[93] Thus, marriage was a *conditio sine qua non* to becoming an elder.

1.4.4.4 Elderhood

Elderhood marked another important stage of life among the *Agĩkũyũ*. After marriage and having raised their children to maturity, individuals gradually entered the ranks of elders who possessed authority in the affairs of the community.[94] These were men who were highly regarded as the custodians of tradition, morality, religion, and justice. They also served as presiders during sacrifices, mediated disputes, blessed marriages, and guided younger generations.

---

[91] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 159.
[92] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Mũthamaki*, (2020), 60.
[93] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Mũthamaki*, (2020), 60.
[94] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu, 1500-1900*, (1974), 127.

1.4.4.5 Death and Funeral

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, death is regarded as the final rite of passage which is understood as an integral rite of passage marking the transition of a person from the visible community of the living to the invisible realm of the ancestors.[95] Therefore, funeral rites observed after a person has died are an important rite of passage by which death in not understood as an annihilation but as a transition into another mode of existence within the community of the departed.[96] Just like birth, initiation, marriage, and eldership, death is not viewed as an end but as a transformative passage within a continuous cycle of life, deeply embedded in the *Agĩkũyũ* religious worldview.[97]

The book *The Rites of Passage* by Arnold van Gennep is useful in understanding the *Agĩkũyũ* funeral practices. Rites of passage according to van Gennep have three stages which are separation, transition, and incorporation.[98] In the *Agĩkũyũ* culture, the ordinary social life of an individual is brought to the end by death; funeral rituals constitute the transitional stage which leads to the deceased joining the company of those who have gone to sleep (*ngoma*). Funeral ceremonies possess both social and spiritual significance.[99]

Among the *Agĩkũyũ* the death of an elderly person is treated differently from the death of a child or a young adult. The death of a respected elder is considered as a "good death" because the individual has fulfilled social obligations such as marriage, procreation, and participation in communal life. A death like this attracts an elaborate funeral ritual, communal mourning, and

[95] Michael Jindra and Joël Noret, *Funerals in Africa: Explorations of a Social Phenomenon* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011) 28.
[96] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (1969), 154.
[97] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (1969), 26.
[98] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 11.
[99] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (1969), 154.

ceremonies of remembrance. By contrast, the death of a child or of an unmarried person is often viewed as tragic and ritually incomplete.

1.5 Economic Context

The *Agĩkũyũ*, have historically inhabited the fertile highlands surrounding Mount Kenya and the Aberdare Range.[100] Their economic life is characterized by a profound historical evolution from a highly organized agrarian and barter-based society to a dominant force in modern Kenyan capitalist enterprise. Central to their economic identity is a deep-seated reverence for land, a strong entrepreneurial ethics, and the historical adaptability that allowed them to transition from traditional subsistence to modern commerce.[101]

Historically, the foundation of the *Agĩkũyũ* economy was agriculture, anchored on a customary land tenure system known as the *gĩthaka* system. Under this system, land was owned communally by the clan (*mbarĩ*), while individuals and families were granted perpetual user rights.[102] This fertile, well-watered environment allowed them to cultivate a diverse array of indigenous crops, including yams (*gĩkwa*), arrowroots (*ndũma*), sweet potatoes (*ngwacĩ*), millet, and sorghum. Land was not merely an economic asset but a spiritual entity and the ultimate measure of social security.[103] The labor was highly organized along gender lines; men were responsible for the arduous tasks of clearing virgin forests, defending the territory, and herding,

[100] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu, 1500-1900* (1974), 26.
[101] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount. Kenya*, (1978), 14.
[102] The *mbarĩ* was a descent group tracing its origins to a common ancestor, functioning as the primary socio-economic unit for land administration. Sale of land outside the *mbarĩ* was traditionally forbidden.
[103] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 31.

while women managed the planting, cultivating, and harvesting of crops, ensuring the sustained food security of the household.[104]

While primarily agriculturalists, the *Agĩkũyũ* also integrated animal husbandry into their economic framework. Livestock, particularly goats, sheep, and cattle, were not raised primarily for daily consumption but served as a critical store of wealth and a medium of exchange. Livestock facilitated vital social transactions, including the payment of bride price (*rũracio*), the settling of legal disputes, and the performance of religious rituals.[105] Furthermore, livestock provided a vital link to neighboring Pastoralist communities. The *Agĩkũyũ* engaged in extensive pre-colonial barter trade with communities such as the Maasai and the Akamba, exchanging their agricultural surpluses, ochre, and iron implements for livestock, salt, and beads.[106] This early engagement in regional trade established a foundational entrepreneurial culture within the community.

The advent of British colonialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries severely disrupted the traditional *Agĩkũyũ* economy. The colonial administration alienated vast tracts of the most fertile *Agĩkũyũ* land for white settlement, pushing the population into crowded native reserves.[107] This land deprivation was a primary catalyst for the *Mau Mau* uprising in the 1950s. However, this period also forced a significant economic pivot. The *Agĩkũyũ* were introduced to, and eventually became major producers of, lucrative cash crops such as coffee, tea, and

[104] Costanzo Cagnolo, *The Agĩkũyũ: Customs, Traditions and Folklore*, (1933), 33.
[105] Costanzo Cagnolo, *The Agĩkũyũ: Customs, Traditions and Folklore*, (1933), 29.
[106] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 68.
[107] Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905-63*, (London: James Carrey; Nairobi: Heinemann Kanya; Athens: Ohio University, 1987) 10.

pyrethrum.[108] Furthermore, the proximity of their reserves to Nairobi, the emerging colonial capital, integrated them early into the wage labor economy and the urban commercial sector.

In the post-independence and contemporary eras, the *Agĩkũyũ* have leveraged this early urbanization and cash-crop agriculture into widespread economic dominance.[109] Today, their economic life extends far beyond the highlands. They are deeply entrenched in Kenya's commercial sectors, holding significant influence in retail, wholesale trade, real estate, banking, and the public transport (*matatũ*) industry.[110] The cultural emphasis on hard work, land ownership, and capital accumulation remains intact, driving their investments in urban properties and corporate enterprises. Ultimately, the economic life of the *Agĩkũyũ* is a testament to resilience, illustrating a successful transition from traditional agrarianism to modern economic enterprise while maintaining the cultural tenets of industry and land ownership.

The *Agĩkũyũ* economic life has over the centuries been shaped and based on environmental factors like rich volcanic soils and reliable rainfall which made intensive farming possible. For the *Agĩkũyũ*, land is held dearly and is deemed sacred because it was given to them by *Ngai*. Apart from tilling the land, they also keep animals because of their economic values such as sheep, goats and cattle.[111] These animals were used as their standard currency as the also engaged in trade.[112]

[108] Roger John Maynard Swynnerton, *A Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya* (1954), 55.
[109] David Himbara, *Kenyan Capitalists, the State, and Development* (Nairobi: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 48.
[110] Kenda Mutongi, Matatu: *A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 45.
[111] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 43.
[112] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Agĩkũyũ 1500-1900*, (1974), 137.

1.6 Religious Beliefs and Practices

Prior to the advent of other religions, accompanied with their preaching as well as the coming of the white man with their Western secularized way of doing things, the *Agĩkũyũ* society was regulated, even in smallest details, by the traditional religion with which it was fully identified.[113] The sense of sacredness among the *Agĩkũyũ* was found in every area of traditional life.[114] From birth, the *Agĩkũyũ* grew up in an environment which helped them to learn the basic beliefs and values of their community. This was realized especially through the teaching of legends and proverbs and occasionally by participation in sacred rituals.[115] The ideological knowledge, thus, received was automatically transformed into beliefs since the adults within the society acted within a complex social structure which were in line with these beliefs as religion was interwoven with the traditions and social customs of the people.[116]

The *Agĩkũyũ* traditional religion was not for an individual but for the community of which one is part of. This made it impossible to have unreligious people in the traditional society. No person could dissociate himself from the religion of his people because by doing so one would automatically sever himself from his roots, foundation, security kinship and the entire group of those who gave meaning to his life and existence.[117] To be without religion amounted to self-excommunication from the entire life of the society a person belonged and African people did not know how to exist without religion.[118]

---

[113] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (1969), 3.
[114] Silvana Battignole, *Kikuyu Traditional Culture and Christianity*, (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books (E.A.) Ltd., 1984), 33.
[115] Costanzo Cagnolo, *The Agĩkũyũ: Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore*, (1933), 74.
[116] Silvana Battignole, *Kikuyu Traditional Culture and Christianity*, (1984), 33.
[117] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (Nairobi: Kenway Publication, (1978), 241.
[118] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (1969), 2.

Reflecting on this same line of thought, the Anglican Church of Kenya adherents Ndungu, S. N., Onyango, E and Githuku, S. by looking at the Anglican Diocese of Mount Kenya South, in the article in The Strategic Journal of Business and Change Management, they confirm that the life of the *Agĩkũyũ* revolved around religion where God's consciousness was life vein. Nothing was carried out, said or observed without God or Spirits being invoked.[119]

Leakey is of the same view with regard to the *Agĩkũyũ* religious beliefs and customs where this reality was profoundly interwoven with the social fabric of the tribe and the life of each family that they cannot be separated. This underlines the importance of religion among the *Agĩkũyũ* as it was necessary for the unity and stability of the family life, so much so that one who did not believe in the *Agĩkũyũ* religion was irrelevant as one of them.[120] Just like Kenyatta, Leakey notes that religion to the *Agĩkũyũ* was not a matter of individual taste; it was not something to be accepted and rejected as one willed, but rather, a family matter and by extension a tribal concern. Religion was, therefore, extremely important to the entire *Agĩkũyũ*. Rejection of religion by a member of a family did not just affect his own life but interfered with the life of his family since, many family religious rites were counted incomplete unless all the members of the family took part.[121] Again, if any member of the family lost faith and denounced the religion of his people, it was said that serious disturbance would visit the family. To avoid this unpalatable scenario, the family would disown and disinherit the disbeliever so as to maintain the unity of the family.[122]

---

[119] Stephen Njenga Ndung'u, Emily Onyango, Sammy Githuku, "The Effects of the Missionaries' Strategies upon the *Agĩkũyũ* Rituals in the Light of *Kiama* Kia Athuri and its Persistence: A Case of Anglican Church of Kenya, Diocese of Mt. Kenya South: 1960-2020" in *The Strategic Journal of Business and Change Management*, Vol. 8, Iss. 4, (November 11, 2021), 650

[120] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Volume 1* (1977) 310.

[121] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903: Volume 1* (1977), 312.

[122] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903, Volume 1* (1977), 313.

According to Jomo Kenyatta, religion was interwoven with the tradition and social customs. All members of the tribe were schooled automatically during their childhood and subsequent upbringing all that was necessary to know about religion and custom. This made the presence of the official priesthood unnecessary since the duty of inculcating and imparting this knowledge was left to the parents who were looked upon as the official ministers of both religious and social custom.[123]

1.6.1 Core Beliefs

1.6.1.1 Belief in *Ngai*

At the heart of the *Agĩkũyũ* religion is the belief in one God, Ngai, the Supreme Creator, Giver and Sustainer of things.[124] For this reason, the *Agĩkũyũ* have always maintained a close and vital relationship with *Ngai* through prayer and sacrifices.[125] This supreme being is in control of everything in this visible world as well as the spiritual one of the ancestors.[126] He is the creator of all that is contained in this world and is in complete control of everything. Without him, there would be no propagation of life whatsoever in man, animals of the field, and the vegetation around us. He has power over death and even when other agencies may cause death, this cannot happen without his consent. He is worshipped through sacrifices, libations, prayers, blessings and oaths.[127]

[123] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mt. Kenya* (1978), 232.
[124] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 233.
[125] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 234.
[126] William Scoresby Routledge & Katherine Maria Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People: The Agĩkũyũ of British East Africa* (London, 1910), 718.
[127] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903: Vols.2*, (1977), 808.

1.6.1.2 Dwelling Places of *Ngai*

The *Agĩkũyũ* believe that *Ngai* has many dwelling places which are considered sacred[128] since he is the supreme creator and sustainer. He is omnipresent as well transcendent since he lives *igũrũ, matuinĩ* (above, in the sky). But because of his immanent nature, He has established his earthly official dwelling places among the four mountains which surround the *Agĩkũyũ* nation to the north, south, east and west. The first of these four and his main dwellings place was Mount Kenya which the *Agĩkũyũ* had given the name *Kĩrĩnyaga* or *Kĩrĩ-maara*. He has other minor abodes such as *Kĩa-njahĩ* (*Kilimambogo*) on the east; *Kĩa-Mbirũirũ* (Ngong Hills) on the south and *Kia-Nyandarũa* (Aberdare Ranges) on the west.[129] All these are regarded highly with utmost reverence as great places that reveal the mystery of *Ngai*.

1.6.1.3 Names of God

Since time immemorial, the *Agĩkũyũ* have used the name *Ngai* (God) in reference to the supreme being. There is a high probability that this was not the original word used by the *Agĩkũyũ* but might have been adopted from the neighboring Maasai tribe who used the same word, *Ngai*.[130] However, the *Agĩkũyũ* were never short of other names apart from Ngai. They use a variety of other names as they view *Ngai* as inexpressible and incomprehensible by humans. These traditional names are: *Mwene-Nyaga* where *Nyaga* means "brightness", "sparkle", "dazzlingness" and thus, *Mwene-nyaga* as a name for the Deity means "The Dazzling One." This is closely linked to Mount Kenya, *Kĩrĩnyaga*, which the *Agĩkũyũ* considered to be the chief seat and the dwelling place of *Ngai*.[131] *Mũrungũ*, *Mwene-Hinya* which means the owner of power, the Almighty God or

[128] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 4
[129] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 227.
[130] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903: Vols. 3* (1977), 718.
[131] Louis Seymour Bazett *Leakey, The Southern Kikuyu before 1903: Vols 3,* (1977), 718.

High God.[132] *Mugai* (The Giver or distributor), *Gĩthuuri*[133] (Great Elder). There are other names like *Mwathani* – the distinctively Eminent Ruler of all, *Mutũũra Mũoyo* – Eternal God, *Mũteithiriria* – Helper, *Baba* – Father, which were in use even before the missionaries set foot on *Agĩkũyũ* land,[134] among many others, which are later derivations from Christianity.[135] These various appellations (the list is not exhaustive) referring to God do not mean that the *Agĩkũyũ* are polytheists. It is just one God, but identified in many ways because he remains a mystery.[136]

This *Ngai* is the One and Only God, the author of the universe, who is mentioned in the *Agĩkũyũ* idioms.[137] The *Agĩkũyũ Ngai* is perceived as the creator of all things, ranging from the universe and that is contained therein both animate and inanimate beings (*Agĩkũyũ* have their origin from God through *Gĩkũyũ* and *Mũmbi*). They believe that whatever they have, especially the land was given to them by the *Mũgai*, the Lord of Nature.[138] *Ngai* is without beginning or end and hence is everlasting. *Ngai* demands that his people observe high ethical demands, where he rewards people according to their behaviour. To the upright, he provides blessings (*kĩguni* or *kĩrathimo*) while the evil doers encounter severe punishment.[139] His residence is in the sky but he has established temporary homes here on earth situated on the mountains where he reposes while on divine visits. During his visits, he carries out "general inspection" and bestows blessings or punishments according to the deeds of the people.[140]

---

[132] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 223.
[133] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ: Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Mũthamaki*, (2020)0, 88.
[134] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903: Vol. 3* (1977), 718.
[135] *Agĩkũyũ* History and Culture. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/AgĩkũyũHistoryAndculture/posts/1494050527302617/ (accessed 22.5.2024).
[136] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903: Vol. 3* (1977), 313.
[137] Patrick Ngigi Njoroge, *A People Called the Agĩkũyũ Yesterday and Today … and Tomorrow* (2017), 113.
[138] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 27.
[139] Paul Ngigi Njoroge, *A People Called the Agĩkũyũ Yesterday and Today … and Tomorrow* (2017), 114.
[140] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 27.

While addressing the Supreme God the common name used is *Ngai*. But during prayers and sacrifices, *Ngai* is addressed as *Mwene-Nyaga* (possessor of brightness), a name which is associated with *Kĩrĩnyaga* (Mt. Kenya) which means: the mountain of brightness or that which possesses brightness. This corresponds very well to what the Bible says in 1 Tim 6:16 of the God who is immortal and lives in unapproachable light.

1.6.1.4 The Form of *Ngai*

The concept of *Ngai* among the *Agĩkũyũ* is so foundational that it constitutes the center of religious consciousness and cosmological understanding. *Ngai* is not merely a deity among others but he the Supreme Being, the creator. He does not possess a physical body like ours with all its limitation due to its corporeality though he is of human form and possessed many human attributes as he could be spoken to and in return he could as well speak to his people.[141] He delighted in sacrifices of meat, blood, fat, beer, and farm produce such as vegetables. The rain was interpreted to mean that it was the urine of God, lightning was referred to as his flashing sword. Thunder, on the other hand, was seen as his uplifted anger. This fact of having human form did not limit him because he possesses many other forms.[142]

This Deity cannot be seen by ordinary mortals.[143] He is transcendent and takes minimal interest in individual's daily engagements in life. Nevertheless, during crises of life he is invariably called upon to intervene. Since *Ngai* is not visible to mortal beings, he has established a variety of

[141] Silvana Battignole, Kikuyu Traditional Culture and Christianity, (1984), 34.
[142] Louis Seymour Bazett *Leakey, The Southern Kikuyu before 1903: Vol. 3* (1977), 719.
[143] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 225.

ways through which he manifests himself. These channels through which God manifests himself are; the sun, the moon, the stars, rain, rainbow, lightning, and thunder.[144]

These manifestations are not identical with *Ngai* but are viewed as revealing his greatness and power (*Morirũ na mahinya ma Ngai*). Through these various forms of divine manifestation of his powers, he can express his love or hatred. For example, thunder and lightning are interpreted to mean that people should clear the way for *Mwene-Nyaga* as He moves from one sacred place to another. Again, when a man is struck dead by lightning, it is generally held that this man was punished for looking upwards in an effort to see *Mwene-Nyaga* stretch and crack his joints as prepared to smash his enemies.[145]

1.6.2 Intermediaries between God and Man

The *Agĩkũyũ* have identified individuals entrusted with the intermediary role between them and their *Ngai*. Some of the intermediaries are human beings, while others are spiritual beings. The human beings include ritual elders, medicine men, seers, oracles, and diviners. The spiritual beings, on the other hand, include the spirits of the ancestors and the supernatural beings.

1.6.2.1 The Ancestors or the Living Dead

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, *Ngai* reigns supreme, and there is no other being above him. He is the only one who is worshipped and sustains the universe. On the other hand, the *Agĩkũyũ* have a solid communion with their ancestors, whom they revere (not worship) and are consulted or invoked during key rites for blessing, guidance, and reconciliation.[146] To bring out clearly the remarkable

[144] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 227.
[145] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 227.
[146] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), 84.

difference between these two supernatural realities, the *Agĩkũyũ* have clear and definite terms which differentiate the ceremonies of communing with the ancestral spirits from those directed to *Ngai* or the Supreme Being. According to Kenyatta, the *Agĩkũyũ* have distinct expressions used in their showing honour to both God and the ancestors. The term *gũthathaiya or gũikia-moko igũrũ* (to raise one's hands in the air) in reference to prayer and worship due to God alone while the term *gũitangira ngoma* njohi (libation) where elders often pour a portion onto the ground while invoking ancestral blessings.[147]

The *Agĩkũyũ* technical term for ancestors is *ngoma* (Plural *ngomi*) a word that comes from the verb infinitive *gũkoma* (to sleep). *Gũkoma* in the *Agĩkũyũ* language means to sleep and they call the ancestors *ngomi* because they believed that people do not die as such – they sleep. Even today, when referring to someone who has died, the *Agĩkũyũ* say so and so has rested or slept.[148]

The communion between the living and the dead is constantly maintained since the *Agĩkũyũ* believe that the spirits of the dead could be pleased or displeased just like a living individual. Communion with the living dead is established through special sacrifices referred to as "*magongona ma gũthĩnjĩra ngoma*" (sacrifices to the spirits of the dead) as well as the naming system whereby the actual spirit of the ancestors is incarnated in a new born child or children named after them. This naming system or tradition is generally observed even today.[149]

Within the spirit world, the *Agĩkũyũ* recognizes three main groups: (1) *Ngoma cia aciari* (spirits of one's father or mother) who remain actively involved in the affairs of their family and

[147] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 256.
[148] Johnson Ng'ang'a Mbugua, *Funeral Rites Reformation for Any African Based on the Proposed New Funeral Practices for the Agĩkũyũ*, (Oregon: Resource Publications, 2016)), 33.
[149] Gakaara Wa Wanjau, *Mihiriga ya Agĩkũyũ*, (Nairobi: Gakaara Press 1981), 12.

the can advise or reproach just as they did during their life on earth. (2) *ngoma cia mũhĩrĩga* (spirits of the clan), these ones work collectively in their dealing with clan issues. They are concerned in the welfare and prosperity of the clan. They also administer justice to either the clan or individual according to their behaviour. (3) *ngoma cia riika* (age-group spirits) These are spirits concerned with the activities of the age group. This is also referred to as tribal spirits. They are composed of young and old and are joined in a wider group. This is the tribal organization of the spirit world. Its focus is the tribe.[150] It is profoundly important to note that the relationship between these spirits and the living is not 'worship' but to maintain continuity because the community believed in the existence after death.[151]

1.6.2.2 Supernatural Spirits

These spirits were not as common as the spirit of ancestors, and they were believed to dwell in forests, bush lands, plains, and lonely or uninhabited places. They are said to be 'half men' with strange body forms, having one hand, eye, leg, and ear.[152] Though these spirits were not widely believed, their story was given mostly to children in order to convey a moral teaching and good behavior.[153]

[150] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 256.
[151] Jens Finke, Kikuyu – Traditional Religion. Retrieved from https://www.bluegecko.org/kenya/tribes/kikuyu/beliefs.htm (accessed 13.11.2024).
[152]Jens Finke, Kikuyu – Traditional Religion. Retrieved from https://www.bluegecko.org/kenya/tribes/kikuyu/beliefs.htm, (accessed 13.11.2024).
[153] Jens Finke, Traditional Music and Cultures of Kenya. Retrieved from https://www.bluegecko.org/kenya/tribes/kikuyu/beliefs.htm#:~:text=There's%20more%20of%20her%20work,;%20opens%20in%20new%20window, (accessed 9.7.2025).

1.6.3 Worship of *Ngai*

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, there is no word for worship as such. Instead, other words or expressions which carry the same connotation are used such as, 'to sacrifice', 'to pray', 'to perform rituals', and so on.[154] These words point out the things and actions which are directed to Ngai and spiritual beings. Thus, the researcher uses the word worship to convey the meaning carried in the above expressions.

1.6.3.1 Holy Locations and Sacred Trees

The transcendent and powerful nature of *Ngai* as conceived by the *Agĩkũyũ* demands a human response from those who encounter him. As a community, the *Agĩkũyũ* worship *Ngai* and express every need which they may have in their cult while facing towards or physically being present in sacred places, sacred trees, and sacred symbols. Mount Kenya occupies the highest spiritual significance because it was regarded as the dwelling place of God *Ngai*.[155] Since they do not have "temple made with hands," they have special Sacred Trees (*Mĩtĩ ya Ngai*). These sacred trees are *mũgumo* (sycamore fig) and *mũkũyũ* (fig tree), which symbolize mountains or altars of sacrifice. Under either of these trees, the *Agĩkũyũ* worship and offer their sacrifices and communal prayers to *Ngai*.[156] Religious symbolism extends to objects such as Staffs, gourds, and sacrificial animals. The elders use these symbolic items in rituals of whatever nature.

[154] John Samuel Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1975), 54.
[155] John Lukwata, *Integrated African Liturgy*, (Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications), 98
[156] Humphrey Waweru, *The Bible and African Culture*, (Limuru: Zapf Chancery Publishers Africa, 2011), 35.

1.6.3.2 Prayer and Sacrifices

Prayer is a central component of the *Agĩkũyũ* spirituality. Individuals and the community prayed directly to Ngai in thanksgiving, crisis, drought, war, illness or initiation ceremonies.[157] Prayer is usually led by elders because they are considered custodians of wisdom and tradition.

In their day-to-day life, the *Agĩkũyũ* have no organized prayers such as "morning and evening" prayers. Not even individual prayer since any intervention or assistance is carried out within the family for no individual could approach *Ngai* in supplication on his own. The very basic group that can do this is the nuclear family of father, mother, and children as it has supernatural sanctions with the father as the key person.[158] A group of families or clan can only come together in time of tribal crisis. As long as things are okay, it is taken for granted that God is happy with the people and hence no need to disturb him. *Ngai ndagiagiagwo*, literally, "*Ngai* must never be pestered." Only when there is a dire need must Ngai be approached without any fear of punishment. Interestingly, when the *Agĩkũyũ* meet to discuss matters of public interest, they offer prayer for protection and guidance.[159]

Sacrifices on the other hand accompanied many prayers and rituals. Animals such as goats, sheep, and occasionally cattle were offered to *Ngai* or in remembrance of ancestors.[160] The blood is a symbol of purification and covenant, while the meat was shared communally, strengthening social cohesion. These sacrificial rituals were avenues through which blessings for fertility, healing, rain, peace, and protection from evil were sought.

[157] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), 59
[158] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 225.
[159] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 228.
[160] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 266.

Libation is another common religious practice. This involves pouring of beer, milk, or honey onto the ground while invoking *Ngai* and ancestral spirits.[161] The acts symbolize the enduring communion between the visible and invisible worlds.

1.6.3.3 Diviners, Medicine Men, and Seers

The diviners and medicine men who were commonly called *arathi andũ* ago possessed Ngai given powers to interpret spiritual realities, diagnose causes of misfortune, and prescribe remedies.[162] Thus, they were regarded as religious specialists and they highly regarded in the *Agĩkũyũ* society. Some among them were believed to possess prophetic abilities and supernatural insight.

These specialists used herbs, rituals, prayers, and symbolic acts to heal illness or counter curses and witchcraft. There were some medicine men who were highly esteemed because of their focus on healing while others were extremely feared for alleged magical powers.[163] Diviners offered advice to the political leaders and elders especially in periods of conflicts.

1.7 The *Agĩkũyũ* and Christianity

This section focuses on the early evangelization of Kenya and the subsequent formation of Dioceses.

[161] Leakey Louis, *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu*, (London: Methuen, 1952), 37.
[162] John Samuel Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1975), 165.
[163] Charles William Hobley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic*, (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1922), 184.

1.7.1 Early Evangelization of Kenya mong the *Agĩkũyũ*

The history of Catholic evangelization began in earnest in the late nineteenth century with the arrival of the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans) at the Coastal and early twentieth century with the Consolata Missionaries in the central highlands. The Spiritans later moved and arrived in Nairobi in 1899[164] followed closely by the Consolata Missionaries who arrived in 1902.[165] Both congregations were very instrumental in evangelizing the *Agĩkũyũ* where within no time made a rich harvest. Through mutual agreement, the Spiritans focused their missionary effort of evangelization on Nairobi and the larger Kiambu. The Consolata on the hand moved to Murang'a, Nyeri. In all these places, the *Agĩkũyũ*, were receptive to the message of the Gospel and many embraced Christianity. As the number of Christian grew, there followed the formation of the dioceses.

1.7.2 Establishment of Dioceses Among the *Agĩkũyũ*

The Catholic Church in Kenya is organized into dioceses and archdioceses that correspond not only to the geographical territories but also, in most cases, to distinctive cultural communities. Although the Catholic Church by its very nature is universal and does not establish dioceses along ethnic lines, the development of evangelization in Kenya resulted in having certain dioceses serving regions where particular ethnic communities constitute the majority of the faithful. Among these, the *Agĩkũyũ* occupy a central place due to their high population and having been among the earliest and most influential recipients of Catholic missionary activity.

---

[164] Lawrence M. Njoroge, *A Century of Catholic Endeavour: Holy Ghost and Consolata Missionaries*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), 51.
[165] John Baur, *The Catholic Church in Kenya: A Centenary History*, (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications – Africa, 1990), 64.

At present the *Agĩkũyũ* are predominantly found in the counties of *Nyeri*, *Murang'a*, *Kiambu*, *Kirinyaga*, *Nyandarua*, *Laikipia*, and significant parts of *Nairobi*, *Nakuru*, *Ngong*, *Embu* and *Meru*. They are also found in Kitale, Mombasa, Malindi, Lamu, and Eldoret in sizable numbers. Consequently, the Catholic dioceses that serve the regions especially where the *Agĩkũyũ* are in the majority provide the principal ecclesiastical context in which the *Agĩkũyũ* culture, language, and liturgical traditions are expressed. These dioceses are especially significant for the study on the inculturation of the *Mũthĩgi* into the symbolism of the Catholic Bishop's Pastoral Staff. These principal dioceses are:

1.7.2.1 Archdiocese of Nyeri

The archdiocese of Nyeri was established in 1953 with Carlo Maria Cavallera as its first bishop.[166] It is the heartland of the *Agĩkũyũ* people and one of the most important Catholic jurisdictions among the *Agĩkũyũ*. All along, it has played a leading role in evangelization, catechesis, and the promotion of inculturated Pastoral ministry. According to 2023 survey there are 619,900 Catholic Christians against a population of 1, 816, 000. This translates to 34.1%.[167]

1.7.2.2 Diocese of *Murang'a*

The Catholic diocese of *Murang'a* which encompasses *Murang'a* County was erected in 1983 with Peter Joseph Kairo as its first bishop.[168] According to the statistics of 2023, the population of the county stands at 2,009, 320 with Catholics being 1, 049, 400 which translates into 52.2%.[169] This diocese serves as one of the most culturally conservative *Agĩkũyũ* regions

[166] Retrieved from, https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dnyer.html, (accessed 1.7.2026).
[167] Retrieved from, https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/scke2.html, (accessed 1.7.2026).
[168] Retrieved from, https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dmura.html, (accessed 1.7.2026).
[169] Retireved from, https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/scke2.html, (accessed 1.7.2026).

where traditional institutions such as eldership, customary rites, and symbolic leadership remains influential.

1.7.2.3 Archdiocese of Nairobi

The Archdiocese of Nairobi was established in 1953 with its Bishop John Joseph McCarthy. The two counties of Nairobi and Kiambu form the archdioceses of Nairobi. According to 2023 population survey, these two counties have a total population of 7, 569, 627. Out of these, 3, 680, 860 are Catholics who form 48.6%. Although ethnically diverse, the archdiocese includes Kiambu County, areas with a predominantly *Agĩkũyũ* Catholic population. It therefore provides an important setting for Pastoral and liturgical inculturation among urban and peri-urban Agikuyu Catholics.

1.7.2.4 Diocese of Embu

The diocese of Embu was erected in 1986 with John Njue as its first bishop. While serving Embu and *Mbeere* communities, there are also a sizeable *Agĩkũyũ* population living in the northern part of Kĩrĩnyaga and neighbouring areas. This scenario makes it an important context for intercultural Pastoral ministry since the *Aembu* and the *Agĩkũyũ* have a lot in common in their culture.

1.7.2.5 Diocese of Nyahururu

It was erected in 2002 with its first bishop Luigi Paiaro. It covers *Nyandarua* and parts of Laikipia, regions settled predominantly by *Agĩkũyũ* communities at the end of colonial rule. According to the 2023 population survey, there 938,256 inhabitants and out these 317’000 are

Catholics who translate to 33.8%.[170] This outlook makes the place reflect a strong interaction between the *Agĩkũyũ* traditions and ecclesial practice.

1.7.2.6 Diocese of Nakuru

The diocese was erected in 1968 and bishop Raphael Ndingi took the leadership. Although multi-ethnic, it has many *Agĩkũyũ* Catholics especially in Nakuru town and Naivasha as a result of migration and settlement. The diocese would be an important for integrating *Agĩkũyũ* cultural values into catholic liturgical life.

1.7.3 Hierarchy and Diocesan Structures

According to the Code of Canon Law and the declaration of *Lumen Gentium*, a Catholic diocese is the fundamental territorial and Pastoral unit of the Church, entrusted to the Pastoral governance of a bishop who exercises authority with the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) and the college of Bishops. A diocese is not merely an administrative entity but a communion of believers organized hierarchically and socially to accomplish the Church's mission of proclaiming the Gospel, celebrating the sacraments and serving humanity. The hierarchical structure ensures ecclesial unity, while the social organization fosters collaboration among clergy, religious and the lay faithful in the evangelizing mission of the Church.[171]

[170] Retrieved from, https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dnyah.html, Accessed on 1.7.2026
[171] The New Code of Canon Law (*Code Iuris Canonici*), *Autoritate Ioannis Pauli II, Promulgatus*, in *AAS* 75 (1983): 1-371, 369. Hereafter Abbreviated CIC.

1.7.3.1 The Bishop: Head of the Diocese

Every Catholic Diocese is headed by a bishop who occupies the highest office within the diocesan structure. Through the episcopal ordination, he possesses the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders and exercises legislative, executive, and judicial authority within the diocese.[172] He governs in the name of Christ as teacher, sanctifier, and shepherd of God's people. As chief shepherd, he oversees the proclamation of the Gospel, administration of sacraments, promotion of charity and preservation of ecclesiastical discipline. His authority is not absolute but is exercised in communion with the universal Church under the authority of the Pope. He is assisted by numerous collaborators to ensure the effective Pastoral care of the faithful.[173]

1.7.3.2 The Priests

Priests are the principal collaborators of the bishop in Pastoral ministry. Through priestly ordination, they share in Christ's priesthood and assist the bishop in teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful.[174] They ordinarily serve as parish priests, chaplains, diocesan administrators, educators, and directors of various Pastoral ministries. Although they possess genuine Pastoral authority within their assigned communities, they remain subject to the diocesan bishop, who appoints and transfers them according to the Pastoral needs within the diocese.[175] Their unity with the bishop is sacramental and Pastoral which results into what the Vatican Council II refers as one presbyterate united around its bishop.[176]

---

[172] CIC 375 § 2
[173] Vatican II Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, in AAS 57 (1965): 5-75, no. 20.
[174] *Lumen Gentium* 21.
[175] CIC 519.
[176] Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*: Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, in AAS 58 (1966): 991-1024, 8

1.7.3.3 Deacons

Deacons constitute the first grade of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Their ministry is centred on service (*diaconia*) in liturgy, charity and proclamation of the Word. Within the diocesan hierarchy, they serve under the authority of the bishop and frequently collaborate with parish priests in Pastoral ministry. They may baptize, preside over marriages, conduct funerals, preach and engage in numerous works of charity, although they cannot celebrate the Eucharist or hear sacramental confessions.[177]

1.7.3.4 Consecrated Religious

Religious men and women contribute significantly to the diocesan life through education, healthcare, evangelization, social services, contemplative prayer and missionary work. While they remain subject to their own superiors regarding internal governance, they collaborate with the diocesan bishop in apostolic activities carried out within the diocese.[178] This relationship mirrors the complementary nature of hierarchical authority and charismatic gifts within the Church.

1.7.3.5 Diocesan Curia

Within every diocese there is the diocesan curia which comprises offices and institutions assisting the bishop in governance. These includes: The Vicar General, Judicial Vicar, Finance officer, Diocesan Tribunal and various Pastoral commissions and departments. The diocesan Curia coordinates Pastoral planning, canonical administration, financial management, education, catechesis, communications and charitable ministries.[179]

---

[177] *Lumen Gentium* 29.
[178] CIC 607.
[179] CIC 469.

1.7.3.6 Deaneries

Dioceses especially large ones are subdivided into deaneries or vicariates, each consisting of several neighboring parishes under the coordination of a dean. The dean promotes cooperation among priests, coordinates Pastoral initiatives, facilitates communication between parishes and the bishop and monitors the Pastoral welfare of the clergy and faithful.[180]

1.7.3.7 The Parish

The parish is the primary local manifestation of the diocesan Church. According to the Code of Canon Law, a parish is a "a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted within a particular Church."[181] Each Parish is served by a parish priest appointed by the bishop. The parish serves as the ordinary place where Catholics celebrate the Eucharist, receive the sacraments, engage in catechesis, charitable works, and communal worship. Vatican II encouraged a greater participation of the laity in the mission of the Church. Following this, exhortation, in the dioceses, there are Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Finance Councils. The Pastoral council assists the parish priest in Pastoral planning and evangelization, while the finance council advises on stewardship and management of parish temporal goods.[182]

Lay Christians form the majority of diocesan population and participate actively in the mission of the Church by virtue of Baptism and Confirmation. Vatican II emphasizes that the laity are called to sanctify the temporal order through family life, professional work, politics, education, healthcare, and social engagement.[183]

---

[180] CIC 555
[181] CIC 515 § 1
[182] CIC 536.
[183] Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity), in *AAS* 58 (1966): 837-864, no. 15.

Thus, within the parish and diocese, there are found lay persons who serve as Catechists, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Lectors, Choir members, Youth leaders, Small Christian Community leaders, Parish administrators and Members of diocesan commissions. The involvement of these bodies in overall management of the parish or diocese reflects the Church's understanding of the common priesthood of all the baptized.

In many African dioceses, especially here in Kenya, within the Parish Small Christian Communities form the grassroots structures of diocesan life. They bring together neighboring Christian families for prayer, Bible sharing, catechesis, mutual support and charitable outreach.[184] These communities strengthen evangelization, social cohesion and Pastoral care while fostering active participation among the faithful.

1.7.3.8 Social Organization of the Diocese

Beyond its hierarchical structure, the diocese functions as a social community characterized by communion (communio). Relationships among bishops, priests, deacons, religious and laity are based upon mutual cooperation, shared baptismal dignity, and complementary vocations.[185]

The social organization includes numerous associations and movements which are commonly found in every parish though this list is not exhaustive such as: Catholic Women Association (CWA), Catholic Men Association (CMA), Catholic Youth Organization, Pontifical Mission Societies, Legion of Mary, Justice and Peace Commissions, Catholic Charismatic

[184] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation), in *AAS* 88 (1996): 38-96, no. 89.
[185] *Lumen Gentium* 30.

Renewal.There are also others like Schools, Hospitals, NGO's, Caritas, Ophanages and others. These organizations foster evangelization, leadership formation, social justice, charitable service and spiritual growth within the diocesan community.

1.8 Relevance of these Dioceses to the study of an Inculturated Pastoral Staff

The dioceses mentioned above with *Agĩkũyũ* in the majority constitutes the principal ecclesial environment in which the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* can be studied alongside the Pastoral Staff of the bishop. Because many clergy, catechist, and lay faithful in these dioceses are themselves *Agĩkũyũ,* they provide fertile ground for examining how indigenous symbols of leadership, reconciliation, wisdom, and Pastoral leadership may enrich Catholic liturgical expression while remaining faithful to the Church's theological and liturgical norms. Having said this researcher is not oblivious to the challenges which may be encountered towards this venture.

1.9 Challenges Towards Liturgical Inculturation of the *Mũthĩgi*

Following the development of Vatican II, the inculturation of African symbols into the liturgy of the Church has been one of the most significant Pastoral developments. But, despite this, the process has encountered numerous theological, liturgical, Pastoral, and cultural challenges which arise from the desire to preserve the integrity of the Catholic faith while allowing local cultures to enrich the liturgical life of the Church. Here are some of the challenges which may be encountered in the effort to realize meaningful inculturation of *Mũthĩgi* among the *Agĩkũyũ* Christian community.

1.9.1 Traditional Religion versus Christianity

The most glaring tension is between Traditional *Agĩkũyũ* practices and Christianity. Many Christian communities across the spectrum view certain rituals associated with *Mũthĩgi* such as animal sacrifices, libation and the invocation of ancestors as incompatible with Christian teaching. This disposition has made some baptized Christian not embrace elder initiation accusing it of syncretism and thus rejection of *Mũthĩgi* as a pagan symbol. This tension has contributed to a divided identity among the *Agĩkũyũ* Christians especially those who seek to balance cultural heritage with ecclesial commitment.[186]

1.9.2 Waning of the Traditional Authority Structures

The advent of the systems of governance which we have today has significantly interfered with the judicial and political roles of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder. Before the coming of the colonizers, the elders exercised authority in every sphere of life: dispute resolutions, land issues, moral and religious regulations. Today, these functions are addressed to a great extent by courts established by the state, administrative authorities and local government structures. Given this scenario the *Mũthĩgi* risks being seen as symbolic devoid of practical authority thereby, weakening its relevance among the younger generation.[187]

1.9.3 Politicization of *Kĩama* and the *Mũthĩgi*

The institution of elders among the *Agĩkũyũ* has sometimes been drawn into political drama of our time of endorsing political leaders and even participation in ceremonies of the state. As a

[186] Benson Weru Maina, "Factors Leading to the Initiation of Christian Men into the *Agĩkũyũ* Cultural Eldership (Kiama), *ShahidiHub International Journal of Theology & Religious Studies Vol.5, No., 1* (2025), 151.
[187] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1938), 109.

result, internal division among elders rises, neutrality is compromised and public skepticism grows regarding the authenticity of the institution. This phenomenon undermines the traditional role of *Mũthĩgi* as a moral and spiritual symbol that transcends partisan interests.[188]

1.9.4 Fragmentation and Leadership Wrangles

Though each region has its own Kiama, there is a constituted national body formed from the regional members which is meant to maintain check and balances. But fragmentation and leadership disputes have been experienced especially from the regional level with different factions claiming legitimacy. As a result, these divisions and squabbles interfere with the unity of the institution and create confusion which raises genuine concerns as to qualifies a legitimate elder, which *Mũthĩgi* is authentic and the whole process of initiation is questioned. These disputes erode public trust and diminish the authority traditionally associated with the *Mũthĩgi*.[189]

1.9.5 Cultural Erosion and Modernization

The *Agĩkũyũ* have had their own share of cultural erosion due to the urbanization, formal education and globalization. This reality which is very much alive has contributed to the decline in transmission of the traditional knowledge. As a result, what is there among the younger generation of the *Agĩkũyũ* is lack of familiarity with the rituals performed by an elder. There is also a perception of traditional symbols as outdated and thus prioritizing modern professional identities over cultural roles. Consequently, only a handful of individuals are willing to undertake

[188] *Daily Nation*, "Kikuyu Elders: This was our State House Ritual," (March, 28, 2022), 1
[189] *The Star*, "Kikuyu Elder's Leadership Wrangles Deepen as Splinter Groups Lock Horns," (April 15, 2024), 2

the rigorous process of initiation into eldership thereby, threatening the continuity of the *Mũthĩgi* tradition.[190]

1.9.6 Ethical Concern and Misuse

In recent times, growing concern has been raised regarding the misuse of the *Mũthĩgi* by individuals who, for personal gains and benefits associated with elderhood, claim elder status without proper initiation or moral integrity. This has brought about the commercialization of the initiation process spearheaded by self-proclaimed elders who use the *Mũthĩgi* for personal or political gain. Such practices compromise the ethical foundation of the institution and weaken its symbolic power.[191]

1.9.7 Colonial and Missionary Legacy

The history of Christian missionary activity in Africa presents obstacles to inculturation. During the colonial period, many African cultural symbols were dismissed as pagan or incompatible with Christianity. As a result, many African Christians developed negative attitudes toward their own cultural heritage.[192]

1.9.8 Inadequate Formation of Clergy and Liturgical Ministers

Some priest, seminarians, and Pastoral agents do not have adequate knowledge and training in liturgical inculturation despite the fact that articles 15 and 16 of the Liturgical Constitution recommends that this training be offered. Those who may have some knowledge, it's only about

[190] Geofrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900* (1974), 121.
[191] Francis Omondi, "Kiama Kia Athuri' Rituals and Challenges to *Agĩkũyũ* Christians," *African Theological Journal for Church and Society* (2024), 56.
[192] Laurenti Magesa, Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 46.

rubrics.[193] This lack of proper formation contributes to unnecessary rejection of authentic African symbols.

1.9.9 Limited Liturgical Guidelines from the Bishops

Although the Holy See has issued important documents such as *Varietates Legitimae*, relatively few episcopal conferences have developed detailed practical guidelines on how liturgical inculturation should be implemented. Some of the innovations which are there are mostly championed by non-Africans.[194]

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the *Agĩkũyũ* are a people with a rich historical, cultural, social, political and religious heritage that has shaped their worldview and communal identity. Their traditions, institutions and symbols evolved within a coherent cultural framework centered on the family, clan, age-set organization and council of elders (*Kiama*) and an enduring belief in *Ngai*, the Supreme Creator. Rather than being isolated cultural expressions, these institutions constituted an integrated system through which authority, justice, morality, reconciliation and communal continuity were safeguarded.

The chapter has further shown that the *Agĩkũyũ* understanding of leadership is deeply symbolic. Authority is not exercised merely through political or social power but is expressed through visible cultural symbols that embody responsibility, wisdom, integrity and service to the

[193] John Lukwata, "Challenges and Opportunities for Liturgical Inculturation in Africa", in African Christian Studies, Vol. 26, no. 3, (CUEA Publications, September, 2010),79.
[194] John Lukwata, "Challenges and Opportunities for Liturgical Inculturation in Africa", in African Christian Studies, Vol. 26, no. 3, (CUEA Publications, September, 2010),78.

community. Among these symbols, the *Mũthĩgi* occupies a privileged place as the visible sign of Elderhood, legitimate authority, mediation and communal unity. It signifies, not domination but service, moral responsibility and the obligation to preserve peace and justice among the people.

Furthermore, the religious life of the *Agĩkũyũ* reveals that belief in *Ngai* permeated every aspect of life. Their rituals, prayers, sacrifices, blessings and rites of passage reveals a people who understood human existence as inseparable from the divine order. Although traditional religious practices differed from Christian worship, they manifested profound values such as reverence for God, respect for life, communal solidarity and moral accountability as embodies in the Mũthĩgi. These values provide important points of dialogue between *Agĩkũyũ* culture and the Christian faith, particularly within the framework of inculturation as advocated by the church.

This cultural background provides the essential foundation for examining the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi*. Since symbols derive their meaning from the cultural world that produces them, the *Mũthĩgi* cannot adequately interpreted apart from the *Agĩkũyũ* understanding of elderhood, communal leadership, justice, reconciliation and sacred authority. Appreciating these cultural realities enables a more informed comparison with the Pastoral Staff of the Catholic bishop. The next chapter therefore builds upon this historical and cultural foundation by examining the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* among the *Agĩkũyũ* elders.

CHAPTER TWO

SYMBOLISM OF *MŨTHĨGI* OF THE *AGĨKŨYŨ*

Introduction

The chapter analyses the origin, development, physical characteristics and various uses of the Mũthĩgi within Agĩkũyũ society. It also examines its connection with the Kĩama, the council of elders, and explains how the Staff became associated with the responsibilities entrusted to elders in maintaining social order, resolving conflicts and guiding the community. Through this exploration, the chapter demonstrates why the Mũthĩgi provides an important cultural foundation for reflection on symbols of Christian leadership.

This chapter further examines the Mũthĩgi as a significant cultural symbol among the Agĩkũyũ people of Kenya. It seeks to move beyond viewing the Mũthĩgi as merely a physical Staff and instead explores its deeper meanings related to authority, wisdom, leadership, justice, reconciliation, responsibility and communal identity.

Symbols occupy a central place in every human society because they embody values, beliefs, authority and identity that transcends their physical form. Within African traditional societies, material objects frequently serve as visible expressions of visible expressions of invisible realities, linking the individual with community, the ancestors and the divine. Among the Agĩkũyũ, one of the most significant cultural symbol is the *Mũthĩgi*, the ceremonial Staff carried by recognized elders. Although outwardly a simple wooden Staff, the Mũthĩgi represents a profound institution of leadership, wisdom, justice, peace, reconciliation and communal responsibility. It is

therefore not merely an instrument of support but visible manifestation of the authority and dignity entrusted to an elder with the *Agĩkũyũ* society.

The symbolism of *Mũthĩgi* cannot be understood apart from the *Agĩkũyũ* worldview in which authority is fundamentally relational and communal rather than individualistic. Leadership among the *Agĩkũyũ* has traditionally been exercised through councils of elders, whose members were expected to exemplify moral integrity, impartial judgment and commitment to the common good. The Mũthĩgi became the external sign of these virtues, reminding both the elder and the community that authority exists in service, reconciliation and the preservation of harmony. Consequently, every aspect of the *Mũthĩgi* communicates values that have been transmitted through generations.

Within this context, this chapter examines the symbolism of the Mũthĩgi by focusing on the meaning of the *Mũthĩgi*, its etymology and origin as well as from the historical, cultural, anthropological and theological perspectives. It investigates its origin, physical characteristics, ritual functions, social significance and religious symbolism among the *Agĩkũyũ*.

2.1 The Meaning of the *Mũthĩgi*

In the *Agĩkũyũ* language, the term *Mũthĩgi* refers to a special ceremonial Staff or stick carried by a recognized elder (*Muthamaki* or member of the *Kiama*). While the object serves as physical support during movement, its primary function is symbolic rather than practical. It is not just an ordinary walking stick or Staff. It identifies the bearer as one entrusted with communal leadership and moral responsibility. It is a sacred symbol of authority, elderhood, wisdom, age,

leadership and power to speak.[195] To underline this deep symbolic meaning of *Mũthĩgi*, Leakey asserts that, "no elder could stand to speak without *Mũthĩgi*. It was the physical sign that he had the right to advise or bless".[196]

Traditionally, the *Mũthĩgi* is given only upon individuals who have attained recognized elder status through age, family responsibility, moral integrity and acceptance by the community. It therefore signifies a public recognition of one's authority and service rather than personal privilege. The elder does not own authority independently; rather, the community entrusts authority to the elder, and the *Mũthĩgi* serves as its visible sign. Patrick N. Wachege observes that *Agĩkũyũ* eldership is fundamentally relational and communal emphasizing service, reconciliation and guardianship of the people's moral order than domination or coercive power.[197]

The *Mũthĩgi* can only be carried by a male elder who has gone through all the rites of passage which includes, initiation (circumcision), marriage and elevation and acceptance into the *kiama* (council of elders). It is a social sign confirming that the person has the right to speak and bless in public forums.[198] Thus, it functions as a tool of blessing and mediation. It is also used in ritual prayers and oathing ceremonies where it symbolizes the elder's chief role among others as a peacemaker and a spiritual link to the ancestral authority and wisdom.[199] According to Leakey, the *Mũthĩgi* is often personalized by being handed down to worthy individuals within the family and

[195] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya, (*1978), 145.
[196] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya,* (1978), 203.
[197] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ: Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Mũthamaki*, (2020), 53.
[198] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3,* (London: Academic Press, 1977), 1255.
[199] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3,* 1258

bears clan's specific symbols. The bearer of *Mũthĩgi* is distinguished as morally upright, socially trusted and ritually complete possessing the wisdom and experience necessary to guide others.[200]

2.1.1 Symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi*

The *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder is profoundly symbolic as it represents authority, moral uprightness, ritual leadership, and juridical legitimacy within the *Agĩkũyũ* society. The *Mũthĩgi* is thus a perceivable sign of elderhood, social trust, and spiritual responsibility. An elder carrying the *Mũthĩgi* is mandated to speak with authority in the *kiama* and judicial assemblies.

Field interview gathered from Catholic clergy and lay leaders situates this symbolism within contemporary debates on liturgical inculturation. In an interview, Fr. Lawrence Mbugua of Murang'a diocese, observed that the prevailing Western design of the episcopal crozier is only "somewhat" adapted to local Pastoral realities, leaving a visual and symbolic gap between Eurocentric insignia and the *Agĩkũyũ* understanding of eldership authority embodied in the *mũthĩgi*.[201]

Among the *Agĩkũyũ* people of Kenya, the *Mũthĩgi* (plural *mĩthĩgi*) is a special ceremonial Staff or stick carried by *Agĩkũyũ* elders. It is not just an ordinary walking stick or Staff. It carries with it the sacred symbolism of authority, elderhood, wisdom, age, leadership, and power to speak.[202] To underline this deep symbolic meaning of *Mũthĩgi*, Leakey asserts that, "no *Agĩkũyũ*

[200] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3*, 1260.
[201] Rev. Lawrence Mbugua, (Diocese of Murang'a), interviewed at Tangaza University, February 24, 2026.
[202] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 145.

elder could stand to speak without *Mũthĩgi*. It was the physical sign that he had the right to advise or bless".[203]

The *Mũthĩgi* can only be carried by a male elder who has gone through all the rites of passage which includes, initiation (circumcision), marriage and elevation and acceptance into the *kiama* (council of elders). It is a social sign confirming that the person has the right to speak and bless in public forums.[204] Thus, it functions as a tool of blessing and mediation. It is also used in ritual prayers and oath-taking ceremonies where it symbolizes the elder's chief role among others as a peacemaker and a spiritual link to the ancestral authority and wisdom.[205] According to Leakey, the *Mũthĩgi* is often personalized by being handed down to worthy individuals within the family and bears clan's specific symbols. The bearer of *Mũthĩgi* is distinguished as morally upright, socially trusted and ritually complete.[206]

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, no man would dare carry the *Mũthĩgi* unless he had been meticulously initiated into elderhood by strictly adhering to the established rites and has the blessing of fellow elders. The *Mũthĩgi* distinguishes those who can authoritatively speak on behalf of the community from any member of the community.[207]

2.1.2.1 Symbol of Authority

The foremost symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* is authority. In traditional *Agĩkũyũ* society, authority was vested not in hereditary chiefs but in councils of elders, whose legitimacy rested on

[203] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 204
[204] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3*, (1977), 1255
[205] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3*, (1977), 1258
[206] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903*: Vols. 3, (1978), 1260.
[207] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 188.

age, wisdom, moral integrity, and communal recognition. The possession and public display of the *Mũthĩgi* was a clear indication to the public that the bearer had gone through all the required stages of life and has attained the status of an elder recognized and accepted by the community as a legitimate leader and decision maker.[208]

The Staff functioned as a visible sign of legitimate leadership. Its symbolism emphasized that authority should be exercised not through coercion but through wisdom, persuasion, and service to the community. The elder carrying the *Mũthĩgi* represented continuity with ancestral traditions and was expected to uphold the values that sustained communal harmony.[209]

2.1.2.2 Symbol of Wisdom and Experience

Traditionally, the *Agĩkũyũ* regarded old age as a repository of knowledge, and the elders were expected to preserve oral traditions, genealogies, customary laws and religious practices. But there were individual elders who distinguished themselves in being exceptionally committed to the things of the community and were thus acknowledged with the bestowal with *Mũthĩgi* which symbolized wisdom and the vast experience which has been accumulated over time. This Staff represented the elder's journey through life and the wisdom acquired through years of service to the community as Kenyatta emphasizes that elders among the *Agĩkũyũ* were respected because of their accumulated knowledge and experience, especially with regard to their keeping and protecting the customs and traditions that guided communal life.[210]

[208] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 1*, (1977), 115.
[209] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500 -1900* (1974), 127.
[210] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 214.

The young members of the community frequently approached these elders for advice on matters concerning marriage, inheritance, social obligations, and conflict resolution. The *Mũthĩgi* gradually became a visible reminder that leadership required prudence, patience, and mature judgment.[211]

2.1.2.3 Symbol of Judicial responsibility

One of the principal duties of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders was the administration of justice. Council of elders adjudicated disputes concerning land ownership, marriage arrangements, inheritance rights, and breaches of customary laws. When they arise, there has to be mechanisms in place to address them. Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, the *Mũthĩgi*-bearing elders come in handy to quell the dispute and restore order. In this scenario, the *Mũthĩgi* symbolized the role of the elder as a custodian of justice.[212] It also affirms that the process used to settle the dispute is legitimate and binding. In this case, once a judgment was made by elders carrying the *Mũthĩgi*, it had social force and spiritual consequences if violated. This demonstrates the fusion of law, morality, and religion in the *Agĩkũyũ* society.[213] Here, the *Mũthĩgi* is held or pointed when speaking, symbolizing truth and justice.[214] Sometimes, it is placed on the ground as a way of sealing an agreement or bringing an argument to the end[215] and words spoken while the elder holds the *Mũthĩgi* are deemed to be binding and sacred.[216]

---

[211] John Middleton, *The Central Tribes of the Northeastern Bantu*, (London: International African Institute, 1953), 47.
[212] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3, (*1977), 750.
[213] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500 -1900*, 1974, 127.
[214] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3*, (1977), 1102.
[215] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 146.
[216] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 208.

Reflecting on this, Elder John Kĩmani wa Mũrũgũ, a lay member of the *kĩama kia maturanguru*, from Nakuru observed that absorbing these traditional judicial gestures into episcopal liturgies would significantly deepen local comprehension of the Bishop's own judicial and Pastoral authority.[217]

2.1.2.4 Symbol of Spiritual Authority

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, religion permeated every aspect of life. Thus, elders frequently presided over sacrifices, prayers, blessings, and rituals directed to Ngai. They also played a very important role in maintaining relationship between the living and the ancestors.[218] Within this religious framework, the *Mũthĩgi* symbolized spiritual authority and ritual competence given the fact that the *Mũthĩgi* itself was often made from sacred trees such as *mũkũyũ* or *mũgumo* (fig tree), which is believed to be connected with *Ngai* (God) and the ancestors.[219]

In an interview with George Githinji, a catechist in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, strongly affirmed that the Church should draw on indigenous materials, suggesting that carving a Pastoral Staff from the sacred *mũgumo* would naturally integrate the *Agĩkũyũ* cosmic worldview into Catholic sacramentals.[220]

2.1.2.5 Symbol of Unity and Social Cohesion

The *Agĩkũyũ* elders were responsible for mediating disputes by promoting reconciliations thereby preserving the social harmony. As leaders of the people, they made sure that conflicts did

[217] John Kĩmani wa Mũrũgũ, interviewed at Nakuru, 20.2.2026.
[218] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1938), 242.
[219] Kihumba Thairu, *The African Mythical Heritage* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1997), 204.
[220] George Githinji, interviewed at St. martin De Porres Catholic Church, Karuri, 12.12.2025).

not undermine the unity of the community.[221] The Staff therefore became an emblem of peace, stability, and collective responsibility. It reminded community members that individual interests should be subordinated to the common good.[222]

2.1.2.6 Symbol of Peace and Reconciliation

Whenever disputes arose among the Agĩkũyũ, elders would often hold the Mũthĩgi while pronouncing reconciliation between the conflicting families. The Staff therefore became a visible sign of restored harmony.

2.1.2.7 Symbol of Continuity and Cultural Legacy

The elders played a very vital role in transmitting traditions from one generation to another since they were the custodians of oral history and cultural memory. The presence of *Mũthĩgi* with them symbolized this continuity by linking contemporary elders with their predecessors and with the ancestral heritage of the *Agĩkũyũ* people. The *Mũthĩgi* thus functioned as a visible reminder that cultural identity depends upon faithful transmission of values, customs, and collective memory. For this reason, the *Mũthĩgi*, if appropriate, is often passed down through generations as a family or clan heirloom[223] because it is seen as representing not only personal status but also collective memory and ancestral responsibility.[224]

[221] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vol. 2, (*1977), 627.
[222] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), 208.
[223] Gerald J. Wanjohi, *The Wisdom and Philosophy of African Proverbs: The Gikuyu Worldview* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 88.
[224] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 193, Vol. 3*, (1977), 1103.

2.1.2.8 Symbol of Service and Responsibility

Finally, the *Mũthĩgi* serves as a symbol of service and responsibility. although it represents authority, it simultaneously reminds its bearer that leadership entails obligations toward the welfare of the community. The elders were expected to protect vulnerable members, preserve justice, safeguard traditions, and promote social harmony.[225] The *Mũthĩgi* therefore is a sign of stewardship rather than domination. Its symbolism reflects the *Agĩkũyũ* understanding that true authority is exercised through service and commitment to the common good.[226]

2.1.2.9 Symbol of Authority and Elderhood

Only the fully initiated elders can carry the *Mũthĩgi* as it signifies that the bearer has completed all the stages of social maturity and is now qualified to lead, speak, bless, and arbitrate within the community. A man without a *Mũthĩgi*, no matter his age, cannot speak officially in public gatherings or participate fully in rituals.[227]

a) Symbol of Spiritual Power

The *Mũthĩgi* is believed to carry and have spiritual powers and the elders carry it always during rituals, prayers, blessings and oaths. These sacred powers associated with the *Mũthĩgi* originates from the sacred trees (*mũgumo* and *mũkũyũ*) where it sourced as these trees are believed to be connected to *Ngai* and the ancestors.[228]

[225] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500 -1900*, 919740, 131.
[226] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), 219.
[227] Julius Gathogo, "The Re-Emergence of the African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Kenya," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 37, n.2 (2011), 90.
[228] Kihumbu Thairu, *The African Mythical Heritage* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1997), 204.

b) Symbol of Legal and Moral Authority

Whenever there are disputes in the social order of the people which require the intervention of an elder or in community meetings (*kĩama*), the *Mũthĩgi* is held or pointed when speaking, symbolizing truth and justice. It can also be placed on the ground which symbolizes that the agreement for example has been sealed or to silence an argument. It is believed that words spoken while holding the *Mũthĩgi* are binding and sacred.[229]

c) Symbol of Cultural Legacy

The *Mũthĩgi* is often passed down through generations as a family or clan heirloom. This happens because it represents not only personal status but also the collective memory of the community and ancestral responsibility.[230]

d) Symbolism in the *Agĩkũyũ* Worship

In the *Agĩkũyũ* cosmology, worship of Ngai takes place under sacred spaces such as *mugumo* (wild fig) trees as altars for prayer and sacrifice, on Mount Kenya or any hill as dwelling Ngai and sites such as rivers for ritual purification and offerings.[231] Leading of worship is reserved for those individuals who have attained ritual, social, and moral authority. These leaders are entrusted with spiritual duties of acting as intermediaries between the community and Ngai. During the worship, the elders raise or plant their *Mũthĩgi* into the earth when invoking blessings or making oath.[232] The planting of the *Mũthĩgi* into the earth symbolizes the spiritual intermediary

[229] Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 208.
[230] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3*, (London: Academic, 1977), 1103.
[231] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Agĩkũyũ, 1500 – 1900*, (1974), 55.
[232] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 2*, 1977, 813

who links the community to Ngai through the earth which is a symbol of fertility and divine presence.[233]

His Lordship Bishop George Muthaka of Garissa Diocese, born and raised in Kiambu notes the inculturation of traditional gestures and symbols could provide a deeply communicative liturgical rubric for local Catholics during solemn celebrations, provided they are carefully catechized.[234]

We have already seen that among the *Agĩkũyũ*, the *Mũthĩgi* is deeply a symbolic object which is used in all communal functions. In traditional worship, its used by the leading elder as:

e) Authority in Worship

The possession of *Mũthĩgi* by an elder in the worship signifies that the individual elder has been properly initiated achieving full social and spiritual maturity making him eligible as a representative of the community before Ngai (God).[235] Thus, the *Mũthĩgi* is not merely a walking stick but rather a visible sign of consecrated authority within the community.

f) Covenant and Truthfulness

The *Mũthĩgi* is also used symbolically in ritual declarations, blessings and curses. Here, one is made to swear while holding it and in case of a situation where one swears falsely, it invokes

[233] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Agĩkũyũ, 1500 – 1900*, (1974), 46
[234] George Muthaka, interviewed in Nairobi, 18.1.2026.
[235] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 185.

ancestral and divine judgment. In this way, its role as a covenant object tied to justice and truth is reinforced.[236]

g) Connection with the Ancestral Spirits

In the *Agĩkũyũ* worship, the *Mũthĩgi* is often viewed as linking the living with the *ngomi* or ancestral world. Therefore, the elders are regarded as being closer spiritually to the ancestors by which *Mũthĩgi* becomes the bridge connecting generations through which communal memory, values and divine expectations are channeled.[237]

h) Ceremonial Purity and Gender Roles

In the *Agĩkũyũ* worship, the *Mũthĩgi* is carried only by men who have been properly initiated and admitted into leadership. Thus, its use is restricted as an indication of ritual purity and status. Women and the uninitiated men had limited roles in formal worship.[238] Women are allowed to lead in those rites related to birth, female initiation, and fertility as well as household prayers and blessings.[239]

2.2 Origin of the *Mũthĩgi*

The origins of the *Mũthĩgi* among the *Agĩkũyũ* is not hinged in one historical source but rather in diverse sources. This should be a clear sign that the *Mũthĩgi* is truly an element whose origin is traceable and is associated with the *Agĩkũyũ* elderhood. Here below, the researcher

[236] Gakaara wa Wanjau, *Mĩhĩrĩga ya Agĩkũyũ* (Nairobi: Gakaara Press, 1981), 52.
[237] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (1969), 67.
[238] Charles Nyamiti, *Studies in African Traditional Religion*, (Nairobi: The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, 1995), 102.
[239] Gakaara wa Wanjau, *Mĩhĩrĩga ya Agĩkũyũ* (1981), 40.

presents three diverse though not conflicting ways in which the *Mũthĩgi* may have originated and the symbolism it has acquired.

2.2.1 Historical Origin

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, the *Mũthĩgi* (plural *mĩthĩgi*) emerged historically as a deeply revered symbol of elderhood and its origins are not reducible to a single historical moment as it is embedded in the development of elderhood, ritual authority, and communal governance.[240]

2.2.2 Functional Evolution: From Utility to Symbol

The origin of the *Mũthĩgi* may also be traced from an anthropological perspective where it is said to have likely originated as a walking stick used by elderly men. However, with the passage of time, it underwent a process of symbolic intensification in which, its practical function was overshadowed by its ritual significance. This transformation can be understood in three stages, namely, the utilitarian stage, where we have a simple walking aid associated with age and mobility, the social stage, which portrays a sign of seniority and respect within the community, and finally, as a ritual symbol stage, it is an object invested with authority, used in ceremonies, judgments, and blessings. This theory is consistent with broader African patterns where everyday objects become ritually sacralized, as E. E. Evans-Pritchard notes, symbolic objects in African societies often emerge from ordinary life but acquire "secondary, deep religious meaning through ritual usage."[241]

[240] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, 127.
[241] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, The Problem of Symbols, in Michael Lambek (editor), A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion, Retrieved from, https://is.muni.cz/el/phil/jaro2015/ETMB83/um/02_ReligionandAnthropologyreadingsfor01182012.pdf, (Accessed on 6.5.2026)

It emerged through a gradual symbolic transformation from being a mere walking aid to a densely layered cultural artifact that embodies authority, elderhood, moral legitimacy, and ritual mediation.

2.2.3 Development within the Institution of the *Kĩama*

The historical development of the *Mũthĩgi* is closely connected with the emergence of the kiama, the council of elders responsible for administering justice, resolving disputes, regulating land ownership, overseeing initiation rites, and preserving religious tradition. As *Agĩkũyũ* society expanded into different ridges and clans, mechanisms for maintaining unity became increasingly important. The *Kiama* provided the cohesion through collective leadership, while the *Mũthĩgi* functioned as the visible emblem of the authority entrusted to its members. Leakey notes that the *Agĩkũyũ* possessed one of the most highly organized indigenous systems of government in East Africa before colonial rule, with elders exercising legislative, judicial, and religious authority.[242] The ceremonial Staff became one of the most recognizable insignia of this office.

According to the *Agĩkũyũ* tradition, the institution of elderhood has its origin from the ancestral founders namely, *Gĩkũyũ* and *Mumbi*, whom the *Agĩkũyũ* regard as the primordial parents created and blessed by *Ngai* at *Mũkũrwe wa Nyagathanga*.[243] These origins gave rise to the moral structures governing kinship, land administration, sacrifices, and conflict resolutions.

The first rank of elderhood was called the *Kĩama kĩa Kamatimũ.*[244] The word *matimũ* from which *Kamatimũ* is derived means spear and hence *Kamatimũ* means carrier of spears which means that those who have joined this grade of elders were still functioning as warriors who carries

[242] Louis Seymour Bazzette Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903*, (1977), Vol. 1, 200.
[243] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1938), 3.
[244] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, (1974), 127.

spears because they have not yet been given the Staff of office which signifies the transition made.[245] They are not yet elders as such but in the process of becoming. Every elder of this grade must give one goat (*mbũri*) *to* the elders' council of his area so that they can confirm his status.[246] The goat (*mbũri*) was for a ceremonial feast in which the candidates are sworn in. *Kamatimũ* were servers at the elders' courts and cannot judge a case yet, they only listen to cases for their legal training. The *Kamatimũ* are at the service of the *kĩama*. They assist in skinning an animal, collect firewood, and roast meat for the senior elders. They also carry ceremonial articles to and from the assemblies of *Kĩama*. This intense training is meant to prepare and initiate them into the next and higher grade of elderhood or leadership.[247]

As validated by Seminarian Dominic Mbugu Kamau in an interview, the intensive vetting of candidates for the *kĩama* mirrors, in his view, the canonical scrutiny applied to candidates for Holy Orders.[248] In the same interview, Fr. Linus Mwangi Mugo further observed that the physical service rendered by the *Kamatimu* functions as a parallel to the transitional diaconate and seminarian formation, where humility precedes the assumption of spiritual authority.[249]

Once a man has passed the first stage, he is ushered into the next grade of Kiama called *Kĩama kia Mataathi* (leaves of *Clausia anisata*), which means the council of peace.[250] This stage is arrived at when one has a son or a daughter who is old enough for circumcision.[251] The candidate is expected to offer two goats to the senior *Kamatimu* elders who become elders of the *Kĩama* or

[245] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 201.
[246] Paul Ngigi Njoroge, *The People called the Agĩkũyũ, Yesterday and Today… and Tomorrow*? (2017), 102.
[247] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 201.
[248] Dominic Mbugua Kamau, interviewed at St. Martin de Porres Parish Karuri, Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, December, 14, 2025.
[249] Rev. Fr. Linus Mwangi Mugo interviewed, Muranga, 19.2.2026.
[250] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vol.2*, (1977), 665.
[251] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 193.

Gikuyu Court of Elders. The elders of this grade were given a white Staff called *Mũthĩgi*, of a particular tree, *mungirima* or *mutaathi*, and a bunch of leaves, *mataathi*, as symbols of their office.[252] When the elders have advanced to this status, they are known as *Kĩama kĩa mataathi*. They have power over others, for they have the prerogative of administering Gikuyu law and justice.

When an individual has gone through all the above-named stages of growth and initiation and shows signs of being worthy of elderhood status, he is made one.[253] For one to be raised to this highly regarded grade of elderhood, he was expected to have "shown bravery in wars, impartiality in justice, self-sacrifice, and above all discipline".[254] Then, as a gesture of one's commitment to his new status in the society, he paid one male goat or sheep. Having met all the preliminary requirements, one could then be incorporated into the Kiama (council of senior elders). The scrutiny was very thorough because the individual to be made an elder was supposed to be a man without reproach. He was expected to be mature, mannered, generous, godly, and able to shepherd the community in the right way. As symbol of his new social status, he had ear-rings of brass placed in his ears which had been prepared during his process of initiation as we have already indicated, he was vested with a black *Mũthĩgi*[255] and abandoned the white one, and carried *maturanguru* leaves as an indication that he was a peace-loving person. Here below, we present the grades of *kiama* together with the accompanying ritual and ceremonies of induction.

[252] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900,* (1974), 127.
[253] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 61
[254] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 192.
[255] Godffrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900,* (1974), 127.

Symbols are an essential part of every culture. The institutional origin of the symbol of the *Mũthĩgi* lies in the authority structures of the *kiama*. There were various duties that the elders were supposed to fulfill. They exercised judicial, political, and religious roles, decisions were arrived at through consensus rather than coercion, and finally, authority required visible and ritualized symbols. Given this scenario, the *Mũthĩgi* functioned as a badge of office which signified the elder's right to speak, judge, and lead communal deliberations.[256] Early ethnographers observed that such Staff distinguished senior members within the age-grade hierarchy.[257]

In addition to this, the Staff symbolized peaceful authority, contrasting with weapons such as the spear, which represented coercive or defensive power.[258]

2.2.4 Origin from Traditional Socio-Political Organization of the *Agĩkũyũ*

The origins of the *Mũthĩgi* are inseparable from the traditional socio-political and religious organization of the *Agĩkũyũ* community, where governance was exercised through councils (*kĩama*). Prior to the advent of Europeans in the *Agĩkũyũ* society, authority was not centralized in kings or chiefs but was vested in age-group systems and councils of initiated elders who exercised judicial, ritual, and moral responsibilities within the community.[259] From this information the *Mũthĩgi* developed as a visible emblem of this authority and legitimacy.

[256] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya (*1978), 192
[257] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903*: Vols. 1, (1977), 114.
[258] Charles William Hobley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic: With Particular Reference to the Kikuyu and Kamba Tribes of Kenya Colony Together with Some Reflections on East Africa After the War*, (London: Frank Cass & Co. LTD., 1967), 47.
[259] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 188.

2.2.5 Development from the Age-Set System

The *Agĩkũyũ* organized society through an elaborate age-grade and age-set system (riika). Individuals gradually progressed through stages of childhood, initiation, adulthood, parenthood and Elderhood. Admission into the ranks of elders followed years of demonstrated responsibility, successful family life, and participation in communal affairs. The *Mũthĩgi* therefore originated not as an inherited object but as a symbol earned through maturity and communal recognition. It marked the completion of person's progression into full civic and moral leader. Patrick Wachege argues that the *Agĩkũyũ* Elderhood represents the culmination of personal formation, integrating wisdom, justice, spirituality and service into a single vocation of communal leadership.[260]

2.2.6 Origin from the Broader African Tradition

The origins of the *Mũthĩgi* could also be trace to the broader African tradition in which Staffs, rods and walking sticks symbolized authority, maturity, and mediation between the sacred and social realms.[261] However, among the *Agĩkũyũ*, the *Mũthĩgi* acquired distinctive cultural and spiritual significance. This assertion is supported by oral tradition which indicates that senior elders among the *Agĩkũyũ* carried Staffs as practical walking aid and as ritual insignia signifying their transition into positions of communal responsibility. in fact, as men advanced through age-set stages and were admitted into elderhood councils, the possession of the *Mũthĩgi* became a public testimony of their recognized wisdom and judicial authority within the community.[262]

[260] Patrick Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Eldership as Muthamaki*, (2020), 67.
[261] Samuel John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 122.
[262] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903*: Vols. 1, (1977), 257.

2.2.7 Origin from the *Agĩkũyũ* Religious Beliefs

Another theory on the origins of the *Mũthĩgi* is closely connected to the *Agĩkũyũ* religious beliefs where sacredness of elders as custodians of ancestral traditions and mediators between the living and the departed ancestors was highly emphasized.[263] The elders frequently used Staffs during prayers, oaths, sacrifices, and libation rituals conducted beneath the sacred tree such as the *mũgumo*.[264] During these ceremonies, the *Mũthĩgi* served as a visible sign of the elder's sacred office. Although the Staff itself possessed no divine power, it symbolized the authority granted to elders to lead communal worship and maintain harmony between God, the ancestors, and the living community.

2.2.8 Origin from the Rituals

There is another deeper origin of the *Mũthĩgi*, which is inseparable from the *Agĩkũyũ* religious cosmology centered on Ngai, the supreme deity who is associated with Mount Kenya.[265] There is a profound belief in this worldview that authority flows from *Ngai* through the ancestors to the living elders. This divine connection makes the elders act as mediators between that which is visible and the invisible realms. In this case, sacred objects in use embody and transmit this authority.

Hence, the *Mũthĩgi* acquired ritual functions in which, during prayers and sacrifices, the elders hold it, in the oath-taking, dispute resolution, covenant-making, blessings and curses, and reconciliation rites. This made *Mũthĩgi* a sacralized object, representing continuity between divine,

[263] Samuel John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (1990), 59.
[264] Charles William Hobley, *Bantu beliefs and Magic* (London: Frank Cass, 1967), 52.
[265] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), 32.

ancestral, and human authority.[266] In sacrificial rites, the elders invoke *Ngai* while facing Mount Kenya. This gesture by itself reinforces the connection which exists between cosmology, geography, and ritual practice.[267]

2.2.9 Other Origins

2.2.9.1 From Connection with the Age-Group (*Riika*) system

The age-grade system among the *Agĩkũyũ* gave rise to a structured leadership succession through generational cycles, which culminated in the transfer of power from one generation to the next, called the *ituika* ceremony.[268] Within this system, authority was corporately held by a generation of elders who had received leadership symbols handed over to them during ritual transition. Here, the *Mũthĩgi* can be understood as an instrument of institutional continuity that carried with it the legitimacy of each ruling generation.[269]

2.2.9.2 From the Mythic and Cosmological Foundation

The narrative of the origin of the *Agĩkũyũ* people from *Gĩkũyũ* and *Mũmbi* in a particular way (not excluding others) given in the *Agĩkũyũ* oral traditions provide a theological framework for authority.[270] These traditions are convinced that at creation *Ngai* allocated land, fertility, and social order through the man *Gĩkũyũ* and hence, authority in the society was divinely sanctioned. Although the presence of *Mũthĩgi* is not obviously mentioned in these foundational myths, its symbolic meaning aligns with this cosmology as an instrument that expresses a divinely mediated authority for visible signs of invisible power. As John S. Mbiti argues, African cosmologies are

[266] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), 71.
[267] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 203.
[268] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, (1974), 117.
[269] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 2*, (1977), 212.
[270] Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, (1978), 3.

characterized by a religious ontology in which the spiritual and material are inseparably intertwined.[271] Thus, the *Mũthĩgi* can be understood as a natural outgrowth of this worldview.

2.2.9.3 Origin within the *Agĩkũyũ* Oral Tradition

Unlike many written civilizations, the early history of the *Agĩkũyũ* was transmitted primarily through oral tradition, proverbs, genealogies, rituals and communal memory. Consequently, reconstructing the historical origins of the *Mũthĩgi* requires and interdisciplinary approach that combines oral traditions, anthropological studies, historical research, linguistic evidence and theological reflection. According to the *Agĩkũyũ* oral tradition, the social order among them was maintained through family heads and later through council of elders. Leadership deepened on age, experience, wisdom, and moral character rather than hereditary kingship.

Within this developing system of governance, elders required visible signs of their office. The *Mũthĩgi* gradually emerged as one of these symbols, identifying those entrusted with communal authority. The Staff represented the elder's obligation to uphold justice and preserve the customs handed down by the ancestors.

Jomo Kenyatta observes that among the *Agĩkũyũ*, authority rested not in an individual ruler but in councils of elders whose legitimacy derived from communal recognition and adherence to tradition.[272] The *Mũthĩgi* therefore became a symbol of corporate rather than personal authority.

[271] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), 74.
[272] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938), 219.

2.3 Physical Characteristics and designations of the *Mũthĩgi*

The *Mũthĩgi* occupies a central place in the material culture and symbolic life of the *Agĩkũyũ*. While its significance is primarily moral, social, and spiritual, its physical characteristics also communicate important cultural meanings. The choice of wood, craftsmanship, dimensions, colour, texture and overall form are not merely aesthetical considerations but reflect the dignity of Elderhood and the values associate with leadership. Unlike an ordinary walking stick, the *Mũthĩgi* is a ceremonial Staff that signifies recognized authority within the institution of Elderhood (*Kĩama*). Thus, an examination of its physical characteristics provides an important foundation for understanding its symbolic value and its possible contribution to the liturgical inculturation of the Pastoral Staff.[273]

2.3.1 Dimensions of *Mũthĩgi*

Depending on the various regions where the *Agĩkũyũ* are found in majority such as *Kiambu, Murang'a, Kirinyaga* and *Nyeri*, as well as those outside these regions, the dimensions of *Mũthĩgi* vary depending on regions and the status of the bearer though standardized features are retained across the *Agĩkũyũ* community. The physical dimensions are highly symbolic as they reflect status, symbolic authority and ritual functions or spiritual presence.

2.3.2 Length

The average length of *Mũthĩgi* measures between 4 and 5 feet (120-150 cm). This length makes it possible for the elder to stand upright while holding it with the lower end resting on the ground, symbolizing rootedness and ancestral authority when delivering ritual speech or

[273] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Eldership as Muthamaki*, (2020), 70.

conveying blessings.[274] There are also shorter *mĩthĩgi,* which measure approximately 3 to 4 feet, which are sometimes used by initiates or in informal gatherings of lesser-ranked elders.[275]

2.3.3 Thickness

The diameter of *Mũthĩgi* ranges between 2.5 and 4 cm, which allows the bearer to have a comfortable grip while maintaining its symbolic strength and durability. The *kiama* elders carry the thicker *mĩthĩgi* as it is appropriate for such high-ranking or senior elders.[276]

2.3.4 Material, Craftsmanship, and Weight

The *Mũthĩgi* is traditionally curved from trees which are held to be sacred by the *Agĩkũyũ*. These trees are either *mũgumo* (sycamore fig) which is reserved for ritual purposes especially those associated with ancestral power and *mũkũyũ* (fig tree) whose *Mũthĩgi* is used for general ceremonial undertakings. The Staff may be engraved with patterns, passed down from one generation to the next as heirlooms, or personalized according to the elder's clan or social function.[277] Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, the importance of the *Mũthĩgi* lies not in how heavy it is, but in what it represents. Therefore, the physical weight is secondary to its symbolic "weight".

2.3.5 Forms of *Mũthĩgi*

The *Mũthĩgi* among the *Agĩkũyũ* is found in different forms each defined by the material used, design, symbolism and function. While the above treatment of the types of *Mũthĩgi* refers to the purpose or the context in which the *Mũthĩgi* is used, for example, *Mũthĩgi wa ũthamaki*, it

[274]Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1938), 205.
[275]Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3*, (1977), 1254.
[276] Francis M. Wamuyu, *Traditional Kikuyu Rites and Their Theological Significance* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 2004), 77.
[277] Kihumbu Thairu, *The African Mythical Heritage* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1997), 204.

points more to the physical characteristics and stylistic variations. This is the *Mũthĩgi* given to an *Agĩkũyũ* man who meets all the requirements of being bestowed with the honor of serving the community as an elder. Below is the categorization of the forms of *Mũthĩgi*.

2.3.6 Y-shaped *Mũthĩgi*

This *Mũthĩgi* comes with a bifurcated or Y-shaped head. It is sometimes used in those rituals that symbolize dual connection linking the living to their living dead, the ancestors (*ngoma*), or two forces, such as spiritual and physical. Its use is ceremonial or spiritual. A very prominent present-day example is found in a 2022 Kikuyu elders' ritual when a group of *Agĩkũyũ* elders visited the then President Uhuru Kenyatta at the State House and gifted him with two *mĩthĩgi,* one straight and one Y-shaped, representing the spiritual and physical responsibilities of his office.[278]

Rev. Fr. Moses Mwangi, in an interview, cited this 2022 precedent as evidence that a single implement can simultaneously carry physical and spiritual significance, a duality he considers instructive for the design of an inculturated Pastoral Staff.[279]

2.3.7 Head or Top design *Mũthĩgi*

Some *mĩthĩgi* in this category are flat or rounded and are for general ceremonial use. Others feature a rounded or club-like head and are used in the rites of restitution or atonement as indicated in the types above. It symbolizes mediation, power, and responsibility.[280]

---

[278] John Kamau, "Kikuyu Elders: This was Our State House Ritual," *Daily Nation Newspaper*, (April 10, 2022), 1.
[279] Rev. Fr. Moses Mwangi, interviewed at St. Peter's Catholic Church, Kigogoini, Nyeri, May 20, 2026. Reference also drawn from *Daily Nation*, "Kikuyu Elders: This was our State House Ritual," March 28, 2022.
[280] Francis M. Wamuyu, *Traditional Kikuyu Rites and Their Theological Significance* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 2004), 77.

2.3.8 Carved Decorative *Mũthĩgi*

This is often found elaborately decorated with carvings, beads, or clan marks. This is the type popularly carried by the initiated youth and dancers. It embodies the pride of the age-set and cultural beauty.[281]

2.4 Designations of the *Mũthĩgi*

Apart from the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders designated as *Mũthĩgi wa ũthamaki* (Staff of leadership), there are other types of *mĩthĩgi* (plural for *Mũthĩgi*) whose symbolism is individualized. *Mũthĩgi* is not a one-size-fits-all object. There are found, different types each conveying specific symbolism, function, and social meaning depending on the age, status or role of the person using it. Here, the researcher gives a short description of the types of *Mũthĩgi* among the *Agĩkũyũ*.

2.4.1 *Mũthĩgi wa Mũthamaki* – Staff of Leadership

This type is carried by a senior elder or community leader and symbolizes supreme authority, wisdom, and ability to judge. It is mostly made from the sacred trees of *mũkũyũ* or *mũgumo*. On it may be found inscribed clan or age-set marking. It is carried in *kĩama* (elders'council) meetings. It distinguishes recognized elders from ordinary members of society.[282]

[281] Mugo wa Kabiru, *Gikuyu Cultural Institutions* (Nyeri: *Maitu* Publications, 1999), 88.
[282] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 1938, 185.

2.4.2 *Mũthĩgi wa mũhũga* (Staff of newly initiated youth)

This *Mũthĩgi* is carried by the newly initiated boys (*anake a ita*) and it marks the transition from childhood to manhood. The young men use it both as a walking aid during their seclusion and as a symbol of their new identity and discipline.[283]

2.4.3 *Mũthĩgi wa Gĩkũyũ* (Clan or Lineage Staff)

This type of *Mũthĩgi* is associated with the leadership or priesthood of the clan and used by elders representing lineage (*mbarĩ*). It symbolizes spiritual authority in sacrificial and naming rites.[284]

2.4.4 *Mũthĩgi wa Gũcokia Mbũri* (Staff of Atonement)

This type of *Mũthĩgi* is used in the rites of restitution or reconciliation. It accompanies the offering of a goat (*mbũri ya kũinũkia*) meant to atone for any wrongdoing. The elder carrying it acts as a spiritual intercessor.[285]

2.4.5 *Mũthĩgi wa Wendo* (Staff of Love)

This type of *Mũthĩgi* is carried by the father of a family, and it is passed from a father to his son or from elders to a married couple. It symbolizes affection, continuity, and family blessing. It is longer frequently in use, but it was part of marriage or farewell ceremonies.[286]

---

[283] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 1938, 205.
[284] Gakaara wa Wanjau, *Mĩhĩrĩga ya Aagikũyũ* (Nairobi: Gakaara Press, 1981), 18.
[285] Francis M. Wamuyu, *Traditional Kikuyu Rites and their Theological Significance* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 2004), 77.
[286] Mugo wa Kabiru, *Gikuyu Cultural Institutions* (Nyeri: Maitu Publications, 1999), 133.

2.4.6 Ceremonial or Decorative *Mũthĩgi*

This refers to stylized Staffs that were used in dances, royal greetings, or symbolic gifts. They do not necessarily relate to governance or spiritual rites, but they communicate visual representations of dignity or celebration.[287]

2.5 The *Agĩkũyũ Kĩama* (Council of Elders)

The *Kiama* was traditionally divided into three succeeding ranks.[288] Only those who have borne children were eligible to train as elders, though there was more to it as mentioned above. A married man who has become a father is not yet an elder, that is reserved for a higher stage when he has a child circumcised and ready for marriage. He now becomes an elder of the lowest rank, or *Kamatimũ*[289] the word *matimũ* from which *Kamatimũ* is derived means spear and hence *Kamatimũ* means carrier of spears which means that those who have joined this grade of elders are still functioning as warriors who carries spears.[290] Every elder of this grade must give one sheep *to* the elders' council of his area so that they can confirm his status.[291] The sheep is slaughtered for a ceremonial feast in which the candidates are sworn in. *Kamatimũ* are more or less assistants at the elders' courts and cannot judge a case yet, they only listen to cases for their legal training. The *Kamatimũ* are at the service of the *kiama*. They assist in skinning an animal, collect firewood and light fires which is used to roast meat for the senior elders. They also carry ceremonial articles to

[287] Wanjiku Kabira, *A Letter to Mariama: Reading African Women's Lives* (Nairobi: EAEP, 2006), 92.
[288] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 200.
[289] Godffrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, 127.
[290] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 201.
[291] Patrick Njoroge Njoroge, *The People called the Agĩkũyũ, Yesterday and Today… and Tomorrow?* (2017), 102.

and from assemblies of *kiama*. This intense training is meant to prepare and initiate them into the next and higher grade of elderhood or leadership.[292]

Once a man has passed this stage, he is ushered into the next grade of *Kĩama* called *kĩama kia Mataathi* (leaves of *Clausia anisata*), which means the council of peace.[293] This stage is arrived at when one has a son or a daughter who is old enough for circumcision. He is expected to offer two sheep or goats to the senior *Kamatimũ* elders become elders of the *Kiama* or *Gikuyu* Court of Elders. The elders of this grade have a Staff, *mũtirima* or *Mũthĩgi*, of a particular tree, *mũngirima* or *mtũaathi*, and a bunch of leaves, *mataathi*, to designate their office. When the elders have advanced to this status they are known as *Kĩama kia mataathi*. They have power over others, for they have the prerogative of administering *Gĩkũyũ ikuyu* law and justice. Of these elders of the *kĩama kia mataathi*, the eldest are called *kĩama kia maturanguru*, i.e, dignified elders, who form the inner circle of the *kĩama* and settle the knotty points of law and custom. They wear special brass ear-rings, *icũhĩ*, and carry a bunch of ceremonial leaves, *maturanguru*, as a symbol of their authority. They decide the dates of circumcision feasts and the holding of the *itwĩka* ceremony when the older generation of rulers gives place to another. Only the elders of these two grades can take part in the *Agĩkũyũ* ceremonies at the sacred fig tree, *mũgumo*.

The *Kĩama* system was a nice, efficient system of coming up with respected judges and priests as it combined aspects of self-selection, deliberative proclamation, social witnessing and appointing, self-sacrifice, learning, and application. It also assigned societal responsibility, from

[292] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 201.
[293] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 201.

security to presiding over the most holy and unctuous rituals of the community and the adjudication of the most complicated cases.

The *Mũthĩgi* can only be carried by initiated elders[294] and has gone through all the stages of social maturity, thereby qualifying him to lead, speak, bless, and judge within the community.[295] No man, despite his age, without *Mũthĩgi* can speak officially in public gatherings or participate fully in rituals.[296]

2.5.1 The Making of an Elder

According to Wachege, "incorporation into the *kiama* (council of elders) was not a mean achievement since it is a ritual process of initiation which marks the transition of a man from ordinary adulthood to recognised status of elder."[297] The *Agĩkũyũ* world was and is still (to a certain extent) governed by the elders. The one to be installed into elderhood was entrusted with authority, moral leadership, arbitration, and custodianship of communal tradition and a man of the people. He was to have a sponsor elder who in collaboration with his people advised him profoundly on what the ceremony was all about.[298]

The process of becoming an elder began with successful passage through circumcision, marriage, parenthood, and responsible participation in communal life.[299] A candidate for installation was expected to demonstrate wisdom, self-control, generosity, and adherence to the

[294] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vol. 3*, (1977), 1101
[295] Gakaara wa Wanjau, *Mĩhĩrĩga ya Agĩkũyũ* (Nairobi: Gakaara Press, 1981), 72.
[296] Julius Gathogo, "The Re-Emergence of the African Initiated Churches in Kenya" *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 37, no. 2 (2011): 90.
[297] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 62.
[298] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 62.
[299] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 133.

accepted moral standards.[300] Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, leadership was generally achieved through merit and social recognition rather than hereditary privilege.[301] Consequently, existing elders carefully evaluated the candidate's reputation before admitting him into the council.[302]

Elderhood among the *Agĩkũyũ* is not a mean achievement that can be realized in a day. It is a process that entails diverse rituals and other related ceremonies spanning from birth.[303] The *Agĩkũyũ* word for elder is *muthuuri,* which comes from the verb *gũthuura* (to choose).[304] Therefore, *Muthuuri* is the one who chooses, though this should not be taken literally. Before one can be crowned an elder of whichever grade or degree (elderhood among the *Agĩkũyũ* varies in ranks or degrees), one must pass through all the required *Agĩkũyũ* rites and ceremonies about every stage of life and have the required personal qualities or virtues.[305] These rituals and ceremonies commence immediately at birth to marriage, and after marriage to circumcision of the firstborn of the family, which determines whether one is eligible to be made an *Agĩkũyũ* elder.

2.5.2 Ceremonies of making an Elder

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, elderhood is not merely a matter old age but a gradual process of social, moral, and ritual advance through the recognized stages of initiation and service to the community. Installation into adulthood marked the transition from ordinary adulthood to a position of authority with the *kiama* (council of elders).[306] An elder occupied an important place within the society as a custodian of customs, an arbiter in disputes, and a guardian of the shared religious

[300] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Our Muthamaki (ideal Elder): An African Christological Study Based on the Agĩkũyũ Understanding of Elder* (Nairobi: Phoenix Publishers, 1992), 46.
[301] Godffrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, (1974), 132.
[302] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 2*, 1977, 783.
[303] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agikuyu Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020) 53
[304] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agikuyu Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 53.
[305] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agikuyu Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 54.
[306] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 108.

traditions.[307] Membership in the council of elders signified admission into a body of that was entrusted with the duty of preserving social order and the transmission of communal wisdom.[308] The institution of elderhood was therefore both a social office and a sacred vocation.[309]

2.5.3 Preparation of the *Mũthĩgi*

The first stage was the preparation of the Staff. the *Mũthĩgi* was selected and prepared as an appropriate emblem of Elderhood. Historical accounts distinguish it from an ordinary walking stick. Leakey, for example, describes the *mĩthĩgi* as Staffs carried by men who had entered elder status.[310]

In some contemporary descriptions of *Agĩkũyũ* elder ceremonies, the *Mũthĩgi* is publicly unveiled and handed over to the recognized office holder. Such contemporary ceremonies demonstrate that the Staff continues to function as an emblem of leadership and authority, although present-day practices should not automatically be projected backwards as completely identical to precolonial practice.[311]

As the day of installing the new elder approached, the sponsor elder prepared a *Mũthĩgi* from one of the *Agĩkũyũ* sacred trees.[312] He also prepared a bunch of ceremonial leaves known as *maturanguru*. These *maturanguru* leaves like *mataathi* leaves symbolized peace and calmness, qualities necessary of a leader capable of judging in human affairs.[313]

---

[307] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 2*, (1977), 755.
[308] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Our Muthamaki (ideal Elder): An African Christological Study Based on the Agikuyu Understanding of Elder* (1992), 42.
[309] John Samuel Mbiti, African *Religions and Philosophy* (1969), 172.
[310] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903*, (1977), Vol. 2, 656.
[311] The Star, "Kikuyu Elders Leadership Wraangles Deepen as Splinter Group Lock Horns" April 15, 2024.
[312] Patrick N. Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki,* (2020), 62
[313] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 193.

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, the *Mũthĩgi* is a ritual Staff that carries with it profound symbolic meaning. It symbolizes moral authority, judicial powers, and sacred mediation. Thus, a *Mũthĩgi*-bearing elder must be a person who has fulfilled social, ritual, ethical, and generational requirements since the elder functions as guardian of communal order and tradition.[314]

When an individual has gone through the three stages of initiation and shows signs of being worthy of elderhood status, he is made one.[315] But apart from this basic requirement the other ways a person qualified for Elderhood was if he had "shown bravery in wars, impartiality in justice, self-sacrifice, and above all discipline".[316] Having met all the preliminary requirements, one could then be incorporated into the *Kĩama* (council of elders). The scrutiny was very thorough because the individual to be made an elder is supposed to be a man without reproach. He was expected to be mature, mannered, generous, godly, and able to shepherd the community in the right way.

2.5.3 Assembly of the *Kĩama* Elders

The second stage involved the gathering of the *kĩama* elders who constituted the authoritative body before whom the candidate was recognized. The significance of the *Kĩama* is important here because the Agikuyu social organization entrusted important matters of communal order, justice, morality and governance to councils of elders. Thus, the *Mũthĩgi* represented not merely the authority of an individual but also authority exercised within and on behalf of the

[314] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 203.
[315] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 61.
[316] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 192.

community. This is consistent with the observation that the Staff served as an "office badge" of Elderhood and was associated with the responsibility of dispensing justice.[317]

When the day arrived to install the qualified candidate into the *kĩama*, all the elders of *itũũra rũgongo* came together each carrying his *Mũthĩgi* in the designated place called *riiko* (fire place) which was in the bush.[318] It was such a highly rated ceremony that even the elders of the neighboring regions who wanted to attend the ceremony were welcome not as strangers but as people with full rights to participate in the ceremony.[319]

On arrival at the venue each elder placed his *Mũthĩgi* down and greeted the already assembled elders warmly. If there were issues to be addressed to all, one elder stood up holding the *Mũthĩgi* signifying shepherding or acquired wisdom with sage philosophy and wisdom.[320] If the elder to speak had a disturbing conscience, he had to request a friend elder to hold *Mũthĩgi* for him while he spoke.[321]

2.5.4 Gathering Site

The *Mũgumo* tree held with high esteem as sacred until today frequently served as a setting for important gatherings and ritual acts connected with elderhood.[322] Under its shade, elders conducted sacrifices, offered prayers, and deliberated on issues affecting the welfare of the

[317] David Irungu Mbuthia, *The Challenges of Negotiating Between National and Sub-National Identities Through Heritage-Making in Kenya: With the Example of Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga Cutural Site*, (PhD Dissertation, 2020), 120.
[318] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya, (*1978), 201.
[319] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 63.
[320] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 63.
[321] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 63.
[322] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 248.

people.[323] The sacred character of the *Mũgumo* reinforced the religious dimensions of elder authority and highlighted the elder's role as mediator between the human community and *Ngai*.[324]

2.5.5 Admission into the *Kĩama*

After this, the elders direct their counsel to the candidate to be installed as an elder. He is told what is expected of him by the *kĩama*. After the instructions, the candidate has a goat presented in a very ceremonial way to the elders as he implored them to consider him for elderhood status.[325] After seeking the views and consensus of the other elders, if no any objection is fronted against the candidate, then, the presiding elder accepts the goat presented by the would be elder and it is slaughtered in the *Agĩkũyũ* way and roasted. Aided by his sponsor elder he proceeded to *kũringa maringa* (give portions) of the roasted meat to the elders present.

Once the giving of portions to the elders is completed, the presiding elder says: "*Wee ng'ania wa ng'ania nitwetikira maringa maku na nitwakũrathima* (you son of so and so, we have accepted your portions and we have blessed you)".[326] After this declaration he continues with prayers. Once the prayer is completed a portion of the ceremonial *ngoima* (ram) is brought by the sponsor elder and they all eat together with joy as a community.[327]

The sacrificial animals were not payments as such but sacred offerings that established a covenantal bond between the initiate, the elders, and the wider community.[328]Through ritual

[323]John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (1969), 59.
[324] John Mary Waliggo, "African Indigenous Religion and Culture," in *African Theology in Context*, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 28.
[325] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903, Vols. 2*, (1977), 787.
[326] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 64.
[327] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 64.
[328] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Our Muthamaki (ideal Elder): An African Christological Study Based on the Agĩkũyũ Understanding of Elder*, (1992), 50.

slaughter and the sharing of meat, the initiate became incorporated into the fellowship of the elders and accepted the obligations attached to the office.[329] Such meals symbolized unity, reconciliation. and mutual accountability.[330]

After they had eaten, the candidate to elderhood presents to his elder sponsor a calabash of special alcoholic drink brewed specifically for the occasion. The elder sponsor took a sip and by spitting some to his chest, he blessed himself. It was at this juncture that the most revered circle of elders called the *athuuri a gitonyi/ndundu* took over the ceremony while the master of ceremonies went ahead and swore the candidate while the other elders responded by repeating after him[331] saying: *"Ng'ania wa ng'ania, ũrohorera na ũgie ũkari ta athuuri a kĩama. Watua ciira kũrotuika guo. Wateithũrana andũ marege gũtigana marotihania* (may you, son of so and so be humble and as confidential as the Elders. Whatever dispute you settle, may it be so. Whenever you reconcile the faction and they defiantly disobey you, may they harm themselves). They continued: *Niwatũika mũthuuri wa kĩama. Ũrikoragwo wi ndunduinĩ ya athuuri* (you are now an elder. Going forward, you will be confiding with the elders."[332]

A candidate from another tribe who wanted to be crowned as an *Agĩkũyũ* elder was required to denounce his tribe by giving three goats and an elder of his choice became his god father. This was referred to as *Gũciarwo na mbũri* which means to be born with goats and as adopted *Agĩkũyũ* elder, he was not entitled to any share of the dowry from his daughters but the dowry would go to his god father. Further, he had to be recommended to the 12 *Arathi* (Seers) by the councils of

[329] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 109.
[330] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), 122.
[331] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 64.
[332] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agikuyu Elderhood as Muthamaki*, (2020), 65

Mataathi and *Maturanguru*. The *Arathi* take the process of verifying the past of this candidate to see if he has ever been involved in murder or any crime against the community.[333]

In a related interview, James Mungai Kagona indicated that this ancient custom demonstrates how an outsider could be fully adopted into elderhood leadership following intense vetting, a precedent he considers relevant to the Pastoral placement of non-local clergy.[334]

2.5.6 Invocation of *Ngai*

Prayer formed an important religious dimension of traditional *Agĩkũyũ* communal ceremonies. *Agĩkũyũ* religious practice recognized *Ngai* as the supreme God and addressed him in ritual prayer and thanksgiving. The well know ritual response *Thaai, thathaiya, Ngai, thaai* appears in descriptions of contemporary Agikuyu traditional ceremonies.[335]

2.5.7 A proposed Form of Blessing the *Mũthĩgi*

The following blessing is a proposed/reconstructed form of prayer based on the documented *Agĩkũyũ* religious and Elderhood themes, not a verbatim historical prayer. It is not documented anywhere and thus it does not reflect the exact wording used traditionally.

Invocation:
Thaai, thathaiya, Ngai, Thaai.
Ngai Mwene-Nyaga,
Mwene-wa-Nyaga,
We thank you for giving us life,
for giving us the land,

[333] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3*, (1977), 1267.
[334] James Kagona Mungai, interviewed at, St. Martin de Porres Catholic Parish, Nairobi, February 20, 2026.
[335] The Standard News Paper, "No Bible Verse nor Christianity at this Burial," describing the use of *Thaai, thathaiya, Ngai, Thaai* in an *Agĩkũyũ* traditional ceremony and the ritual role of elders carrying *mũthĩgi*. This happened during the burial ceremony of Muhu Thuti an *Agĩkũyũ* elder in Kianabara village in Mathira Nyeri County, April 24, 2022.

for giving us our families and our community,
and for bringing us together on this day.
Assembly:
Thaai, thathaiya, Ngai, thaai.
Elder:
Ngai, source of wisdom and giver of life,
look upon this *Mũthĩgi* which we are about to place in the hands of this elder.
May it be a sign of wisdom,
a sign of justice,
a sign of peace,
and a sign of responsibility among the people.
Assemble: *Thaai, thathaiya, Ngai, thaai*.
Elder:
Give this elder wisdom to listen before he speaks;
courage to defend what is right;
humility to receive counsel;
strength to reconcile those who are divided;
and integrity to judge without favour.
May he never use the authority
represented by this *Mũthĩgi* for selfish purposes.
May he use it for the good of the people,
for the protection of the weak,
for the preservation of peace,
and for the transmission of wisdom
to the generations that come after us.
Assembly: *Thaai, thathaiya, Ngai, thaai.*
Prayer of Entrustment
Elder:
Ngai, we entrust this elder to you.
As this *Mũthĩgi* supports the body of an elder,
may wisdom support his decisions.
As a Staff guides the steps of a person,
may truth guide his ways.
As the elder stands among the people,
may he stand for justice and peace.
May his words bring reconciliation.
May his counsel bring wisdom.

May his decisions protect the community.
May his life be an example to the young.
May those who come after him receive from him the wisdom that has been entrusted to our elders.
Assembly: *Thaai, thathaiya, Ngai, thaai*.

2.5.8 Bestowal of *Mũthĩgi*

One of the visible symbols associated with elderhood was the *Mũthĩgi* (Staff).[336] The Staff signified authority, wisdom, responsibility, and continuity with ancestral tradition.[337] It functioned as a symbol of office carried by elders during public gatherings and judicial proceedings.[338] The reception or possession of *Mũthĩgi* demonstrated that the elder had been entrusted with communal authority and recognized as a legitimate representative of the people.[339] In this regard, the Staff was not merely a practical object but a sacred symbol of leadership and service.[340]

The presentation of the *Mũthĩgi* is the defining moment in the entire ceremony. With the last statement of declaring that one has become a *Kiama* elder, there follows the presentation with the symbols of elderhood. The most revered group of elders known as *athuuri a gitonyi/ndundu* (inner circle elders) in a very solemn and dignified way hands the elder to be with the instruments of his new status and role in the society. These instruments are *Mũthĩgi* a symbol which signified that one had become a shepherd to his people and *maturanguru* (soft leaves - symbol of peace - made in a form of fly whisk) a signification that this newly ordained elder was a man of peace and an effective reconciler of the people and had deep care for them.[341]

---

[336] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Our Muthamaki (ideal Elder): An African Christological Study Based on the Agikuyu Understanding of Elder*, (1992), 28.
[337] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 2*, (1977), 821.
[338] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1938), 108.
[339] Godffrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, (1974), 118.
[340] Robert W. Blunt, *For Money and Elders: Ritual, Sovereignty, and the Sacred in Kenya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 35.
[341] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki,* (2020), 63.

Elder:
The senior elder then places the *Mũthĩgi* in the hands of the new elder and says:
Receive this *Mũthĩgi* as a sign of the responsibility entrusted to you.
Carry it with wisdom.
Exercise authority with humility.
Speak truthfully.
Judge justly.
Protect peace.
Counsel the young.
Respect the elders.
Serve the community.
And remember that authority is entrusted to you for the common good.
The Recipient:
The recipient receives the Staff with both hands and responds:
I receive it with humility and gratitude.
I accept the responsibility entrusted to me.
May *Ngai* give me wisdom, strength and integrity to serve the people faithfully.
Assembly: *Thaai, thathaiya, Ngai, thaai.*

2.5.6 Oath and Communal Blessing

The ceremony of installing a new elder is concluded with a brief communal prayer.[342] During this prayer the elder raised their hands while facing *Kĩrĩnyaga* (Mount Kenya) the most sacred mountain among the *Agĩkũyũ* even today. While their hands remain raised, the elders solemnly beseeched God by repeating three times: *Thaai thathaiya Ngai thaai*. With this, the entire rite of incorporating one into the order of elders is concluded.

[342] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Muthamaki*, 65.

2.6 Ceremonies with *Mũthĩgi* Usage

The *Mũthĩgi* accompanies the elder in important public and ritual functions, serving as a visible sign of his office and his responsibility to safeguard the moral, social and spiritual well-being of the community. The following rites are some of the most important ceremonies in which the usage of *Mũthĩgi* is paramount.

2.6.1 Birth Rites

Once a child is born, it was secluded for several days (4 for a girl and 5 for a boy). At the lapse of this time, the child was brought forth for the naming ceremony in which a respected *Mũthĩgi* carrying elder presided. The child did not touch or receive the *Mũthĩgi* but its shear presence is a symbol of generational continuity and the authority of the community over the child in conferring identity.[343] The child was then blessed where an elder would raise or tap the *Mũthĩgi* as part of the ritual symbolizing the invocation of the ancestral protection and the legitimization of the child's place within the *mbarĩ* (lineage).[344] Ms. Grace Mumbi, an elderly woman of 90 years, highlighted that this non-tactile presence of the *Mũthĩgi* serves, in her assessment, as a powerful visual anchor for ancestral witness during life-cycle liturgies.[345]

2.6.2 Naming

Without interacting directly with *Mũthĩgi*, its presence in the naming ceremony is a symbol of what the child expected to grow into. This applied for boys who would one day receive the

[343] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 155.
[344] Gakaara wa Wanjau, *Mĩhĩrĩga ya Agĩkũyũ*, (Nairobi: Gakaara Press, 1981), 17.
[345] Grace Mumbi, interviewed at Kiamunyi, Nakuru, April 22, 2026.

Mũthĩgi as a symbol of their transition into adulthood.[346] Again, in this rite, the *Mũthĩgi* is more than an object as it stands for the voice of the ancestors and moral guardianship while it reinforces the spiritual and social fabric that holds the *Agĩkũyũ* together.[347]

2.6.3 Initiation Rites of Circumcision

The stage towards manhood among the *Agĩkũyũ* is marked by the rites of circumcision without which one cannot become an elder. This can be equated to baptism among Catholics without which one cannot validly receive the other sacraments. For the *Agĩkũyũ*, circumcision marks the crucial passage from childhood to adulthood.[348] This rite signifies that the circumcised is expected to behave in a way that is acceptable to the society as one gets closer to becoming an elder. In this rite the *Mũthĩgi* plays crucial symbolic and functional role as they are expected to demonstrate some qualities associated with elderhood such as courage, discipline, and obedience. The *Mũthĩgi* becomes a symbol of the man one will become signaling that one is now on the way to full adulthood and communal responsibly.[349]

During the process of healing, the initiates and older warriors often carry *mĩthĩgi* in their celebratory dances as a symbol of valor and unity identifying them as members of a newly formed *riika* (age-set).[350] In some instances especially during the instruction sessions the actual *Mũthĩgi* would be passed on ceremonially by an elder as a form of ancestral acknowledgment and continuity.[351]

---

[346] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 2*, (1977), 824.
[347] Francis M. Wamuyu, *Traditional Kikuyu Rites and Their Theological Significance*, (2004), 40.
[348] Paul Ngigi Njoroge, *The People called the Agĩkũyũ, Yesterday and Today… and Tomorrow*? (2017), 101.
[349] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 130.
[350] Gakaara wa Wanjau, *Mihiriga ya Agĩkũyũ* (Nairobi: Gakaara Press, 1981), 23.
[351] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 2*, (1977), 900.

At the conclusion of the initiation period, the elder may bless the initiates with his *Mũthĩgi* by tapping it on the ground or the shoulder of the young initiate invoking the protection of the ancestors. The *Mũthĩgi* in this instance represents spiritual commissioning and communal accountability.[352] After this, though the initiate has not yet become an elder, he was expected to carry a small *Mũthĩgi* in ceremonies as a public acknowledgment of the potential he had for future leadership in the community and respect for tradition.[353]

2.6.4 Rites of Marriage

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, marriage is not and not an individual but a communal affair with ritual, moral and symbolic dimensions in which *Mũthĩgi* holds subtle meaningful place in its enactment. Though it is not central either the bride or bridegroom, the *Mũthĩgi* plays a key symbolic role through the elders who officiate and bless the union.

At the *rũracio* (initial bride-price negotiations) the representatives or spokespersons from both families would carry their *mĩthĩgi* as a sign of authority, wisdom, and ancestral representation. The *Mũthĩgi* in this case symbolizes the continuity of the lineage and the weight or seriousness of the pact being forged.[354]

Once the *rũracio* was over, the bride and the groom received special blessings from *Mũthĩgi*-bearing elders, through which they give the rite a sacred legitimacy. The elders may raise or touch their *mĩthĩgi* while invoking the formula for blessing, in which *Mũthĩgi* becomes a ritual witness to the covenants between families.[355] Then, there is the transmission of clan morality

[352] Francis Mbugua Wamuyu, *Traditional Kikuyu Rites and Their Theological Significance*, 2004, 64.
[353] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3*, 1977, 1253.
[354] Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, 1978, 174.
[355] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3*, 1977, 1332.

responsibility from the elders while gesturing with the *Mũthĩgi* or planting it in ground symbolically. This act implies the passing over of communal expectations, authority, and masculine virtue especially to the new husband.[356]

2.6.5 Death Rituals

At the death of an elder, which is seen not merely as a biological event but a really structured transition from this visible world to the ancestral realm, the *Mũthĩgi* plays a significant symbolic role especially when a senior elder die. Here, the *Mũthĩgi* he carried during his earthly life is not seen as a personal possession but an emblem of office, moral authority, and communal trust. Thus, the way it is handled at death signals the closure of authority and the continuity of lineage and social order.[357]

2.7 The *Mũthĩgi* in the *Agĩkũyũ* Sacrifices

In their books The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903 by Leakey and Facing Mount Kenya by Kenyatta, they identify instances when a sacrifice was offered to Ngai in order seek his divine intervention whenever the community found itself in a big problem especially the one which posed threat to life. These sacrifices could only be carried out by sacrificial elders. While these ceremonies were conducted under the leadership of elders who traditionally possessed *Mũthĩgi* as a sign of authority, the available ethnographic literature does not explicitly identify the *Mũthĩgi* as a ritual object employed, for example, in planting. Its presence in these ceremonies is inferred from the elder's role rather than a fact from direct documentary evidence.

[356] Francis M. Wamuyu, *Traditional Kikuyu Rites and Their Theological Significance*, (2004), 79.
[357] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 185.

2.7.1 Rain Making

The traditional *Agĩkũyũ* religion regarded rain as a gift from *Ngai* who was believed to dwell on Mount Kenya. Since rain sustained human life, livestock, and crops, a prolonged drought, famine, or environmental distress was interpreted as a sign that there was disruption of harmony between *Ngai*, humans and the land.[358] To restore this harmony, the elders organized communal sacrifices, which often involved the offering of either a lamb, goat or bull under *mũgumo* or other ritual sites. During such ceremonies, the senior elders carried their *mĩthĩgi* which serves as tangible signs that they possessed the wisdom, legitimacy, and ancestral mandate necessary to approach Ngai on behalf of the community.[359]

In the ritual of interceding for rain, the elders stood in a circle around the sacrificial animal while holding their *mĩthĩgi*. Then, prayer would follow with the *mĩthĩgi* raised towards Mount Kenya or pointed toward the sky as prayers were offered by the leading elder to *Ngai*.[360]

2.7.2 The Planting Ceremony

Once the rain which was being waited anxiously has come, the elders of the sacrificial council organize a short planting ceremony where seeds are blessed so that there can be assurance of good crops.[361] The planting season was marked by ritual observances conducted under the guidance of elders. In this ceremony, the *Mũthĩgi* functioned as an important symbol of authority, blessing, and mediation between the human community and the spiritual world. Although the Staff

[358] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (1969), 59.
[359] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Agĩkũyũ, 1500 – 1900* (1974), 128.
[360] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3*, (1977), 920.
[361] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 252.

itself was not an agricultural tool, its presence in planting rites signified the elder's sacred role in invoking fertility and divine favour upon the land.[362]

The role of the *Mũthĩgi* in this ceremony reveals a profound theological lesson of integration of religion, ecology, and leadership in the *Agĩkũyũ* society. The Staff symbolized the elder's responsibility to mediate blessings, maintain harmony, and ensure the fertility of the land. Through prayer, ritual, and instruction, the elder used the authority represented by the *Mũthĩgi* to unite the community around the sacred task of cultivating the earth, thereby sustaining both physical life and communal identity.[363]

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the *Mũthĩgi* is far more than a functional walking Staff or ceremonial object within Agikuyu society. Rather, it is a richly layered cultural symbol that embodies the fundamental values upon which *Agĩkũyũ* social, political, moral and religious life has traditionally been founded. Its significance derives not from physical appearance but from the institution of Elderhood that it visibly represents and the communal responsibilities entrusted to those privileged to bear it.

The chapter has further shown that the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* is inseparable from the *Agĩkũyũ* worldview. The elder who carries the *Mũthĩgi* is expected to exercise authority with humility, integrity, impartiality and moral accountability before both Ngai and community.

[362] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 3*, (1977), 1081.
[363] Jesse Mugambi, *African Christiaan Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1989), 43.

Consequently, the *Mũthĩgi* becomes a constant reminder that authentic leadership demands self-discipline, preservation of communal harmony and the administration of justice without favoritism.

This study has also established that the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders has more to it than a utilitarian walking stick. It is a symbol that embodies authority, moral responsibility, ancestral continuity and sacred mediation. It functions within a richly symbolic cosmology which acknowledges the elder not merely as a leader, but a spiritual bridge between the community, the ancestors, and Ngai.[364] Through ritual acts such as oathing (*muma*), blessings, sacrifices, and arbitrations, the *Mũthĩgi* serves as a visible and tangible extension of the elder's consecrated role.[365]

In the rites of passage, the symbolism of *Mũthĩgi* is deeply involved more especially in the actual rite of incorporating a man into the *Kiama* where it does not signify status but the transformation and readiness of the newly installed elder to bear spiritual burdens on behalf of his community. Through the symbol of *Mũthĩgi* the values of truth, justice, continuity and cosmic harmony are ritualized and enacted.[366]

Again, in both sacred and social domains, the *Mũthĩgi* is predominantly involved, making it an exemplary symbol of holistic *Agĩkũyũ* spirituality in which no existence of dichotomy between the secular and the sacred.[367] In form, use and symbolism, the *Mũthĩgi* brings out a

[364] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1938), 185.
[365] Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903: Vols. 2*, 1977, 809.
[366] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1969, 86.
[367] Charles Nyamiti, *Studies in African Traditional Religion* (Nairobi: The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, 1995, 104.

theology based on the relational authority where an elder is accountable to *Ngai* and the community.[368]

This profound symbolic richness of *Mũthĩgi* invites meaningful comparative liturgical reflection, especially when it is viewed alongside the Pastoral Staff of the Catholic Bishop even though they originate from different religious cosmologies.[369] Given this rich symbolism, the *Mũthĩgi* stands out as a potential instrument for liturgical inculturation offering pathways through which contextualized Christian liturgical symbols could be expressed with the *Agĩkũyũ* worldview.[370] The next chapter presents the Staff in the Bible and Church Tradition.

[368] Wanjohi Githinji, "The Kikuyu Traditional Religion and Christianity", in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 22, no. 4 (1992), 135.
[369] Paul Bradshaw and Maxwell Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2011), 215.
[370] Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 201), 134.

CHAPTER THREE

THE STAFF IN THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCH TRADITION

Introduction

This chapter deals with the Staff in the Old Testament and New Testament respectively. It then focuses on the Staff which appears as a visible sign of authority, divine commissioning, protection, guidance, and Pastoral care. From the Staff of Moses through which God manifested his power before Pharaoh and during the Exodus, to the shepherd's rod celebrated in the Psalms, the Staff consistently symbolizes God's providential guidance and the responsibility entrusted to human leaders.

In the Old Testament, the Staff served practical, political, and religious functions. Patriarchs, prophets, shepherds, and kings carried Staffs as signs of their office and authority. The Staff of Moses became an instrument through which God performed miracles and liberated Israel from bondage, while Aaron's Staff emerged as a sign of divine election and priestly legitimacy. These biblical traditions established the Staff as a powerful symbol of leadership exercised under God's authority and in service His chosen people.

The New Testament deepens the Pastoral symbolism of the Staff through the ministry of Jesus who identifies himself as the Good Shepherd who knows, guides, and protects his flock. Although Jesus is not explicitly presented carrying a shepherd's Staff in the Gospel narratives, the image of the shepherd becomes central to Christian understanding of leadership and Pastoral ministry. The shepherd's responsibility for the care, protection, and unity of the flock subsequently shaped the Church's conception of ecclesiastical authority.

Within the Church tradition, the biblical symbolism of the Staff developed into the crozier, the Pastoral Staff carried by bishops, abbots, and certain ecclesiastical leaders. The crozier signifies the bishop's participation in the Pastoral ministry of Christ and his responsibility to teach, govern and sanctify, and guide the people of God. Through centuries of liturgical development, the Pastoral Staff became one of the principal insignia of episcopal office, embodying both authority and service. The bishop's Staff thus preserves and transforms the biblical imagery of shepherding within the sacramental life of the Church.

Unlike the Staff in the Hebrew Scripture, the Staff in the official liturgical books of the Roman rites is qualified and referred to as crozier or Pastoral Staff (*baculus Pastoralis*).[371] In fact, the original word for Pastoral Staff was crozier which is derived from the old French *crocier* and Latin *crociarius* which referred to the person who carried the episcopal crook and was called his *crocer, croyser* or *crosier* which originally meant "Shepherd's Staff" or "hooked Staff".[372] The term is itself derived from *croce* (hook), ultimately tracing back to the Latin crux (cross), though some scholars also connect it to crocus or *crocea*, referring to a hooked or bent object.[373] The term crozier was used to refer to the Staff carried by bishops, patriarchs, abbots and abbesses, and sometimes by priors and prioresses.[374] A bishop's Staff was called a crosier's Staff, and as time went by, it was simply called a crosier.[375]

---

[371] Catholic Doors Ministry, *Pastoral Staff*, https://www.catholicdoors.com/faq/1500/qu1536.htm, Retrieved on 10.3.2025.
[372] Cyril E. Pocknee, *Liturgical Vesture: Its Origins and Development*, (Westminster, Maryland: The Canterbury Press), 45.
[373] Reginald E. Allen, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1911), 276. Here the word is spelt with s (crosier) unlike other texts with z (crozier) but both referring to the same element which is defined here carrying two meanings. 1. a hooked staff carried by a bishop as a symbol of pastoral office. 2. a crook.
[374] Cyril E. Pocknee, *Liturgical Vesture: Its Origins and Development*, (Westminster, Maryland: Canterbury Press, 1961), 44.
[375] Cyril E. Pocknee, *Liturgical Vesture: Its Origins and Development*, (Westminster: The Canterbury Press), 45.

Accordingly, this chapter examines the symbolism of the Staff in the Old Testament, the New Testament, the writings of the Church Fathers, the early sacramentaries and pontificals, the medieval and Tridentine periods, the teachings of Vatican II, post-conciliar liturgical reforms and the contemporary theology of the episcopal Staff. This historical and theological survey establishes the doctrinal basis upon which the recommendations for liturgical inculturation of the Pastoral Staff among the *Agĩkũyũ* will be developed.

3.1 The Staff in the Old Testament

The biblical tradition inherited and transformed these earlier meanings of the Staff. Thus, Israel adopted the Staff from its Pastoral environment but gave it a new meaning within the framework of covenant theology. Therefore: the shepherd's Staff became the rod of God in the hands of Moses,[376] the royal scepter became a sign of messianic kingship[377] and finally, the shepherd's rod symbolized divine care.[378]

The most common image of Staff in the bible is associated with shepherd. It was made from wood which is not specified and measured the length of a walking stick. It had a curved head which meant to guide, support and rescue strayed animals, a function which would later influence the shape of bishop's Staff in Christian liturgy.[379]

In the hands of King David, it was a scepter denoting his status as King who was supposed to shepherd God's people.[380] Apart from this practical use, it also carries like any other symbol in

[376] Exodus 4:20.
[377] Genesis 49:10.
[378] Psalm 23:4.
[379] James G. Crossley, *Jesus and the Chaos of History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 88.
[380] Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 1970), 94.

the Bible a deep spiritual and theological symbolism which can be very enriching to anyone who reads the Bible. It is associated with various individuals such as some Patriarchs, Moses, Aaron, Kings, Jesus, and his disciples.[381]

3.1.1 Pre-Biblical Biblical Witness

The origins of the Staff predate the biblical texts and can be traced to the wider cultural milieu of the ancient Near East. Before its appearance in the Bible, it already functioned as an important object in the social, political, Pastoral, and religious life of ancient civilizations. Archeological and textual evidence attests that the Staffs were initially employed as a practical implement for walking, shepherding, and defense. With the passage of time, it evolved into a symbol of authority, kingship, priesthood and divine power.[382]

The rulers in places such as Mesopotamia and Egypt are often presented holding Staffs, scepters or rods which stood for power and governance. The Staff therefore functioned as a tool of survival and a symbol of leadership, forming the cultural background for its biblical usage. The people of Israel inherited these patterns in their Pastoral life where everyday objects became carriers of symbolic meaning.[383]

The Hebrew language uses several terms for "Staff", each reflecting different aspects of its origin. The following three words, *maṭṭeh*, *šēḇet* and *maḳḳēl* when translated into English carries a variety of meanings though they are classified as Staffs. *Maṭṭeh*, often means "Staff" where it links the object to leadership and lineage. Again, šēḇet carries the meaning of a "rod" or "scepter"

[381] J. Frederic McCurdy, Louis Ginzberg, https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5-aaron-s-rod, Retrieved on 4.2.2025.
[382] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its life and Institutions*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 103.
[383] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its life and Institutions*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 103.

emphasizing rule and authority. Finally, *maḳḳēl* espouses "support" or "walking stick" which highlights dependence and stability.[384] From this linguistic analysis, it is clear that the three Hebrew words for "Staff" have profound variations in the structure and functionality of each. For example, though *maṭṭeh*, refers to the long wooden walking stick used virtually by every Israel male, it can function as a defensive weapon against people and animals who pose threat to the life of an individual carrying the Staff.[385] When interpreted as rod, the meaning is confined to its practical use.[386]

Though the Bible does not tell us how the Staff looked like in terms of its shape, size and structure, there is a number of ways the Staff has been described by researchers. In his article titled, *Your Rod and your Staff, comfort me*, Aaron L. Garriott presents the biblical Staff as "a guiding tool with a hook on one end to secure a sheep around its chest."[387] Still, the Staff is presented as a long slender stick, hooked at the tip which was primarily used to direct the flock and to rescue any which may get entangled in thorn bushed or fall into fast flowing rivers.

3.1.2 The Staff of Jacob

In the biblical narratives, the earliest references to the Staff are found in the stories of patriarchs where it reflects a semi-nomadic lifestyle. These patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, lived as Pastoralist, and the Staff was an essential part of their daily existence.[388] In the

[384]Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 631.
[385] L. G. Herr, *Staff*, in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. IV (fully Revised), (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988) 608-609.
[386] J. Frederic McCurdy, Louis Ginzberg, https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5-aaron-s-rod, Retrieved on 4.2.2025.
[387] Aaron L. Garriott, https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2018/08/your-rod-and-your-staff-they-comfort-me/, Retrieved on 26.6.2025.
[388] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its life and Institutions*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 13.

catalogue of the patriarchs, Jacob is one of the earliest individuals who is explicitly associated with a Staff. In his prayer before meeting his brother Esau, he recalls his humble beginnings when he declares:

"I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my Staff I have crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps". [389]

Commenting on this verse in reference to the Staff, Claus Westermann, observes that Jacob's words bring out both historical memory and theological confession, since the Staff recalls his exile while at the same time testify to God's blessing throughout his journey.[390] On the other hand, Gerhard von Rad interprets the verse in reference to the Staff as a symbol of pilgrimage, vulnerability, and total dependence on God's providence.[391]

Jacob's Staff appears again in his final blessing over Judah in Genesis 49:10 where it says: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's Staff from between his feet". Walter Bruegemann explains that in this blessing the Staff is explicitly linked to leadership, kingship, and dynastic authority thereby, transforming the Staff from a simple walking stick into a symbol of tribal and royal sovereignty.[392]

[389] Genesis 32:10.
[390] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 515.
[391] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 322.
[392] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 374.

3.1.3 The Staff of Judah

Judah, son of Jacob is another patriarch who is closely associated with the Staff. In his sexual encounter with Tamar his daughter in law, he gives her his personal items as a pledge which included his Staff:

"What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your signet and your cord, and your Staff that is in your hand."[393]

In his commentary on this verse, Nahum Sarna observes that these personal items "constitute unmistakable proofs of identity."[394] Another Bible commentator Gordon Wenham notes that the Staff in this context carries juridical significance in which it functions like an official seal.[395] It functions as personal symbol of identity and authority since in the ancient Near East context, Staffs often ornamented or uniquely carved, making them recognizable signs of ownership and status.[396]

3.1.4 The Staff of Moses

One of the most prominent figures associated with the use of a Staff in the Bible is Moses. Originally, his Staff which was simply meant for Pastoral use, becomes a vehicle of divine power which was to accompany him.[397] When Moses first encounters God at the burning bush, he is instructed to employ his Staff as a tool for demonstrating divine power through signs and wonders. In Exodus 4:2-5, God inquires, "What is that in your hand?" Moses responds, "A Staff." Following

[393] Genesis 38:18
[394] Nahum Mattathias Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 263.
[395] Gordon John Wenham, *Genesis 16-50, Word Biblical Commentary 2* (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 367.
[396] Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, commentary on Genesis 38:8, which notes that the staff was "often carved and highly ornamented" and served as "a most certain means of identification."
[397] William Henry Caldwell Propp, *Exodus 1-18,* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 209.

this, God commands him to cast it upon the ground, resulting in its transformation into a serpent. Then, God orders him to retrieve it, and it reverts to a Staff, thereby underscoring its status as a symbol of divine authority.[398] God commands Moses to make use of the Staff which is sometimes called the "rod of God" (Ex. 4:20) to perform signs and wonders (Ex. 4:17). The Staff therefore holds significant importance within the narrative of the Exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt.

Among the bearers of the Staff in the Bible, the one of Moses has a singular and unparalleled place in biblical symbolism and salvation history.[399] Though Staffs and rods are frequently mentioned throughout the Bible, as symbols of authority, guidance, discipline and leadership, the Staff of Moses is uniquely prominent because it serves as a visible instrument of divine power, covenantal authority, liberation, judgment, and mediation between God and His people.

3.1.4.1 Origin of the Staff of Moses

Though the Bible is not clear regarding the origin of the Staff, Exodus 4:20 says that when Moses started back to the land of Egypt after encountering God in the burning bush, "the Staff of God he carried with him". Now, according to the Jewish legend found in *Mishnah*[400], the Staff was created on the sixth day of creation as recorded in Genesis and was handed over to biblical patriarchs before eventually landing in the hands of Moses. *Mishnah* goes further to say that the

[398] *What is the meaning and importance of a staff in the Bible?*, https://biblechat.ai/knowledgebase/religious-events-symbols/biblical-symbols/what-meaning-importance-staff-bible/, Retrieved on 11.3.2025.
[399] The uniqueness of the staff of Moses is anchored on its central role in the Exodus story, where it becomes a primary sign of God's intervention in the life of the Jews in Egypt. See Exodus 4:2-4; 7:8-12; 14:16; 17:5-6. The staff is first mentioned when Moses is divinely commissioned at the burning bush where God transforms a mere shepherd's staff into a sign of divine authority.
[400] According to the *Oxford Dictionary* Mishnah is an authoritative collection of exegetical material embodying the oral tradition of Jewish law and forming the first part of the Talmud.

Staff is one of the wondrous things created just shortly before the first *Shabbat* of creation.[401] Thus, following these two references, the Staff in the Bible has a divine origin since it is a creature of the Creator.

The *Midrash*[402] on the other hand asserts that, after creation, the Staff was given to Adam in the garden of Eden. Adam himself passed on the Staff to Enoch, Enoch to Noah, Noah to Shem, Shem to Abraham, Abraham to Isaac, Isaac to Jacob. Then Jacob took it with him to Egypt where he handed it over to his son Joseph. When Joseph died, the Egyptians ransacked his house and took everything they wanted and the Staff was among the items they took and they placed it in the palace of Pharaoh.[403]

Then, when Jethro was serving as an adviser to the Pharaoh, he saw the Staff and he admired it because of the mysterious inscriptions on it. This led him to steal it and take it with him to Midian and planted it in the middle of his garden. From here no one could uproot it until when Moses who had fled Egypt and was housed by Jethro, while walking through the garden saw the Staff and reading the letter on it managed to uproot it, which no one before him had managed to do so.[404] This is the Staff he was holding when Yahweh appeared to him in the burning bush as recorded in Exodus 3:2.

---

[401] Joel Hecker, *Evil and Compassion: Two sides of one Staff*, Retrieved from, https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/dvar-torah/evil-and-compassion-two-sides-one-staff/#:~:text=The%20Mishnah%20in%20Pirkei%20Avot,first%20Sabbath%20eve%20at%20twilight, Accessed on 23.4.2025.

[402] A term that refers to the repository of the Jewish wisdom and expounded in storytelling and tradition. Sometimes, it refers to specific works or to a genre.

[403] Yehuda Shurpin, *Where did Moses get his Staff and what happened to it?*, Retrieved from, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/509202/jewish/Where-Did-Moses-Get-His-Staff-What-Happened-to-It.htm, accessed on 10.3.2025.

[404]Yehuda Shurpin, *Where did Moses get his Staff and what happened to it*? Retrieved from, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/509202/jewish/Where-Did-Moses-Get-His-Staff-What-Happened-to-It.htm, Accessed on 10.3.2025.

3.1.4.2 The Nature of the Staff

According to the Midrash, the Staff of Moses (Rod in the Midrash) weighed forty se'ah[405] and was made of sapphire.[406] Beside this, there is another tradition which says that the Staff was made out of wood from the Tree of Knowledge.[407] Additionally, the Midrash says that on the Staff were engraved the ten plagues and the order they were to be unleashed in Egypt against the obstinacy of Pharaoh.[408]

3.1.4.3 The Staff and the Contest with Pharaoh

On his journey back to Egypt, Moses is accompanied by his brother Aaron who is also carrying a Staff as Exodus Chapter 7:10 attests: "Then Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord commanded. Aaron threw his Staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it was changed into a snake". Pharaoh tried to demonstrate his equal power by summoning his magicians to confront God made manifest through Aaron's Staff. They threw their Staffs down and the turned into snakes but the amazing thing is that: "Aaron's Staff swallowed their Staffs." The swallowing of the Egyptian Staffs signifies the ultimate defeat of the pagan power by divine authority.[409]

Then, God sent Moses to Pharaoh with the message to let the people of Israel leave but he was obdurate and God said to him: "… I will strike the water that is in the Nile with Staff that is in my hand, it shall be turned to blood …" Exodus 7:17. Again, in Exodus 10:13, "Moses stretched

[405] A measure of volumes for dry objects and for liquids in use during that time.
[406] Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon (eds.), *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus*, (London: The Soncino Press, 1961), 118.
[407] Yehuda Shurpin, Retrieved from, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/509202/jewish/Where-Did-Moses-Get-His-Staff-What-Happened-to-It.htm, accessed on 26.6.2025.
[408] Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon (eds.), *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus*, (London: The Soncino Press, 1961), 119.
[409] Nahum Mattathias Sarna, Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel, (New York Schocken Books, 1999), 79.

out his Staff over the land of Egypt, and the Lord sent an East wind blowing over the land all that day and all that night…".

The Staff was instrumental in leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness. It aided them in navigating challenging terrain and served as a symbol of divine direction, ultimately guiding them to their long-awaited destination—the Promised Land. The Staff also embodies God's authority and might, as Moses wielded it to perform various miracles. It became the instrument through which God displayed His miraculous power, enabling Moses to perform wonders such as turning the Nile River into blood and summoning plagues of locusts and darkness upon Egypt. These miracles reveal Yahweh's power over the cosmos and exposes the powerlessness of Egyptian gods which associated with fertility, the Nile, and the weather.[410]

God used the Staff in the hands of Moses to communicate to the Egyptians that the God whom Moses worshipped was greater than their gods. By holding this Staff above the waters of River Nile, they turned into blood. Still, it was the same Staff that Moses held over the rivers and streams in Egypt that they got invested with frogs. With the Staff, he struck the dust and there was an explosion of lice. Again, when he held the Staff up towards the sky, the plague of thunder and storm destroyed the land and all that was in it.

Throughout the Exodus narrative, Moses' Staff serves as a vehicle for God's miraculous interventions. It is with this Staff that Moses strikes the Nile River, causing its waters to be transformed into blood (Exodus 7:17). Additionally, he employs the Staff to part the Red Sea, thereby facilitating the Israelites' escape from the advancing Pharaoh's army (Exodus 14:16).

[410] John Isbell Durham, Exodus, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 97.

Moreover, he strikes the rock at Horeb with this Staff, which produces water for the thirsty Israelites (Exodus 17:6). Each of these actions highlights the Staff's role as a symbol of God's provision, deliverance, and sustenance[411] during a pivotal period in the history of the Israelite people.

3.1.4.5 The Nature of the Staff of Moses

Although the Old Testament does not explicitly present the Staff of Moses in Trinitarian terms, Christian theology has often interpreted Old Testament symbols typologically in the light of revelation of the Trinity in the New Testament. Through the Staff, God manifests divine authority, liberates his people from the slavery, and guides them into covenant communion with him. In this sense the Staff can be interpreted as expressing the united work of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[412]

First, the Staff reveals the authority and sovereignty of God the Father. When God called Mosses at the burning bush, He instructed him to use the Staff as an instrument through which his divine power would be manifested (Exod. 4:1-5). The transformation of the Staff into a serpent and back again demonstrated that the signs performed by moses originated not from human ability but from God Himself.[413] Throughout the Exodus narrative, the Staff remains a visible reminder that God the Father governs history and acts on behalf of His covenant people.[414]

---

[411] *What is the meaning and importance of a staff in the Bible*?, Retrieved from https://biblechat.ai/knowledgebase/religious-events-symbols/biblical-symbols/what-meaning-importance-staff-bible/, (accessed 11.3.2025).
[412] Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, (San Francisco: Ignatius press, 2004), 135.
[413] Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 82.
[414] Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville: John Knos Press, 1991), 75.

Second, Christian tradition sees the Staff as prefiguring Christ. The miracles performed through the Staff particularly, the parting of the Red Sea (Exod. 14:16-31) and the striking of the rock at Horeb (Exod. 17:5-7) have been interpreted typologically as foreshadowing Christ's saving work.[415] St. Paul explicitly identifies the rock in the wilderness with Christ: "…and all drank the same spiritual drink, since they drank from the rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4).[416] As Moses stretched out the Staff to deliverance, so Christ, through His Cross, became the definitive instrument of redemption for humanity.[417] Patristic writers frequently compared the Staff of Moses with Cross of Christ, seeing both as signs of victory and salvation.[418]

Third, the Staff also symbolizes the activity of the Holy Spirit. The miracles associated with the Staff were not magical acts but a manifestation of God's living presence among his people.[419] The Spirit who throughout the Scripture empowers God's servants and sustains the covenant community, can be seen operating through these signs and wonders.[420] The pillar of cloud and fire that accompanied Israel in the wilderness further demonstrates the divine presence guiding and protecting God's people (Exod. 13:21-22).[421] In Christian theology, such guidance is fulfilled in the Holy Spirit, who leads believers into truth and communion with God.[422]

The unity of the Trinity is reflected in the manner in which the Staff functions within salvation history. The Father commissions Moses, the Son is foreshadowed through the redemptive

---

[415] William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (New York: Doubleday, 199), 546.
[416] Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 812.
[417] Catechism of the Catholic Church, (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*,1997), no. 618
[418] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 60.
[419] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 174.
[420] Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. 1 (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 15.
[421] John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary 3 (Wacco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 187.
[422] CCC 683-686.

symbolism associated with the Staff, and the Holy Spirit empowers and accompanies God's saving action. Consequently, the Staff becomes not merely a shepherd's rod but a sacramental sign of divine presence and cooperation in the economy of salvation.[423]

3.1.5 The Staff of Aaron

The Staff of Aaron occupies a distinctively prominent place in biblical history, as a symbol of divinely instituted priesthood, sacred authority, mediation and life-giving power, serving as a potent symbol throughout the narrative of the Exodus and beyond.[424] While often overshadowed by the more illustrious one of Moses, this distinctive Staff plays a vital role in the unfolding divine drama depicted in the books of the Old Testament. In order to comprehend its full significance, we will explore its various appearances and the theological implications associated with its use.

Aaron's Staff is employed as an instrument of divine judgment, wielded to unleash several devastating plagues upon Egypt. In the first plague, when the Nile is turned to blood, God directs Moses to tell Aaron to stretch out his Staff over the waters of Egypt: "The Lord then said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: 'Take your Staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt - their streams and canals, and ponds, all their supplies of water - that they may become blood. Throughout the land of Egypt there shall be Blood even in the wooden pails and stone jars." (Exodus 7:19). Here, the rod emerges as a tangible representation of God's authority and power, manifesting His ability to reshape creation at will. This theme resounds in subsequent plagues, such as the devastating

[423] Henry de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man,* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 136.
[424] The theological importance of the staff of Aaron is profoundly rooted in its association with the priestly office established by divine command. The Letter to the Hebrew 9:4 explicitly refers to "Aaron's rod that budded" as one of the sacred signs connected with the covenant. This confirms its enduring symbolic importance in both Jewish and Christian traditions as a sign of priesthood and divine election.

swarm of frogs (Exodus 8:5) and the oppressive plague of gnats (Exodus 8:16-17), where Aaron's Staff again takes center stage, initiating divine judgment upon the land.

3.1.5.1 The Staff of Aaron in the Court of Pharaoh

The first striking appearance of Aaron's Staff occurs in Exodus Chapter 7 during a dramatic confrontation between Moses, Aaron, and the formidable Pharaoh. In an awe-inspiring display of divine power, God commands Moses to instruct Aaron to cast his Staff before Pharaoh. The ordinary Staff undergoes a miraculous transformation, becoming a serpent that writhes on the ground: "Then Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord commanded. Aaron threw his Staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it was changed into snake" (Exodus 7:10).

This event transcends mere spectacle; it is a bold challenge to the Egyptian magicians and their deities. When they replicate the miracle with their own Staffs which equally turn into serpents, Aaron's serpent eclipses their efforts by consuming their serpents (Exodus 7:12). This act symbolizes Yahweh's ultimate triumph over the gods of Egypt, setting the stage for the ensuing plagues and the liberation of the Israelites.

3.1.5.2 Aaron's Staff and the Rebellion of Korah

The story of Aaron's Staff takes another significant turn during the rebellion of Korah, recounted in chapters 16-17 of the Book of Numbers. In this intense episode, Korah and his followers challenge the divinely sanctioned leadership of Moses and Aaron. In response to their insurrection, God commands each tribal leader to present a Staff, with Aaron representing the tribe of Levi. The Staffs are placed in the sacred Tent of Meeting, and God decrees that the one belonging to His chosen leader shall miraculously sprout: "The next day, when Moses entered the

tent, Aaron's Staff, which represented the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth not only shoots but blossoms as well, and even bore ripe almonds." (Numbers 17:23) This astonishing event serves to symbolize God's choice of Aaron divinely and his tribe for holy service in the Temple, silencing dissent and establishing his authority in a way that could not be contested.[425] The flourishing rod, adorned with buds and blossoms, symbolizes life and fruitfulness, indicating God's ongoing provision and blessings upon His chosen leaders. The rod is then preserved before the Ark of the Covenant as a lasting testament (Numbers 17:10), reminding future generations of God's authority and the legitimacy of the Aaronic priesthood.

3.1.6 The Staff Among the Prophets

In the Pentateuch, the Staff is often associated with individual or specific persons while in the prophets it becomes a metaphorical extension of God's sovereign action in history. The prophetic use of the Staff imagery reflects both the political realities of Israel and Juda and the theological conviction that God governs his people through judgment and mercy.

3.1.6.1 Isaiah

Isaiah presents a major prophetic use of the Staff, which appears in 10:5, which says:

"Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger – the Staff in their hands is my fury." In this biblical verse, the rod Staff symbolize imperial power under divine providence. Assyria, though a foreign empire, is presented as the instrument through which God disciplines His covenant people for unfaithfulness.[426]

[425] Aaron's rod, Retrieved from, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aaron%27s_rod, (accessed 17.6.20250).
[426] Brevard Spring Childs, *Isaiah*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 93.

3.1.6.2 Ezekiel

In the book of the prophet Ezekiel 20:37, a rich symbolic use of the Staff occurs.

"I will make you pass under the Staff, and I will bring you within the bond of the covenant." There is no doubt that this verse draws from ancient shepherding practice, where sheep passed under the shepherd's Staff for counting, inspection and selection. Further, this imagery reflects God's role as the covenant shepherd who examines, purifies, and restores the flock.[427]

3.1.6.3 Zechariah

The most explicit prophetic symbolism of the Staff appears in Zechariah 11:7, "I took two Staff; one I named favour, the other I named Union." In their commentary on these two Staffs, namely favour, which refers to divine grace and protection, and Union, which points to the social cohesion and covenant unity, Keil and Delitzsch say that the prophet intentionally uses two Staffs to symbolize the double blessing of divine favour and communal solidarity.[428]

3.1.7 Messianic Staff

Beyond its immediate historical significance, the Staff possesses a profound typological dimension prefiguring the coming Messiah whose authority would unite the roles of shepherd, king and priest. The New Testament recognizes these Old Testament figures as finding their ultimate fulfilment in Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd and eternal King.[429]

---

[427] Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 641.
[428] Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on Old Testament, vol. 10* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 389
[429] Catechism of the Catholic Church, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 128-130

One of the earliest messianic anticipations appears in the blessing of Judah by Jacob:

"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's Staff from his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Genesis 49:10).

Here, the "scepter" and the "ruler's Staff" symbolize an enduring royal authority.

3.1.8 Wisdom Books and Psalms

Among the Pastoralist communities of the Near East, the Staff more than else associated person carrying it with shepherding. This instrument is unique to the shepherding profession where it is used for the care and management of sheep – and only sheep.[430] The Staff was first and foremost a handy tool which they used to guide, protect and manage the flock with ease.

The shepherd's Staff is a powerful symbol seen throughout the Bible, representing God's guidance. The imagery of a shepherd leading his flock with a Staff serves as a vivid metaphor in both the Old and New Testaments, illustrating how God nurtures and protects his people.

In Psalm 23, the Staff acts as a source of guidance and comfort for the psalmist and not for help or satisfaction of the shepherd: "Your rod and your Staff, they comfort me." Similarly, in Ezekiel 20:37, God describes himself as gathering his people using his shepherd's Staff: "I will put my Staff in their hands, and I will stop the passing through of them." In the New Testament, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, highlighting his role in guiding and protecting his followers: "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep, and they know me." These biblical

[430] Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd's Look at Psalm 23*, (United State of America: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 99.

references underscore the significance of the shepherd's Staff as a symbol of God's direction and care. The Staff embodies not just God's authority, but also his compassion for his people.

Moreover, the shepherd's Staff is frequently portrayed as a tool for rescuing lost sheep. In Luke 15:4-6, Jesus shares the parable of the lost sheep, illustrating how a shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to find the one that strayed. The Staff aids in lifting the sheep from danger and bringing them back to safety, showing that God's guidance extends not only to the faithful but also to those who have wandered away from his path.

3.1.9 Symbolism of the Staff

From the above narratives, the Old Testament Biblical Staff serves as a powerful symbol of God's sovereignty and authority. It is a concrete manifestation of divine will, utilized to perform miraculous acts, execute judgment, and validate leadership.[431] The Staff's significance transcends its immediate context, pointing to broader theological themes woven within the biblical narrative. In Christian theology, Moses' or Aaron's Staff can be interpreted as a type, or foreshadowing, of Christ and his Cross.[432] Just as the Staff was an instrument through which God revealed His might and authority, so too is Jesus Christ the ultimate embodiment of God's power and authoritative presence. The blossoming of Aaron's Staff, which brought forth life from a seemingly barren object, prefigures the resurrection of Christ, who triumphed over death to bring life anew.[433] This

[431] Aaron's rod, retrieved from, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aaron%27s_rod, accessed on 17.5.2025.
[432] Phillip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, John Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Homily 11:18*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 333.
[433] Melissa McLaughlin, Retrieved from, https://melissamclaughlin.org/2025/03/10/what-does-aarons-rod-that-budded-represent/, Accessed on 17.5.2025.

typology resonates within the writings of Hebrews, where parallels are drawn between the Old Testament priesthood and the priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 7-10).

Throughout the Book of Exodus, the Staff captures significant theological themes, particularly focusing on divine power, authority, and providence.[434] Moses acted as a vessel for God's might, with the Staff serving as the tangible representation of that power. It possessed no intrinsic magical qualities; rather, it symbolized Moses' absolute obedience to the divine will. The Staff functioned as a physical reminder of the Israelites' liberation from Egyptian bondage and the multitude of miracles performed during their exodus. Furthermore, it embodied Moses' leadership as he navigated the Israelites through the physical and spiritual trials of the wilderness

3.1.9.1 Symbol of Divine Power

In biblical theology, the Staff symbolizes God's sovereign strength and authority, representing the divine protection bestowed upon the chosen people. Figures such as Moses, Aaron, and subsequent prophets wielded Staffs as signifiers of their spiritual leadership. For instance, in Exodus 4:2-5, God instructs Moses on how to utilize his Staff to demonstrate divine power to the Israelites. Subsequently, in Exodus 7:8-13, Moses employs the Staff to transform the Nile River into blood, and in Exodus 14:16, he raises it to part the Red Sea, securing the Israelites' deliverance.[435]

[434] Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1974), 185.
[435] Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus, The New American Commentary, vol. 2* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 334. Stuart emphasizes that the physical raising of the staff was not the source of power, but a required act of faithful obedience to trigger God's miraculous wind.

3.1.9.2 Symbol of Shepherding

The symbolism of the Staff as an instrument of shepherding occupies an important place in the biblical tradition and in the wider religious imagination of the ancient Near East. In the ancient world, shepherds used Staff for practical purposes. It assisted them in directing the sheep, rescuing the straying, defending the flock from predators, and supporting themselves during long journeys. These practical functions gave rise to symbolic meanings. The shepherd's Staff came to represent care rather than domination, authority exercised through service, and leadership characterized by responsibility for the welfare of others.[436]

3.1.9.3 Symbol of God's Faithfulness

In the biblical tradition, God's faithfulness (*hesed* and *ʾĕmûnâ*) is manifested through his continual guidance, protection, covenantal commitment, and providential care. The Staff, therefore, becomes a visible reminder that God accompanies his people throughout their journey, sustains them in time of adversity, and remains true to his promises.[437] Expanding upon its covenantal significance, the Staff symbolizes the steadfastness of God's character. At Rephidim, when the people of Israel suffer from thirst, God commands Moses to strike the rock at Horeb with Staff and water flows forth for the people (Ex. 17:5-6). Water emerging from the rock symbolizes abundance arising from barrenness through divine intervention.[438] A related episode is found in

[436] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John Mchugh, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), 25.
[437] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 217.
[438] Terence Earle Fretheim, *Exodus*, (Louiseville: John Knox Press, 1991), 191.

Numbers 20:1-13, on the striking of the rock by Moses at Meribah and water emerges miraculously.

3.1.9.4 Symbol of God's Promises

In the Bible, the Staff stands as a tangible memorial of God's covenantal promises. In Genesis, Jacob utilized his Staff to mark his journey and acknowledge God's providence (Genesis 32:10).[439] Later, Moses wielded his Staff to perform miracles and execute the exodus from Egypt.[440] Aaron's budding Staff stands as another poignant example, symbolizing God's irrevocable affirmation of his priestly lineage. These narratives demonstrate that the Staff transcends mere physical utility; it functions as an enduring monument to God's faithfulness.

3.1.9.5 Symbol of Humility and Divine Authority

Throughout the biblical narrative, the Staff functions as a broader symbol of divine authority. In the ancient Near East, Staffs and rods represented kingship, judicial authority, and leadership.[441] Moses, wielded his Staff not merely as an administrative tool, but as a symbol of delegated divine authority. This unassuming piece of wood became instrumental in executing extraordinary miracles, facilitating the Israelites' emancipation from slavery. As he traversed the harsh desert landscape, Moses leaned upon his Staff, a physical act that mirrored his spiritual reliance on God's guidance during the arduous journey.

Another profound illustration is encapsulated in the confrontation between David and Goliath. Faced with the formidable Philistine champion, David rejected conventional military

[439] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 2 (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 291.
[440] Oshea Davis, "*The Staff of God*," Retrieved from, https://osheadavis.org/2024/02/08/the-staff-of-god/, accessed on 26.6.2025
[441] Roland de Vaaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961),101.

armaments, opting instead for his humble shepherd's Staff and a sling.[442] This deliberate choice epitomized his unwavering faith; he placed his trust entirely in God for deliverance, illustrating that definitive power resides in spiritual conviction rather than physical might

3.1.9.6 Symbol of Divine Protection against Enemies

The Staff is not just a ritual object but a theological sign of God's supremacy in a conflict between divine sovereignty and imperial oppression.[443] frequently depicted as a means of safeguarding against enemies. In various situations, the Staff has been used in battles, to fend off predators, and to navigate through perilous terrain. A noteworthy example of the Staff serving as protection is found in the story of Moses. When he led the Israelites out of Egypt, God provided him with a Staff. This Staff not only facilitated miraculous feats, such as parting the Red Sea, but also acted as a weapon against Israel's foes.

The Staff stands as a potent symbol of defense throughout biblical literature, representing authority, leadership, and protection.[444] It is frequently depicted as a safeguard against hostile forces. In various historical and Pastoral contexts, the Staff was utilized in combat, to ward off predators, and to navigate treacherous terrain. A quintessential example of the Staff functioning as an instrument of protection is located in the Exodus narrative. When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, the divinely bestowed Staff not only facilitated miraculous events, such as the parting of the Red Sea, but also served as a symbolic weapon against Israel's adversaries.

---

[442] Robert Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 106. Alter highlights the stark contrast between Goliath's heavy bronze armaments and David's pastoral tools as a literary device emphasizing reliance on divine intervention.

[443] Nahum Mattathias Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel*, (New York Schocken Books, 1999), 79.

[444] *"Placement of the Staffs*," Bible Hub, Retrieved from, https://biblehub.com/topical/p/placement_of_the_staffs.htm, Retrieved on 26.7.2025.

3.1.9.7 Symbol of God's Presence and Covenant Guidance

The Staff symbolized God's continued presence with his chosen people Israel. This is clearly demonstrated in Exodus 17:8-13 during their battle against the Amalekites. Moses held the Staff aloft in his hand while Joshua and the men of Israel faced the enemy in a fierce fight. As long as the Staff remained raised by Moses, Israel prevailed against their enemies. This episode demonstrates that victory depends not merely on military strength but upon reliance on God.[445]

Furthermore, the Staff was a reminder of God's covenant faithfulness throughout their journey in the wilderness. Durham argues that the Staff signified Yahweh's abiding accompaniment of his people and his commitment to fulfill the promises made to the patriarchs.[446] In this sense, the Staff transcended its practical function and became a sacramental sign of divine guidance.

3.1.9.8 Symbol of Comfort in Difficult Times

The most explicit biblical expression of this symbolism appears in Psalm 23. A primary reference to the Staff as an instrument of comfort appears in Psalm 23:4, which declares, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your Staff, they comfort me."[447] Here, the rod and the Staff represent God's reassuring presence in moments of fear and suffering. Rather than serving merely as instruments of discipline, they become signs of divine companionship and security. The comfort experienced by the psalmist

[445] Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus, JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 96.
[446] John I. Durham, *Exodus, Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 3, (Wacco, Texas: Word Books, 1987) 32.
[447] Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms, New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 123. Broyles notes that the rod (*shebet*) and staff (*mishan*) function dually for defense against predators and for guiding the flock, metaphorically underscoring divine providence.

arises not from the absence of danger but from the certainty that God accompanies his people through every trial.[448]

3.2 The Staff in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the Staff is not as adversely mentioned though the rich symbolic heritage of the Old Testament is retained while receiving a complete Christological and ecclesiological meaning.

3.2.1 Jesus and the Staff

Although the New Testament does not explicitly depict Jesus carrying a shepherd's Staff, the symbolism of the Staff is deeply embedded in his identity and mission. He frequently employed the imagery of shepherding to describe his mission. In the Gospel of John, he identifies himself as the "Good Shepherd" who lays down his life for his sheep (Jn 10:11). Although the shepherd's Staff is not explicitly mentioned in this passage, it is implicitly present within the broader biblical image of shepherding. In ancient Palestine, shepherds relied upon Staffs to guide, protect, and rescue their flocks. Consequently, Christ's self-identification as the Good Shepherd evokes the symbolic functions traditionally associated with the shepherd's Staff namely, leadership, protection, correction, and care.[449]

In the New Testament, the symbolism of the Staff finds its fullest theological expression in the person of Jesus Christ.[450] In the tradition of the Bible, the shepherd's Staff signifies guidance,

---

[448] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary, trans. Hilton C. Oswald* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 306.
[449] Willem Abraham Van Gemeren, "Rod", in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, Vol. 4*, (Grand Rapids, Missouri: Zondervan, 1997), 1259.
[450] Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII, Anchor Bible 29*, (New York: Doubleday. 1966), 400.

protection, authority, correction, sacrificial care, and leadership.[451] These meanings find their fulfilment in Jesus Himself as the Good Shepherd and the Chief Shepherd of God's people.[452]

3.2.1.1 Shepherd imagery

The Old Testament frequently presents God as the shepherd of Israel and depicts kings and leaders as shepherds responsible for caring for God's people. When these leaders failed, God promised to raise up a faithful shepherd who would gather and protect the flock. Ezekiel 34 particularly condemns Israel's shepherds and announce that God himself will seek his sheep and appoint "one shepherd" over them, namely a new David.[453]

The New Testament identifies Jesus as the fulfilment of the prophetic expectations. He gathers the scattered people of God, heals the weak, and restores those who are lost. As the promised Messiah from the house of David, Jesus accomplishes the mission that earlier shepherd had neglected.[454] Thus, although no physical Staff is mentioned, the symbolism associated with shepherd leadership finds its ultimate realization in Christ.

3.2.1.2 Good Shepherd

One of the most important passages concerning Jesus and shepherd imagery appears in John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."[455] In his discourse, Jesus presents himself as the shepherd who knows his sheep personally and willingly

[451] Raymond Edward Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII, Anchors Bible 29*, 401.
[452] Jesus explicitly identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10:11 and is later referred to the Chief Shepherd in 1 Peter 5:4.
[453] Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25-48, New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 288.
[454] Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel According to John I-XII, Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 389.
[455] The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), John 10:11.

lays down his life for their salvation.[456] Unlike hired servants who abandon the flock in times of danger, Jesus remains faithful to his mission even unto death.

In biblical tradition, the shepherd's Staff represented guidance, protection, and care. These functions are fulfilled spiritually in Jesus. He guides his disciples toward truth, protects them from spiritual danger, and gathers them into one flock under one shepherd.[457] Therefore, Christ himself becomes the living embodiment of what the shepherd's Staff symbolized in ancient Israel.

3.2.1.3 Sheep without a Shepherd

The synoptic Gospels repeatedly describe Jesus as moved with compassion because the people were "like sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 6:34 Mt. 9:36).[458] This expression echoes Numbers 27:17 and Ezekiel 34, where God's people suffer because of inadequate leadership. Jesus responds by teaching, healing, and feeding the crowds. The multiplication of the loaves demonstrates his Pastoral concern for the physical and spiritual needs of the people.[459] In this sense, Christ exercises the functions traditionally associated with the shepherd's Staff: gathering, nourishing, and protecting the flock.

3.2.1.4 The Shepherd Who Seeks the Lost

In the parable of the lost sheep in Lk. 15:3-7, Jesus goes on to highlight his identity as the compassionate shepherd. Leaving the ninety-nine sheep, he seeks the one that has gone astray and

[456] Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel According to John I-XII, Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 389.
[457] Andreas J. Köstenberger, John, Baker, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 303.
[458] Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 399.
[459] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) 262.

rejoices when it is found. This imagery reflects God's faithful love and demonstrates Christ's concern for sinners and the marginalized. Traditionally, the shepherd's Staff with its bent end would be used to rescue wandering sheep and bring them safely back to the flock.[460] Spiritually, Jesus performs this function through his ministry of reconciliation and forgiveness.

3.2.1.5 The Passion and the Shepherd Motif

The passion of Jesus also possesses shepherd symbolism. At the Last Supper he quotes Zechariah 13:7: "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (Mk 14:27). By applying this prophecy to himself, Jesus reveals that his death forms part of God's saving plan. His resurrection, however, transforms scattering into gathering and establishes a new covenant community centered upon the risen Shepherd. The Letter to the Hebrews refers to Jesus as the "the great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb 13:20), while the First Letter of Peter calls him the "Shepherd and Guardian of your souls" (1 Pet 2:25).[461] These titles indicate that Christ's Pastoral ministry continues beyond his earthly life.

3.2.2 The Apostles

Jesus' relationship with the symbolism of the Staff becomes more explicit in his commissioning of the Twelve. According to Mark 6:8, Jesus instructed his disciples: "He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a Staff." The permission to carry a Staff recalls the experience of Israel during the exodus and signifies dependence on God's providence during missionary activity. The Staff here becomes a symbol of apostolic authority and participation in Christ's Pastoral mission. This understanding has made some scholars view the Staff as an

[460] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X-XXIV*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1072.
[461] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 356.

indication that the disciples, like shepherds, were entrusted with guiding God's people.[462] Thus, the Pastoral symbolism associated with Jesus extends to those whom he commissions.

3.2.3 The Book of Revelation

Here, the symbolism of the Staff is presented through the image of the "rod", which points to the sovereign authority, righteous judgment and universal kingship of the Risen Christ. Although Revelation does not openly describe Christ carrying a shepherd's crook, it repeatedly employs the imagery of the rod to portray the fulfilment of Old Testament messianic prophesies concerning the Messiah's royal and Pastoral rule. Consequently, the symbolism of the Staff in Revelation reaches its climax in the glorified Christ, whose authority extends over the entire creation.[463]

The first reference to the rod is found in the message of Christ to the Church in Thyatira:

"To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations; to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered" (Rev. 2:26-27).

This text is a direct quote from Psalm 2:8-9 where the Davidic Messiah receives authority from God to rule the nations. The iron rod symbolizes unbreakable justice, sovereign authority and the definitive triumph of Christ over evil. Believers who persevere in the faith are promised participation in Christ's royal reign, illustrating that the Messiah's authority is shared with His faithful disciples.[464]

A second significant use of the rod appears in Revelation 11:1:

[462] Adela Yarbo Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 322.
[463] Gregory Kenneth Beale, The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 250.
[464] David Edward Aune, Revelation 1-5, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 52A (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), 214.

"Then I was given a measuring rod like a Staff, and I was told, 'Come and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there.'"

Here, the measuring rod functions differently from the rod of iron. It symbolizes God's authority to preserve, judge, and define his holy people. Measuring the temple signifies ownership, protection and the distinction between those who belong to God and those who oppose him.[465]

Another important text appears in Revelation 12:5, where a woman gives birth to a male child: "She gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron." The child mentioned here is Jesus Christ whose birth, death, resurrection and ascension fulfill the messianic promises of the Old Testament. The rod of iron emphasizes Christ's eternal kingship rather than earthly political domination. His authority is rooted in his victory over sin, death and Satan, making the rod a symbol of divine sovereignty exercised in righteousness.

The imagery of the rod is found in its fullest development in Revelation 19:11-16, where Christ appears as victorious rider on the white horse: "He will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fully of the wrath of God the almighty" (Rev. 19:15). The rod here stands for Christ's final judgment over the nations. Unlike the earthly rulers whose authority is often marked by injustice and oppression, Christ's rule is perfectly just, holy, and faithful. The rod therefore becomes an eschatological symbol of his victorious kingship and the establishment of God's everlasting kingdom.[466]

---

[465] Craig Richard Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 540.
[466] Gregory Kenneth Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 950.

3.3 Church Tradition on the Pastoral Staff

The use of the Staff in the Church has a long history which has developed over many centuries as a symbol of ecclesiastical authority, Pastoral care, and sacramental leadership.[467] This development, which has always had its roots in the biblical imagery of the shepherd, especially Christ the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11), makes the Pastoral Staff become one of the most recognizable insignia of episcopal office in Catholic liturgy.

3.3.1 Apostolic Period

In the apostolic and their immediate successors, bishops did not possess any distinct ceremonial symbol or insignia like the ones to be found in later centuries. Leadership in the Church was primarily demonstrated through preaching, sacramental ministry, and witness rather than external symbols.[468] The early Church often avoided adopting symbols associated with imperial or secular authority because of persecution and the need for the Church to remain simple. Consequently, there is no evidence for the use of ceremonial Staffs by bishops during the first four centuries.[469]

3.3.2 Patristic Period

The earliest mention of the episcopal Staff as an element used in the Church is found in the letter of Pope Celestine I of 428 addressed to the bishops of Vienne and Narbonne exhorting them

[467] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 3, "Crosier" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 753.
[468] Francis A. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the early Church* (New York: Newman Press, 2001), 92.
[469] Josef Andreas Jungmann, *The early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great,* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 108.

to hold lighted lamps and Staffs.[470] But, no mention of the context in which this was to take place. As a liturgical symbol, it is clearly and definitively mentioned for the first time by the year 633 during the Fourth Council of Toledo, canon 28 signifying the leadership or governance of a particular Church and the Pastoral ministry entrusted to the bishop.[471]

3.3.3 Early Middle Ages

By the early Middle Ages, the Pastoral Staff had become an established symbol in episcopal ordinations and other solemn liturgical celebrations. The bishop received the Pastoral Staff during the rite of ordination with prayers emphasizing his responsibility to guide, protect, correct, and govern the flock entrusted to him. The Staff symbolized not secular domination but spiritual authority exercised in imitation of Christ, who came "not to be served but to serve" (Mt. 20:28).

The Staff became increasingly integrated into the solemn episcopal rites[472] and its liturgical use expressed the threefold Pastoral *munera* of a bishop which are, teaching, sanctifying, and governing the flock entrusted to his care by the Lord.[473] The curved upper crook represented the bishop's duty to gather and draw back those who had strayed from the faith.[474] The straight shaft symbolized the steadfastness in doctrine and moral integrity, while the pointed lower end represented the bishop's responsibility to correct vice and stimulate the faithful toward holiness.

---

[470] Josef Andreas Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 303.
[471] Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, (London: Dacre Press, 1986), 412
[472] Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, (London: Dacre Press, 1986), 231.
[473] *Ceremonial of Bishops*, (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1984), no. 59.
[474] William Durandus, *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments*, (Rationale Divinorum Officiorum), trans., John Mason Neal and Benjamin Webb, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), Book III, Chapter 15.

These interpretations became widespread through liturgical commentaries and episcopal ordination rites.[475]

3.3.4 Carolingian Reform

Beginning in the Carolingian period (8th and 9th centuries), significant liturgical reforms promoted greater uniformity in episcopal ceremonies throughout the Western Europe. Newer liturgical boos known as pontifical incorporated ceremonial actions and episcopal insignia. The *Romano-Germanic Pontifical* of 10th century standardized many episcopal rites, including the ceremonial presentation and use of the Pastoral Staff. As a result, the Pastoral Staff became an integral component of episcopal liturgical identity across the Western Church.[476]

By this period, the crosier had become a standard element in the episcopal consecration.[477] In the ordination rite of a bishop, the bishop-elect formally received the Staff with the following accompanying words:

Accipe baculum Pastoralis officii… (Receive the Staff of the Pastoral office), signifying you're your responsibility to govern and shepherd the flock entrusted to your care.[478]

This rite demonstrates that the crozier had by this time become the visible sign of the Pastoral ministry of the bishop.

---

[475] William Durandus, *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments* (Rationale Divinorum Officiorum), trans., John Mason Neal and Benjamin Webb, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), I.3

[476] Cyrill Vogel and Reinhard Elze, eds., *Le Pontifical Romano-Germanique du dixième siècle*, Vol. 1., Studi e Testi, (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1963-1972) 40.

[477] Thamas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith, eds., *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Vol. 3*, (Cambridge University Press, 2008, 218-221.

[478] Cyrille Vogel and Reinhard Elze, eds. *Le Pontifical Romano-Germanique du Dixième Siècle*, 3 vols., *Studi e Testi* 226-227, 269 (Vatican City: *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, 1963-1974), Vol. 1, 43.

3.3.5 Middle Ages

During this period, the Pastoral Staff acquired juridical significance. Canon law recognized it as one of the visible insignia of episcopal jurisdiction, signifying the bishop's authority within his own diocese. During solemn liturgical celebrations outside his diocese, a bishop ordinarily did not carry the Pastoral Staff without the consent of the ordinary, illustrating that the crozier represented Pastoral responsibility over a particular Church rather than universal jurisdiction.[479]

Abbots likewise received Pastoral Staffs as symbols of their spiritual governance over monastic communities. Although abbots did not possess episcopal orders, the Church recognized that they exercised genuine Pastoral authority within their monasteries. Their crosiers often differed slightly in artistic form from episcopal croziers but retained the same fundamental symbolism of Pastoral leadership and service: *sacri regiminis signum*, the shepherd's rod with which the flock of God moved along the straight path.[480]

The liturgical use of the Pastoral Staff became increasingly regulated. Bishops carried the crozier during pontifical Masses, ordinations, processions, synods and other solemn liturgical celebrations. The Staff was ordinarily held in the bishop's left hand, leaving the right hand free for blessings and sacramental actions. Such ceremonial precision reflected the growing sophistication of medieval liturgical practice.

[479] James A. Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law*, (London: Longman, 1995), 99.
[480] Anscar J. Chupungco, *Handbook for Liturgical Studies, Vol. IV: Sacraments ans Sacramentals*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 230.

3.3.6 Scholastic Period

It was during this time that the Staff inevitably underwent symbolic and artistic evolutions.[481] Initially, the curved ends were simple and unadorned. But, as time went by, they began to assume spiral shape and were decorated with engravings, enamel, inlays as well as precious stones or crystals.[482] They are made of different materials such as wood, ivory, bone, bronze, gilded copper, silver and filigree.[483]

3.3.7 Reformation Period

During this period, the Church experienced severe storm where the understanding of ecclesiastical ministry, liturgical ceremonies and episcopal insignia including the Pastoral Staff were critically attacked by the reformers. The Church retained the Pastoral Staff as one of the principal symbols of authority and Pastoral governance while many reformers rejected its liturgical use, viewing it as part of the medieval ecclesiastical system that required reform. As a result, the reformation period witnessed both continuity and discontinuity in the symbolism and use of the Pastoral Staff.[484]

3.3.8 Council of Trent

In response to the Reformation through the Council of Trent, the Church reaffirmed the divine institution of the episcopal office and promoted Pastoral reform among bishops. Although the council did not legislate extensively on the ceremonial use of the Pastoral Staff, it strongly emphasized the bishop's duties of residence, preaching, catechesis, and Pastoral visitation. Within

---

[481] *The Value of the Pastoral Staff in Catholic Symbolism*, retrieved from https://www.holyart.com/blog/church-supplies/value-pastoral-staff-catholic-symbolism/, Accessed on 16.6.2025.
[482] *The Value of the Pastoral Staff in Catholic Symbolism*, https://www.holyart.com/blog/church-supplies/value-pastoral-staff-catholic-symbolism/, Retrieved on 16.6.2025.
[483] *The Value of the Pastoral Staff in Catholic Symbolism*, https://www.holyart.com/blog/church-supplies/value-pastoral-staff-catholic-symbolism/, Retrieved on 16.6.2025.
[484] Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 200.

this renewed understanding of episcopal ministry, the Pastoral Staff continued to symbolize the bishop's responsibility to shepherd the flock entrusted to him by Christ.[485]

3.3.9 Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council did not explicitly discuss the Pastoral Staff in any of its constitutions, decrees, or declarations. Instead, it profoundly renewed the theology of the episcopate by providing the ecclesiological and liturgical framework within which the symbolism of the Pastoral Staff is to be understood. Rather than viewing the Pastoral Staff merely as an insignia of ecclesiastical rank, Vatican II presents bishop as a successor of the Apostles who exercises the Pastoral ministry of Christ, the Good Shepherd. Consequently, the Pastoral Staff becomes a visible sign of the bishop's participation in Christ's mission of teaching, sanctifying, and governing the people of God.[486]

3.4 Pastoral Staff in the Rite of Ordination of a Bishop

The three rites of ordination to Episcopate, Priesthood and Diaconate are divided into three parts which are properly referred to as rites. They are, Preparatory Rites, Essential Rites and Explanatory Rites.

3.4.1 Early Evidence (Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus)

The Apostolic Tradition, traditionally attributed to Hippolytus of Rome (c. 215 AD), is one of the earliest surviving documents describing the liturgical life, ministry and ecclesiastical of the early Church. Although the document does not explicitly mention the Pastoral Staff (crozier) as

[485] Herbert Joseph Schroeder, trans., *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., 1941), 80.
[486] *Lumen Gentium*, 27.

part of the episcopal insignia, it provides valuable theological foundations for understanding the bishop's Pastoral office, from which the later symbolism of the Pastoral Staff developed. The document presents the bishop primarily as the shepherd, teacher and high priest of the Christian community rather than as a holder of ceremonial insignia.

3.4.1.1 Bishop as Shepherd in Apostolic Tradition

In the ordination of a bishop, the Apostolic Tradition points out that the bishop is chosen to shepherd God's flock through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The prayer of consecration asks that the bishop receive "the Spirit of leadership" (*Spiritus principalis*) so that he may faithfully govern the Church entrusted to him. This prayer echoes biblical descriptions of Christ the Good Shepherd and the Pastoral commission entrusted to Peter (Jn 21:15-17). Consequently, the bishop's authority is fundamentally Pastoral rather than political or administrative.[487]

The absence of the physical Staff in the ordination rite should not be interpreted as evidence that the Pastoral office lacked symbolic expression. Rather, the emphasis falls upon the spiritual authority conferred through the laying of hands and prayer. In the early third century, episcopal authority was understood primarily in sacramental and Pastoral terms, while visible insignia developed only gradually in subsequent centuries.[488]

The bishop described in the Apostolic Tradition is entrusted with responsibilities that later became symbolized by the Pastoral Staff. These responsibilities are: guarding the unity of the Church, teaching sound doctrine, presiding over the Eucharist, reconciling sinners, ordaining

[487] Hippolytus of Rome, *Apostolic Tradition*, trans. Alistair Stewart (New York: St. Vladimir, s Seminary Press, 2015), 36.
[488] Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 75.

ministers and caring for the poor and vulnerable. These Pastoral functions eventually found visible expression in the crozier, whose curved head signifies the shepherd gathering the flock, while the upright shaft represents firmness in faith and moral leadership.[489] Thus, although Hippolytus never refers to a crozier, his theology provides the conceptual framework upon which later generations developed the Pastoral Staff as the external sign of episcopal ministry.

3.4.2 Sacramentaries

The earliest sacramentaries constitutes an indispensable source for understanding the historical development of the bishop's Pastoral office and the gradual emergence of the Pastoral Staff (*baculus Pastoralis* or *baculus episcopalis*) as a liturgical symbol. Although these sacramentaries do not contain a formal rite for the presentation of the Pastoral Staff during episcopal ordination, they reveal an evolving theology of episcopal ministry that later justified the Staff's incorporation into the episcopal liturgy. The Pastoral Staff developed gradually from the bishop's responsibility rather than from an apostolic liturgical command.

3.4.2.1 The Nature of the Sacramentaries

The sacramentaries were collections of presidential prayers used primarily by bishops and priests during the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments. Among the most prominent and influential were the Leonine Sacramntary (Veronense) of 6th century, the Gelasian Sacramentary (7th-8th century), and the Gregorian Sacramentary (late 6th-8th century). These books preserve prayers for episcopal ordinations, Church dedications, blessings and major liturgical celebrations, providing insight into how the Church understood episcopal ministry. Although these

[489] Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and interpretation*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007), 52.

sacramentaries focus on the spiritual character of the episcopate, they portray bishop as shepherd, teacher, priest and guardian of the Church.[490]

3.4.2.1.1 The Leonine Sacramentary (*Sacramentarium Veronense*)

This is the oldest surviving Roman Sacramentary and it contains numerous episcopal prayers used during the episcopal consecration. Though no explicit mention of the Pastoral Staff, the prayer emphasize that the bishop should: shepherd God's people faithfully, preserve unity within the Church, teach sound doctrine, celebrate the sacred mysteries worthily and govern the Christian community with wisdom and holiness.[491] These responsibilities correspond closely to the biblical image of Christ as the Good Shepherd, which would later provide theological foundation upon which the crozier would connote.

3.4.2.1.2 The Gelasian Sacramentary

The Gelasian Sacramentary contains a richer theology of episcopal ministry in which, during the episcopal ordination, prayers are directed to God asking Him to fill the bishop with wisdom, prudence, justice and Pastoral charity. Although no rubric on the giving of a Pastoral Staff, the bishop's ministry is repeatedly described using shepherd imagery. The bishop is commissioned to protect the faithful from error, reconcile sinners, strengthen the weak and guide the Church toward salvation.[492] Such language reflects the growing Pastoral theology that would eventually require qn external symbol expressing these responsibilities.

---

[490] Eric Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books from the Beginning to the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville Minessota: Liturgical Press, 1998) 52.
[491] Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, (ed.), *Sacramentarium Veronense* (Codex Veronense LXXXV), Ecclesiasticarum Documenta, Series Maior 1, (Rome: Herder, 1956), xx.
[492] Henry A. Wilson, ed., *The Gelasian Sacramentary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), 22.

3.4.2.1.3 The Gregorian Sacramentary

The Gregorian Sacramentary which is closely associated with the pontificate of Gregory I contains prayers for episcopal consecration without mentioning the ceremonial presentation of the crozier. Nevertheless, the prayers used during the consecration of a bishop strongly emphasize vigilance over the flock, fidelity to the apostolic teaching, Pastoral governance, care for the poor and holiness of life.[493] These theological themes were of immense importance during the Carolingian reforms as they became increasingly accompanied by visible liturgical symbols which included the Pastoral Staff, episcopal ring and later the mitre during the episcopal consecration.

3.4.3 The Current Rite of the Ordination of a Bishop

The rite of the ordination of a bishop is contained in the Roman Pontifical and it takes place within the celebration of the Eucharist. This ordination is presided over by an archbishop appointed by the Holy See. He has to be assisted by at least two bishops a reflection of the collegial nature of the episcopate and preserving apostolic succession.[494] The Code of Canon Law requires that, unless there be a special exception granted by the Roman Pontiff, there has to be at least three bishops participating in the ordination.[495]

The symbolism of the Staff is clearly revealed during the episcopal ordination. After the prayer of consecration or ordination and the anointing with Chrism on the head, the newly ordained is presented with the Staff as a symbol of his new Pastoral role.[496] The accompanying words in

---

[493] Jean Deshusses, ed., *Le Sacramentaire Grégorien: Ses Principales forms d'après les plus anciens manuscrits,* 3 vols. (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1971-1982), Vol. 1, 98.
[494] The Roman Pontifical: *Rite of Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests, and of Deacons* (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1989), 33-35.
[495] CIC, no. 1014.
[496] *Catholic Church, Roman Pontifical: Rite of Ordination of a Bishop* (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1990), n. 47.

the prayer of ordination invites the bishop to be vigilant and carefully guide the flock entrusted to him thereby underlining the fact that episcopal authority is not political or juridical but fundamentally Pastoral in its orientation. The Staff symbolizes participation in the role of Christ the Good Shepherd (Jn10:11) as he is entrusted with role of leading the local Church as a visible sign of apostolic continuity.

3.4.3.1 Liturgical Celebration

The liturgical celebration begins with the presentation of the bishop elect and reading of the Apostolic Letter from the Pope authorizing the ordination.[497] After the homily, the bishop elect makes promises of fidelity to the Church and obedience to the Roman Pontiff and his successors. This is followed by litany of the Saints while the candidates prostrate, a gesture of humility and total submission and dependence upon God's grace.[498]

The essential rite of episcopal ordination consists of the laying on of hands by the ordaining bishops and the Prayer of Ordination. Through these actions, the Holy Spirit is invoked and the fullness of the priesthood is conferred upon the candidate.[499]The Catechism teaches that this sacramental act imprints an indelible spiritual character and configures the bishop to Christ as Teacher, Shepherd, and High Priest.[500]

Then, there follows several explanatory rites in which the newly ordained bishop is anointed on the head with sacred chrism, signifying participation in Christ's priesthood and the

[497] The Roman Pontifical, no. 38.
[498] The Roman Pontifical, no. 42.
[499] *Lumen Gentium* 21.
[500] CCC 1582.

abundance of the Holy Spirit.[501] He is then presented with the Book of the Gospels, a symbol of his duty to proclaim and safeguard the Word of God. Then, the ring is placed on his figure as a sign of total fidelity to the Church, his bride; the mitre is placed on his head as a symbol of holiness and the call to strive for sanctity; and finally, the Pastoral Staff is handed to him as the emblem of his office as a shepherd of the flock entrusted to his care. After this, the bishop is then led to the cathedra, his official chair which symbolizes authority to teach and govern the diocese.[502]

3.4.3.2 Handing over the Pastoral Staff

The Pastoral Staff is an ecclesiastical ornament given to a bishop at his ordination and is used in solemn Pastoral functions.[503] It is a symbol of ecclesiastical power which usually designates the role of the bishop or abbot.[504] In fact, the only time they were seen carried by a prelate or a pope is during the crossing of the threshold of a holy door during the great jubilee year 2000 by Saint Pope John Paul II.[505]

This insignia represents the bishop's Pastoral office as a shepherd of the flock of God's people entrusted to him.[506] At the handing over of the crozier, the ordaining minister says, "Receive

[501] The Roman Pontifical 53.
[502] Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-inspiring Rites of Initiation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994) 2010
[503] Catholic Encyclopedia, Crosier, Retrieved from https://www.catholicity.com/encyclopedia/c/crosier.html, (accessed on 11.7.2025).
[504] The Value of the pastoral staff in Catholic Symbolism, Retrieved from https://www.holyart.com/blog/church-supplies/value-pastoral-staff-catholic-symbolism/, (accessed on 11.7.2025).
[505] Shawn Tribe, *The History, Forms, Symbolism of the Crosier*, Retrieved from: https://www.liturgicalartsjournal.com/2023/09/the-history-forms-and-symbolism-of.html, Retrieved on 17.7.2025.
[506] Bishop Manuel, Symbols of a Bishop: Diocese of Palm Beach, Retrieved from, https://www.diocesepb.org/about-us/bishop/symbols-of-a-bishop/symbols-of-a-bishop.html, (accessed on 21.7.2025).

the Staff, the sign of your Pastoral office…"[507] The significance of such symbols is to render visible the invisible reality of ecclesial ministry.[508]

3.4.3.3 Dimensions, Material, Shape, and Form of the Pastoral Staff

3.4.3.3.1 Dimensions

The Church has clear liturgical norms regarding the use and symbolism of the Pastoral Staff but she doesn't have a universal canonical legislation prescribing its exact dimensions. Due to this, the size and proportions of the Staff vary according to historical traditions, artistic styles, regional customs, and stature of the bishop who uses it.[509]

In contemporary practice, the Pastoral Staff generally measures between 1.5 and 1.8 meters in height. Such dimensions enable the bishop to hold the Staff comfortably while walking in procession and wile presiding over liturgical cerebrations. The Staff is made in way that its upper curved portion reaches approximately his shoulder or slightly above, thereby ensuring both functionality and visual balance.

3.4.3.3.2 Material

Until the reforms of Vatican II, the Staff was for the most part made of ivory and wood, which were joined together by a knop of crystal and gilt.[510] The upper part was made of ivory, which extended to the crooked part of the Staff, while the wooden part had an iron point. The ivory

[507] Roman Pontifical no. 62.
[508] Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, (2000), 84.
[509] Herbert Norris, *Church Vestments: Their Origin & Development*, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1950), 121.
[510] Passmore, T. H., *The Sacred Vestments*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1899), 112.

symbolizes the severity of the law and the wood the gentleness of the Gospel, while the knop, which joins the two parts, points to the divinity of Christ.[511]

3.4.3.3.3 Shape and Form

Just like other liturgical vestments of a bishop, the Pastoral Staff or crosier has undergone evolutions and variations. The dominance of the classic "crook" has taken an upper hand because until today the Staff has retained the form of a crook. Here, we refer to the Staff that is curved at the top resembling the shepherd's Staff.[512] Another form which the Staff took is the ferula in Latin which translate to "rod" and which did not have a curved top but rather a knob surmounted by a cross. This ferula form of the Staff is what the pope carries (the cross is dominant or larger than the orb) though the regular use of the ferula by the Pope today is a new development since formerly its use was quite constrained. The practice of this frequent use came about with Pope Paul the VI.[513]

3.5 The Symbolism of the Pastoral Staff

First and foremost, the Pastoral Staff symbolizes the ecclesiastical power the bearer possesses which is manifested in the role the bishop plays in the Church. It also symbolizes a scepter an object of solemn investiture though its origins are simple.[514] With its association with shepherds, where it is referred to as shepherds rod (crook), a derivation from the Latin '*baculus*

[511] HolyBlog, Retrieved from https://www.holyart.com/blog/church-supplies/value-pastoral-staff-catholic-symbolism/, (accessed on 25.7.2025).
[512] HolyBlog, Retrieved from https://www.holyart.com/blog/church-supplies/value-pastoral-staff-catholic-symbolism/, (accessed on 5.8.2025).
[513] Shawn Tribe, Retrieved fom https://www.liturgicalartsjournal.com/2023/09/the-history-forms-and-symbolism-of.html, (accessed on 22.8.2025).
[514] *The Value of the Pastoral Staff in Catholic Symbolism*, Retrieved from https://www.holyart.com/blog/church-supplies/value-pastoral-staff-catholic-symbolism/, (accessed on 225.8.2025).

Pastoralis', a stick which has one end bent in order to make it easy for the shepherd to grab the sheep without harming it. Thus, it is a symbolic stick which points to a good ecclesiastical government geared towards leading the flock of God to salvation. The sharp end is meant to prod the lazy and the unrepentant while the curve is meant to attract repentant and lost sinners.[515]

Viewing the Staff from the perspective of its bearer the bishop, we may say that the ivory refers to the severity of the bishop and the wood to his gentleness and these two segments of the Staff are joined by the bond of charity.[516] This is extremely important because the sternness or mildness of the bishop would exceedingly lack if either is held without the other. At the bottom end, the iron is blunt because it points a scenario where justice is tempered with mercy.[517] The crooked nature of the Staff signifies the recalling of the contrite into penance. We sometimes have a curve which takes the shape of a human head because eternal life is promised to those that turn to God. The following words may in some instances be found written round the curved part: *Cum iratus fueris misericordiae recordaberis* (In your wrath remember mercy, Hab. 3:2). This petition is meant for the shepherd who by reason of the relapsing of his flock to former way, his wrath should becloud the eyes of his reason.

Sometimes, on the knop is written the word HOMO which serves as a reminder to the bishop that after all he is a man and should be wary of the temptation of getting puffed up with power bestowed upon him.[518] The end of the Staff is sharp, straight in the middle and crooked at

[515] *The Value of the Pastoral Staff in Catholic Symbolism*, Retrieved from https://www.holyart.com/blog/church-supplies/value-pastoral-staff-catholic-symbolism/, (accessed on 30.8.2025).
[516] Passmore, T. H., *The Sacred Vestments*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1899), 112.
[517] Passmore, T. H., *The Sacred Vestments*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1899), 113.
[518] Passmore, T. H., *The Sacred Vestments*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1899), 113.

the top. This structure means that the bishop ought to goad or encourage the idle or lazy sheep to remain awake and vigilant, direct the weak with his own righteousness and gather the wanderers.[519]

The Staff, as we have seen, is derived from the Old Testament and the New Testament, where it is identified in different names based on the function, such as the Staff, the crook, the rod and even the scepter.[520] We have already encountered Moses with the Staff, which he had by the commandment of God. Through this Staff, he was able to perform miraculous deeds both in sea and sky, bringing food from heaven and water from the rock as he steered the chosen people to the land flowing with milk and honey.[521]

Given its shape and form, we may rightly say that the Pastoral Staff is a doctrinal authority because by it, the weak are sustained, the restless rallied, and the erring drawn to repentance.[522] Thus, it is called *Pedum*, the Crook, in reference to its curved nature which made it easy for the shepherds to draw back their herds by the feet.[523]

3.6 Usage of Pastoral Staff in Liturgical Celebrations

The Pastoral Staff (crozier) is one of the most significant episcopal insignia symbolizing the role of the bishop as the shepherd of the people of God. Its use in the liturgy is not therefore decorative but deeply integrated into the liturgical life of the Church. It appears in a range of

[519] Passmore, T. H., *The Sacred Vestments*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1899), 114.
[520] Passmore, T. H., *The Sacred Vestments*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1899), 111.
[521] Joshua 5:6
[522] Passmore, T. H., *The Sacred Vestments*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1899), 111.
[523] Passmore, T. H., *The Sacred Vestments*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1899), 111.

liturgical celebrations presided over by the bishop where it signifies his authority to teach, sanctify, and govern the local Church.[524]

3.6.1 The Pastoral Staff in the Celebration of the Eucharist

The Pastoral Staff is prominently used in the pontifical Mass where the bishop presides at the Eucharistic celebration. During the celebration the Pastoral Staff is typically carried: During the entrance procession, at the proclamation of the Gospel, at the giving of the homily, and at the final blessing on persons unless the blessing includes the laying on of hands.[525] The use of the Pastoral Staff at these instances within the celebration of Mass emphasizes the bishop's role as shepherd leading the community in worship.

3.6.2 Ordination of Priests and Deacons

In the ordination of priests and deacons, the bishop carries the Pastoral Staff to highlight his role as source of the ministerial authority in the local Church.[526] Although those to be ordained do not touch or receive the Pastoral Staff, the bishop's use of it signifies the continuity of the apostolic ministry and the delegation of Pastoral responsibility.

3.6.3 Confirmation

During the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation, presided over by the bishop, the crozier is used as a sign of his Pastoral oversight.[527] In this instance, the presence of the Staff

[524] *Ceremonial of Bishops* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1989), 59
[525] *Ceremonial of Bishops* no. 59
[526] *Ceremonial of Bishops* no. 502
[527] Ceremonial of Bishops 458.

underscores the bishop's role as the successor of the apostles and the ordinary minister of confirmation.[528]

3.6.4 Dedication of a Church and Altar

According to the rite of the dedication of a church and an altar, the bishop presides carrying the Staff in his hand as a symbol of his authority over the sacred space and the local community.[529] In this context the Pastoral Staff expresses the bishop's role as the guardian of the liturgical life of the diocese and his singular responsibility to consecrate sacred spaces.

The rite does not mention the exact thing that the bishop has to with the Pastoral Staff. But the same rite has left a room for adapting it to various situations. It is in this spirit of adaptation that the bishops in Kenya while carrying out the sacred duty of dedicating a Church use the Pastoral Staff to knock the door which until then is closed with the tip of the Pastoral Staff three time before having the door opened (video available).

3.6.5 Pastoral Visitations

Whenever the bishop embarks on Pastoral visitation of his diocese, he often carries the Pastoral Staff in liturgical celebrations to reflect his role as the shepherd visiting his flock and the unity between him and the local community.[530]

[528] *CCC* 1313.
[529] Rite of Dedication of a Church and Altar (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1989), nos 7-10.
[530] Ceremonial of Bishops, 1177, though this number does not mention the pastoral staff as such but its comment on the role of the bishop in this context insinuates the presence of the crozier

3.6.6 Religious Profession

In a situation where the bishop is the one receiving the vows and promises or a profession of faith, he holds the Staff in his hands or it is held near him by an altar server.[531]

3.7 Liturgical Norms Governing the use of the Pastoral Staff

Since the Church is a society governed by laws and regulations, the use of the Pastoral Staff is regulated by liturgical norms. These norms are clearly expressed in the Ceremonial of Bishops where is states that: the bishop is to use the Pastoral Staff within his own diocese, held in the left hand, leaving the right hand free to bestow blessing, and it is used at specific moments not continuously.[532] The observance of these norms ensure that the Pastoral Staff retains its symbolic clarity and dignity. In the Catholic liturgy presided over by the local ordinary of the diocese, the Pastoral Staff is among the most significant insignia of the episcopal office. Its liturgical use is not merely ornamental but profoundly symbolic, expressing the bishop's participation in the shepherding ministry of Christ, the Pastor Bonus.

The bishop carries the Staff in specific liturgical celebrations to signify his office of governance, teaching and sanctification of God's people. The Ceremonial of Bishops explicitly identifies the Staff as the sign of the bishop's Pastoral office. Where the local bishop is the principal presider, the Staff is a visible sign pointing out to the bishop's office as shepherd, teacher and leader of the local Church. Apart from its symbolic meaning, it also carries a profound theological meaning in which it presents the bishop as participating in in Christ's Pastoral ministry as the Good

[531] Ceremonial of Bishops 59.
[532] Ceremonial of Bishops 59

Shepherd. The following are the liturgical contexts in which the bishop carries the Staff through which his relationship to the people of God entrusted to his care is brought forth.[533]

3.8 The Pope and the Pastoral Staff

In the tradition of the Church, the pope did not carry the Pastoral Staff, not even the Pastoral Staff as part of his liturgy.[534] This is supported by the *Ordines Romani* (Roman Ordinals) which say nothing about the use of it in the Papal Mass. The Roman Ordinals opines that in the early days of the Church, the Staff was carried on some occasions by the pope but come the time of pope innocent III, the practice disappeared simply because he believed as affirmed in his writing *De Sacro altaris mysterio*, "Concerning the Sacred Mystery of the Altar, I, 62, that, "The Roman Pontiff does not use the shepherd's Staff."[535]

There are two reasons fronted as to why the pope never used the Pastoral Staff. One reason is historical and the other one is mystical. The historical reason states that, the Apostle Peter sent his disciple Martial together with others to go and take the Good News to the Germans. On the way, one of them Frontus, died, and Martial decided to returned to inform Peter of this sad development. In response, Peter said to him, "take this Staff and touch him with it, and say, In the Name of the Lord arise and preach. Upon getting back to where the body of Frontus was kept, he did as direct by Peter and though was fortieth day after his death, the moment the Staff touched

[533] Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 16-188.
[534] *Sacred Vestments*, Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/jaroACECAT/posts/liturgicat-no-35sacred-vestmentspapal-ferulacatechesisthe-papal-ferula-from-lati/463568415461164/, (accessed 7.9.2025).
[535] *Papal ferula*, Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papal_ferula, (accessed 7.3.2025).

him, he arose and continued with the mission of preaching the Good News. This way, Peter put away his Staff by passing to the flock and never recovered it again.[536]

On the other hand, writing in the *Speculum Ecclesiae*, Pope Innocent III asserts that the Apostle Peter sent his Staff to Eucherius who was the first bishop of Treves whom he appointed together with Valerius and Maternus to preach the Gospel to the Teutonic people. After the death of Eucherius, Maternus who had had been raised from the dead by Peter's Staff succeeded him. To date, this Staff is in the Church of Treves with profound veneration. This disciple was miraculously healed and went on to become the bishop of Treves.[537]

The second reason was seen to appeal to because the Staff is given by the metropolitan archbishop to a newly ordained bishop during investiture as the rite of ordination of the bishop stipulates. On the contrary, the pope does not get investiture from another bishop except that he is invested with the pallium at his coronation or inauguration. Throughout the centuries of the Church, the popes never used the Staff for the reason given above until the pontificate of Pope Paul VI who brought it back to the liturgy and other celebrations presided over by the bishop. Thus, the Pope being the bishop of the diocese of Rome had to carry his Pastoral Staff like other bishops.[538]

From the outset, we would like to state that not every Staff is a 'Pastoral Staff or a crosier. What is meant by this is that, among archbishops and the Roman Pontiff respectively, they have

[536] Passmore, T. H., *The Sacred Vestments*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1899), 115.
[537] St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Question 40: *Whether the Vestments of the Ministers are fittingly instituted in the Church?*, Retrieved from https://www.wisdomlib.org/christianity/book/summa-theologica-english-translation/d/doc1565121.html, (accessed on 10.10.2025).
[538] Shawn Tribe, Retrieved from https://www.liturgicalartsjournal.com/2023/09/the-history-forms-and-symbolism-of.html, (accessed 25.10.2025).

the privilege of using the archiepiscopal or patriarchal cross in some occasions, though not the practice everywhere.[539] Despite their majestic appearance, they are not our focus in this study. They are symbols of high rank and in fact, processional crosses.

3.9 Theology of the Pastoral Staff in the Rite of the Episcopal Ordination

The Pastoral Staff is one of the principal insignia entrusted to a bishop during the Rite of Ordination of a bishop. Together with the ring and the mitre, it signifies the bishop's participation in the Pastoral ministry of Christ, the Good Shepherd. The presentation of the Pastoral Staff is not merely ceremonial but sacramental in character, expressing visibly the bishop's office of teaching, sanctifying and governing the people of God. Through this liturgical action, the Church manifests that episcopal authority is fundamentally Pastoral, exercised in chrity, humility and service rarher thandomination.[540]

The theological foundation of the Pastoral Staff derives from Sacred Scripture, where the shepherd's Staff symbolizes divine guidance, protection, correction and leadership. In the Old Testament, Moses' Staff became the instrument through which God liberated Israel (4:2-5; 14:16), while Psalm 23 presents the shepherd's rod and Staff as signs of God's comforting presence: "Your rod and Staff – they comfort me" (Ps. 23:14). These biblical images culminate in Jesus Christ, who identifies himself as the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep, lays down his life for them, and

[539] See in the Appendix Photos of the Archbishop of Santiago de Compostella a two barred staff while St. Pope John Paul the Second is holding one with three bars.
[540] *Pontificale Romanum*, The Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests and Deacons, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), 55.

gathers them into one flock (Jn 10:11-16). Consequently, every bishop receives the Pastoral Staff as a sacramental sign of participation in the shepherding ministry of Christ himself.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the symbolism of the Staff constitutes a significant thread linking the biblical tradition with the life and ministry of the Church. In the Bible, the Staff appear as a multifaceted symbol associated with authority, divine election, protection, guidance, and Pastoral responsibility. From the patriarchs and shepherds of Israel to Moses, Aaron, kings, and prophets, the Staff functioned not merely as a practical instrument but as a visible sign of God's presence and power working through human leaders. It expressed the vocation of those called to guide God's people and served as a reminder that authentic leadership is exercised in obedience to the divine will.

The New Testament deepens this symbolism by presenting Jesus as the Good Shepherd who gathers, protects, and leads His flock. Although the physical Staff is mentioned less frequently, the shepherd imagery reaches its fullest theological expression in Christ, whose Pastoral mission becomes the model for all Christiaan ministry. The shepherd's role of guiding, caring for, and seeking the lost becomes the foundation upon which the Church understands ecclesial leadership.

Within the Catholic tradition, this rich biblical heritage is embodied in the crozier, the Pastoral Staff carried by bishops during the liturgical celebrations. The crozier serves as a visible sign of the shepherding office entrusted to the bishop through the episcopal ordination. Its symbolism reflects the bishop's responsibility to teach, sanctify, and govern the people of God in

communion with the universal Church. The crozier expresses the continuing Pastoral ministry of Christ exercised through the Church's ordained leaders.

The continuity between the biblical Staff and the crozier illustrates the Church's capacity to preserve and reinterpret biblical symbols within changing historical contexts. While the form and usage of the Staff have evolved, its essential meaning remains remarkably consistent: leadership exercised in service, authority grounded in divine commission, and care directed toward the well-being of God's people. The crozier thus stands as a living witness to the enduring relevance of biblical symbolism in the Church's liturgical and Pastoral life.

In light of these observations, the Staff emerges as a powerful theological symbol that connects the Bible and the Tradition. It reveals that authentic authority in both Israel and the Church is fundamentally Pastoral, ordered toward guidance, protection, unity, and service. The biblical Staff and the episcopal crozier ultimately point beyond themselves to Christ, the eternal Shepherd, from whom Pastoral ministry derives its meaning and legitimacy. Through this continuity, the Church affirms that the mission entrusted to the shepherds of God's people in biblical times continues today in the ministry of those called to lead the faithful in the name of Christ and for the building of His Kingdom. The next chapter is an exposition towards liturgical inculturation of the Pastoral Staff among the *Agĩkũyũ*.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE *MŨTHĨGI* AND THE PASTORAL STAFF

Introduction

This chapter presents a comparative study between the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders and the Pastoral Staff of the bishop. It examines how two symbols from different cultural and religious contexts communicate ideas of authority, leadership, guidance, service and responsibility. It identifies areas of convergence and distinction between the two symbols from cultural, theological, pastoral and liturgical perspectives. It also explores the concept of inculturation and considers how the values expressed through the Mũthĩgi may contribute to a deeper cultural understanding of episcopal ministry without compromising Catholic doctrine and liturgical tradition.

Throughout the history of Christianity, it has been proven that the Gospel becomes most fruitful when, after encountering a certain cultural reality of a certain people, it transforms it without destroying the identity of those people. From the apostolic period to the present age, the Church has never ceased to seek ways of expressing the Christian faith through local languages, customs, symbols, and institutions. This process which is known as inculturation received renewed emphasize during the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council which encouraged adaptations in the liturgy while preserving the unity of the Roman Rite.[541] With this declaration, the Church recognizes culture not as an obstacle to evangelization but as a privileged locus through which the mystery of Christ can be encountered and celebrated.

[541] Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1963), 37-40.

Among the *Agĩkũyũ* symbols occupy a central place in social, religious, and communal life. One such symbol is the *Mũthĩgi*, the Staff carried by elders as a sign of authority, wisdom, reconciliation, and communal leadership. The *Mũthĩgi* in not merely a walking stick but a visible expression of the elder's responsibility to preserve harmony, mediate disputes, and safeguards th traditions of the community. Its symbolic significance closely parallels several functions traditionally associated with the bishop's participation in the shepherding ministry of Christ and his responsibility to guide, teach and govern the people of God.

This chapter, therefore, examines the possibilities of liturgically inculturating the Pastoral Staff among the *Agĩkũyũ*. It explores how the theological symbolism of the bishop's crozier may enter into dialogue with the cultural symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* and offers ways in which this encounter can enrich the liturgical life of the Church while safeguarding ecclesial unity and doctrinal integrity. Ultimately, this chapter argues that an inculturated Pastoral Staff can serve as a visible sign of the successful encounter between the Catholic faith and the *Agĩkũyũ* culture, demonstrating that the Gospel truly becomes incarnate within the lived experience of the people.

For purposes of this chapter, the comparative and theological discussion is interpreted together with the field responses gathered from clergy, a seminarian, a catechist, lay faithful and recognised Agĩkũyũ elders. The responses were read thematically rather than statistically because the interviews sought meanings, experiences and judgements concerning the Mũthĩgi, episcopal leadership and the possibility of liturgical inculturation. The recurring themes were legitimate authority, guidance, service, ritual communication, cultural identity, catechesis, artistic adaptation and the need for theological discernment.

The qualitative evidence does not present the *Mũthĩgi* and the Pastoral Staff as identical objects. Instead, the participants repeatedly identified areas where the cultural meaning of the

Mũthĩgi could help the faithful understand dimensions of the bishop's ministry. At the same time, their responses point to the need to retain the specifically Christian and episcopal meaning of the Pastoral Staff. This interpretive balance guides the analysis that follows.

4.1 Comparative Study: The *Mũthĩgi* and the Pastoral Staff

The *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder and the Pastoral Staff (crozier) of the Catholic Bishop are among the most significant symbols of leadership within their respective traditions. Although they originate from different historical, cultural and theological contexts, both Staffs function as visible signs of authority, service, responsibility and guidance. The following comparative study reveals the points of convergence and divergence that are essential for evaluating the possibility of liturgical inculturation. Rather than equating the two symbols, this comparison seeks to identify authentic cultural values embodied in the *Mũthĩgi* that may enrich the Church's understanding and expression of the episcopal Pastoral office.

4.1.1 Similarities

Although the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder and the Pastoral Staff (crozier) of the catholic bishop originate from different religious and cultural contexts, both objects function as perceptible symbols of authority, leadership, wisdom, service and continuity within their respective communities. The *Mũthĩgi* embodies the social and spiritual responsibilities of *Agĩkũyũ* elderhood, while the crozier represents the bishop's Pastoral ministry as a shepherd of God's people.

4.1.1.1 Both are Symbols of Legitimate Authority

Both Mũthĩgi and the Pastoral Staff function as visible and tangible symbols of legitimate authority recognized and legitimate.[542] In the *Agĩkũyũ* community, the *Mũthĩgi* has always been associated with elderhood and identifies a person who has attained recognized elderhood and participates in communal decision-making. Within this context, it signifies maturity, wisdom and legitimate communal authority. [543] The possession of the Staff signifies legitimate authority acquired through age, initiation, experience and acceptance by the community. It is a public statement that manifests the elder's responsibility to guide, resolve conflicts of whatever nature when they arise, and preserver order in the community.[544]

Similarly, in the Catholic tradition, the crozier is the *insignium* of the office of the bishop which reflects and signifies his authority as a shepherd of ecclesiastical jurisdiction of a local Church.[545] At the episcopal ordination the bishop receives the Pastoral Staff as a sign of his role expressed in *Lumen Gentium* which presents the bishop as one who teaches, sanctifies, and governs the flock of God entrusted to him.[546] In both traditions, therefore, the Staff is not merely an ornament but a visible sign of office and responsibility.

> The interview evidence strengthens this comparison at the level of lived meaning. A Kĩama elder respondent explained that traditional gestures performed with the Mũthĩgi during deliberation and settlement of disputes make authority visible to the community. In his assessment, carefully interpreted forms of this symbolism could deepen local comprehension of the bishop's judicial and Pastoral responsibility.[547] His response is important because it shifts the comparison from external resemblance to the social meaning

[542] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Tradition of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 115
[543] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1978), 110.
[544] Godfrey Muriuki, A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900 (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1974), 127
[545] Ceremonial of Bishops (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1984), 59.
[546] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, in *AAS* 57 ((Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), 27.
[547] John Kĩmani wa Mũrũgũ, interviewed, Nakuru, 20.2.2026.

> attached to legitimate authority. The Staff communicates that authority has been entrusted to a recognised person for the good and order of the community.

4.1.1.2 Both Represent Leadership and Guidance

Traditionally, the *Agĩkũyũ* elders guided the community in matters of justice, reconciliation, rituals, and social order. The *Mũthĩgi* thus became a symbol of leadership exercised for the common good.[548]

Similarly, the Pastoral Staff of a bishop conveys and expresses Pastoral guidance which is deeply rooted in the biblical image of the shepherd. The image of Christ as the Good Shepherd as mentioned in John 10:11 is sacramentary extended to the bishop at his consecration and ordination when his he is given the Staff with the duty to lead the faithful in truth and holiness.[549] The symbol of guidance symbolized by the two Staffs communicate the fact that each individual though from different cultural outlooks is called to lead to exercise responsible leadership.[550]

> A similar concern emerged from a priest respondent, who described the prevailing Western form of the episcopal crozier as only "somewhat" adapted to local Pastoral realities.[551] His response suggests that the problem is not the absence of theological meaning in the crozier, but the distance that may exist between that meaning and the cultural imagination of some Agĩkũyũ faithful. Qualitatively, this points to a communication gap. A Mũthĩgi-inspired design could therefore function as a cultural bridge through which guidance and responsible leadership are more immediately recognised, while catechesis preserves the Christian meaning of the bishop as shepherd.

[548] L. S. B. Leakey, The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903, Vol. 3 (1977), 1112.
[549] Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 20033), 115
[550] George Kuria Kiarie, "Theological Impediments to Inculturation of the Eucharistic Symbols in the Anglican Church of Kenya", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 45, no. 1 (2019): 9
[551] Lawrence Mbugua, interviewed, Murang'a, 24.2.2026.

4.1.1.3 Both Express Service Rather than Domination

Traditionally, the *Agĩkũyũ* leadership was based on wisdom, consensus and service to the clan rather than coercive power.[552] The elder's authority existed for the welfare of the community. Likewise, the Catholic theology understands the episcopal authority as Pastoral service. The bishop is called to imitate Christ who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mk. 10:45). The crozier therefore symbolizes Pastoral care rather than political domination.[553]

> The theme of service was also evident in the interviews concerning preparation for elderhood. A seminarian respondent compared the careful vetting of candidates for the Kĩama with the scrutiny applied to candidates for Holy Orders.[554] a priest respondent further observed that the humble service expected during the earlier stages of Kĩama formation has a meaningful parallel with seminary formation and the transitional diaconate, where service precedes the assumption of greater spiritual responsibility.[555] These responses do not equate the two institutions. Rather, they reveal a shared moral principle: recognised leadership should emerge from formation, testing of character and demonstrated service, not from self-assertion.

4.1.1.4 Both function within Ritual Context

The Mũthĩgi is carried by the elders during important ceremonies such as sacrifices, prayers for rain, reconciliation rites, and meetings of council of elders.[556] It therefore possesses ritual significance. Likewise, the Pastoral Staff is used in liturgical celebrations, episcopal ordinations, confirmations, processions, and other solemn rites of the Church.[557] In both cases, the Staff serves as a sacred symbol within communal worship and ceremonial life.

> The ritual dimension was especially clear in the testimony of an elderly lay respondent. Reflecting on Agĩkũyũ life-cycle ceremonies, she described the presence of the Mũthĩgi as

[552] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (1990), 174.
[553] Lumen Gentium 27
[554] Dominic Mbugua Kamau, interviewed, Nairobi, 14.12.2025.
[555] Rev. Fr. Linus Mwangi Mugo, interviewed, 19.2.2026.
[556] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903*, Vol. 3, (1977), 1028.
[557] Peter J. Elliott, *Ceremonies of the Modern Roman Rite*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 174 (#470).

a powerful visual anchor of continuity and communal memory even when the person at the centre of the rite did not physically handle the Staff.[558] Her response shows how a symbol can communicate before it is verbally explained. This is relevant to liturgical inculturation because Catholic worship also communicates through visible signs. A bishop respondent similarly observed that carefully chosen traditional gestures and symbols can become deeply communicative within solemn celebrations when they are accompanied by proper catechesis.[559] Together, these responses support adaptation that is both symbolic and educational rather than merely decorative.

4.1.1.5 Both Express Protection and Correction of the Community

The *Agĩkũyũ* elders protected the unity and welfare of the clan through mediation, conflict resolution, and preservation of social harmony. [560] In Christian symbolism, the bishop's crozier reflects the shepherd's responsibility to defend the flock against spiritual dangers and maintain ecclesial unity. Medieval liturgical theologians saw the bishop's Staff as an instrument for recalling the wondering sheep and correcting error.[561] This symbolism became especially explicit in mediaeval liturgical theology through the writings William Durandus.[562] Consequently, both Staffs symbolize guardianship and care. Though he does not refer to the symbols of Mũthĩgi and the Pastoral Staff as such, Benezet Bujo is of the idea that such symbols carry the idea of protection and correction as elements which are necessary in any community.[563]

4.1.1.6 Both Carry Profound Spiritual Significance

Among the *Agĩkũyũ,* elderhood possessed religious dimensions because elders presided over sacrifices and prayers directed to Ngai.[564] Consequently, the *Mũthĩgi* became associated with sacred responsibilities. In Christianity, the crozier signifies the bishop's participation in the

[558] Grace Mumbi, interviewed, Nakuru, April 22, 2026.
[559] George Muthaka, interviewed, Garissa, 18.2.2026.
[560] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (1990), 206.
[561] Pontificale Romanum, *De Consecratione Electi in Episcoporum*, 77.
[562] William Durandus, *Rationele Divinorum Officiorum*, III, xv.
[563] Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 22.
[564] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1938), 255

Pastoral ministry of Christ and his spiritual responsibility toward the people of God.[565] Therefore, both Staffs transcend their material form and point to spiritual realities.

4.1.1.7 Both Embody Moral Integrity

An elder who carries the Mũthĩgi is expected to be honest, trustworthy, impartial and of good morals. The vocation of a bishop is one which demands holiness of life and exemplary conduct as a successor of the apostles (1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:7-9). As a result, both Staffs points to the moral character required of their bearers.

4.1.2 Differences Between the Mũthĩgi and the Pastoral Staff

Despite the fact that the above section has outlined numerous symbolic similarities between the *Mũthĩgi* and the Pastoral Staff, there are also numerous differences which are occasioned by the fact that the two symbols arise from distinct historical, cultural, and theological context. These differences highlight the uniqueness of each symbol and provides a balanced foundation towards liturgical inculturation.

4.1.2.1 Their Distinct Origin

Looking at these two symbols, the most important difference lies in the origin and theological foundation.[566] The *Mũthĩgi* has its origin from the *Agĩkũyũ* socio-cultural and ritual tradition.[567] Its significance developed from traditional institutions of elderhood, communal governance, and ancestral customs.[568] It is therefore rooted in the *Agĩkũyũ* cultural heritage.

---

[565] Vatican II, *Christus Dominus*, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in *AAS* 58 (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1965), 11, AAS 58 (1966) 11.
[566] *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 37
[567] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 109
[568] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 179

By contrast, the Pastoral Staff developed gradually within the Christian tradition and became associated with the bishop's office from the early centuries of the Church. Its symbolism derives primarily from biblical images of shepherding and from the Pastoral ministry of Christ.[569] Its meaning is also rooted in apostolic succession, episcopal ordination, and the theology of the Church as the People of God.[570]

4.1.2.2 Source of Authority

The authority represented by the *Mũthĩgi* arises from age, initiation, moral integrity, family reputation, and communal recognition. The elder receives authority because the community acknowledges his wisdom and ability to preserve harmony and justice.[571] However, the Pastoral Staff, signifies authority received through episcopal ordination in apostolic succession. The bishop exercises authority not by virtue of age as such or clan status but through the sacrament of Holy Orders, by which he shares in the fullness of Christ's priesthood.[572]

4.1.2.3 Theological Foundation

The *Mũthĩgi* derives its meaning from *Agĩkũyũ* customs and religious beliefs concerning elders, community life, and the relationship with Ngai.[573] Its authority is cultural and communal rather than sacramental[574] as it represents social leadership, reconciliation, peace-making, judicial authority, blessing, and continuity with ancestors. Although it has religious significance within the *Agĩkũyũ* traditional religion, it does not symbolize participation in Christ's priesthood or the

[569] Ceremonial of Bishops no. 59
[570] *Christus Dominus*, 11
[571] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 175
[572] *Lumen Gentium* no. 20-27
[573] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (1990), 145.
[574] Muriuki, *History of the Kikuyu*, 127

sacramental life of the Church.[575] The Pastoral Staff, however, possesses specifically Christian theological meaning of Christological and ecclesiological symbolism. It represents Christ the Good Shepherd who guides, protects, and gathers the faithful. The bishop carries the Pastoral Staff as a visible sign of his Pastoral responsibility to sanctify, teach, and govern the people of God. It therefore signifies authority within the ecclesial body of Christ, especially the diocese.[576]

4.1.2.4 Ritual Function

The *Mũthĩgi* is employed in traditional ceremonies such as sacrifices, rites of reconciliation, customary assemblies, rites of passage, adjudication, and eldership rituals.[577] The Pastoral Staff is used exclusively within the Christian liturgical celebrations and ecclesiastical ceremonies such as Eucharistic celebration (processions from the sacristy, during the Gospel, during the homily), episcopal ordinations, confirmations, when receiving religious vows and promises or a profession of faith, blessings on a person where the laying of hands is not included, and dedication of a Church.[578] Thus, the ritual contexts in which each of the two Staffs are used are fundamentally different.

4.1.2.5 Differences in symbolic Design

In the *Agĩkũyũ* tradition, the Mũthĩgi is usually simple wooden Staff made from selected indigenous trees and reflects the practical simplicity of the *Agĩkũyũ* culture. Its form is generally functional rather that decorative. However, in most instances, the Pastoral Staff carries elaborate artistic designs. The curved upper end symbolizes the crook of the Staff of the shepherd and in

[575] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 185
[576] *Lumen Gentium* no. 27
[577] Benson Weru Maina, "*Agĩkũyũ* Cultural Eldership", 154.
[578] Ceremonial of Bishops 59.

most cases, it carries decorations that express Christian themes. Such precious metals and curves ornamentation are commonly use.

4.1.2.6 Material and Artistic Design

In the *Agĩkũyũ* tradition, the *Mũthĩgi* is usually a simple wooden Staff made from selected indigenous trees and reflects the practical simplicity of the *Agĩkũyũ* culture. Its appearance is generally simple, emphasizing function and tradition rather than elaborate ornamentation.[579] However, the Pastoral Staff is often made of wood or metal and it frequently carries elaborate artistic designs decorated with precious materials. The curved upper end recalls the shepherd's crook, while artistic designs often incorporate crosses, serpents, vines, lambs, or other Christian symbols reflecting biblical and theological themes.[580]

4.1.2.7 Universality

The *Mũthĩgi* is a cultural symbol that belongs specifically to the *Agĩkũyũ* people and reflects their particular historical experience. The Pastoral Staff on the other hand is a universal symbol used throughout the Catholic Church regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or culture. Its meaning transcends local traditions and serves the entire Christian community.

4.1.2.8 Jurisdiction

The authority symbolized by the *Mũthĩgi* is generally confined to a particular clan, village, or local council of elders. Its jurisdiction ids determined by kinship structures and customary

[579] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903*, (1977), 305.
[580] Adrian Fortescue, *The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1917), 75

law.[581] The Pastoral Staff on the other hand signifies the bishop's Pastoral jurisdiction over a diocese entrusted to him by the Church. His authority extends to all the faithful within that ecclesiastical territory regardless of ethnicity, clan, or family affiliation.[582]

4.1.2.9 Appointment

The *Mũthĩgi* is given to an *Agĩkũyũ* elder after satisfying cultural qualifications such as circumcision, moral integrity, and acceptance by fellow elders. Advancement occurs through successive age-grade systems and communal recognition.[583] However, the bishop receives the Pastoral Staff only after canonical appointment by the Pope and episcopal ordination according to the rites of the Catholic Church. The Pastoral Staff is formally presented during the rite of episcopal ordination as one of the episcopal insignia.[584]

4.1.3 Qualitative Interpretation of the Comparative Findings

The comparative evidence shows that respondents recognised real points of contact between Agĩkũyũ elderhood and episcopal ministry, but they did not remove the differences between them. The strongest points of convergence concern the moral and relational meaning of leadership. In both settings, the Staff is meaningful because the bearer has been entrusted with responsibility for others. It evokes guidance, social trust, protection, reconciliation and accountability. The distinction lies in the source, scope and theological end of the authority. The

[581] Leakey, *The Sothern Kikuyu before 1903*, (1977), 305.
[582] *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23
[583] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (1978), 169
[584] Rinaldo Ronzani, *Apostolic Ministries: Sacraments of Holy Orders*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2010), 170.

Mũthĩgi arises from Agĩkũyũ social and cultural institutions, whereas the episcopal Staff belongs to the sacramental and apostolic ministry of the Church.

> A Kĩama elder respondent offered a useful perspective on communal acceptance when he recalled that an outsider could historically be incorporated into Agĩkũyũ elderhood after demanding scrutiny and formal acceptance by the community.[585] In relation to Pastoral ministry, this suggests that the cultural category of elder can illuminate the ministry of a bishop even where the bishop is not ethnically Agĩkũyũ. The essential issue is not ethnic identity but whether the leader is recognised through service, moral credibility and responsibility towards the people. This prevents the proposed inculturation from becoming an ethnic claim over episcopal office.
>
> A priest respondent also drew attention to the capacity of a single Staff to carry more than one layer of meaning. Referring to a contemporary Agĩkũyũ example in which different forms of mĩthĩgi represented physical and spiritual responsibility, he considered such symbolic duality instructive for an inculturated Pastoral Staff.[586] This response suggests that the design of an inculturated crozier need not reproduce the Mũthĩgi literally. Instead, selected materials, forms or motifs can communicate the bishop's spiritual responsibility and his concrete Pastoral care for the community.

The qualitative interpretation of the similarities and differences therefore favours symbolic dialogue rather than substitution. The Mũthĩgi can provide a local cultural vocabulary for understanding authority, wisdom, reconciliation and service. The crozier must nevertheless remain an episcopal insignium whose primary reference is Christ the Good Shepherd, apostolic succession and the bishop's responsibility for the particular Church. The field evidence is thus most consistent with an inculturated crozier inspired by the Mũthĩgi rather than a simple replacement of the crozier by an unmodified traditional Staff.

4.2 Concepts of Inculturation and Liturgical Inculturation

In her quest to take the Gospel to the ends of the world as Jesus commanded, the Church has continued to encounter diverse cultures which has generated significant theological reflection between the Gospel and human societies. Within this reflection, two closely related but distinct

[585] James Kagona Mungai, interviewed, Karuri, 20.2.2026.
[586] Rev. Fr. Moses Mwangi, interviewed, Nyeri, 20.5.2026.

concepts emerge: inculturation and liturgical inculturation. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, liturgical inculturation constitute a particular application of a broader process of inculturation within the sphere of public worship.

4.2.1 The meaning of Inculturation

Though terms like *indigenization*, *contextualization*, *incarnation*, *reformation*, *adaptation* and *interculturation*[587] have been fronted as substitutes to the concept of inculturation, the term inculturation stands out as the only one that captures and expresses the understanding, presentation and interpretation regarding Christian beliefs from an African aspiration, needs, manner of thinking and mentality more distinctly and coherently.[588]

In the Catholic theology, inculturation points to the dynamic process by which the Gospel is communicated and become embodied within a given culture while, at the same time, the culture is purified, transformed and enriched by the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This process involves a reciprocal interaction between faith and culture, enabling the Gospel take root in local traditions, values, symbols, languages and social structures without losing. Pope John Paul II describes inculturation as "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity into the various human cultures."[589] With this attitude in mind inculturation seeks to ensure that the Gospel message becomes genuinely meaningful within local contexts while remaining faithful to the values of the Gospel.[590]

[587] Leonardo Boff, *New Evangelization: Good News to the Poor*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 89.
[588] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, "African Inculturation-Liberation Theology", in *African Christian Studies*, (CUEA, Vol. 8, no. 1, 1992), 45.
[589] John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), 52.
[590] Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 61.

Though the Church has always been involved in the process of inculturation in her mission and evangelization, the deliberations in the Second Vatican Council gave a new momentum to the term inculturation which since the conclusion of the Council has continued to attract a great theological, liturgical and Pastoral significance. The Council laid the foundation for this understanding by recognizing that the Church is not bound exclusively to any single cultural form. The Council affirmed that the Church can enrich herself through contact with different cultures and can adapt certain circumstances when these are compatible with faith.[591]
Consequently, inculturation extends beyond worship and include theology, spirituality, catechizes, education, ecclesiastical structures, music, art, and Pastoral practice.

In the African context, inculturation has been understood as a necessary response to the historical experience of evangelization. African theologians have argued that Christianity must speak through African cultural categories if it is to be fully meaningful to African people.[592] This broader vision of inculturation seeks the genuine integration of Christian faith into the lived experience of local community.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) marked a decisive moment in the Church's understanding of the relationship between the Gospel and human cultures. Although the Council did not use the term inculturation as such – a concept that became more fully developed in post conciliar theology – it laid the theological and liturgical foundations for what later came to be known as liturgical inculturation. Through its vision of the universality of the Church and its

[591] *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, in *AAS* 58, (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1966), 55.
[592] John Samuel Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in Africa*, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 34.

openness to cultural diversity, Vatican II encouraged the adaptation of liturgy to the traditions and genius of various peoples without compromising the unity and integrity of the Roman Rite.

4.2.1.1 *Sacrosanctum Concilium*

This constitution of Vatican II on the Sacred Liturgy, established the primary conciliar basis for liturgical inculturation. The concept of liturgical inculturation is based on the conviction that liturgy is both divine and human transcendent yet historically embodied. The Constitution on the sacred liturgy, without mentioning the word "inculturation" laid down (Articles 37-40) the foundational principles on how this process is to be realized when it declared that:

"Even in the liturgy the Church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community."[593]

Consequently, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* without obstacles openly allowed legitimate variations and adaptations according to the culture and traditions of particular peoples and regions, especially in mission territories, as long as the essential unity of the Roman Rite is preserved.[594] Such adaptations, however, were to be studied and approved by competent ecclesiastical authority to safeguard doctrinal integrity and liturgical unity.[595]

4.2.1.2 *Gaudium et Spes*

This Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* expanded the council's vision by presenting culture as an essential dimension of human existence. The document defined culture broadly as everything by which human beings develop their physical and spiritual capacities and humanize

[593] Austin Flannery (ed.), Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, in *AAS* 56 (1965), 37
[594] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 38.
[595] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 22.

social life.[596] It deepens this insight by affirming it as a "living exchange" between the Church and the various cultures of humanity, so that the Gospel can be expressed through the cultural forms of each people.[597]

The Council observed that the Gospel is not bound to any particular culture and therefore can enrich every people and civilization.[598] At the same time, the Church herself benefits from the interaction with different cultures because such encounters enable the Christian message to be expressed more effectively in diverse contexts.[599]

4.2.1.3 *Ad Gentes Divinitus*

The decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes,* further strengthens the theological basis for inculturation by exhorting that local Churches should draw from their own traditions, wisdoms, art, and customs those elements capable of glorifying God and enriching Christian life.[600]

According to the Council, the Gospel should take root in every culture in such a way that each local Church develops its own authentic expression of Christian life while remaining united with the universal Church.[601] Thus Christianity is not intended to replace cultures but to purify, elevate, and transform them through the saving work of Christ.

---

[596] *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 53.
[597] *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 44.
[598] *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 58.
[599] *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 44.
[600] Austin Flannery (ed.), Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*: Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, in *AAS* 58, (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1966), no. 22.
[601] *Ad Gentes*, no. 22

4.2.1.4 Post-Conciliar on Inculturation

Following the Council's deliberations that established the theological and Pastoral foundations for liturgical inculturations, subsequent magisterial teachings have made the concept clear and systematically developed. Popes, synods, and dicasteries have elaborated on the principles which govern the encounter between the Gospel and culture where emphasize is placed on fidelity to the Catholic tradition and openness to the legitimate values of local cultures. These pronouncements have transformed inculturation from a general conciliar principle in an essential dimension of the evangelizing mission and liturgical life of the Church.

4.2.1.5 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

In 1975 Pope Paul VI released one of the earliest post-conciliar Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi on "inculturation". Even though the term inculturation is not explicitly employed, Paul VI stressed that evangelization must penetrate cultures and transform them from within. He warns that the separation of the Gospel from culture constitutes one of the greatest challenges of modern evangelization.[602]

According to Paul VI, evangelization should not merely embellish cultures externally but should profoundly renew human values and cultural expressions in the light of the Gospel.[603] In fact, later reflections on inculturation were greatly informed by this teaching.

[602] Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern Word, in *AAS* 68 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana,1976) no. 20.
[603] *Evangelii Nuntiandi* no. 20

4.2.1.6 *Catechesi Tradendae*

In 1979, John Paul II released his Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* in which he gave definitive magisterial expression to the concept of evangelization. In this document the Pope describes catechesis as an effort to incarnate the Christian message within different cultures while preserving the integrity of the faith. [604]

4.2.1.7 *Redemptoris Missio*

In his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, of 1990, John Paul II offers one of the most elaborate and authoritative definition of inculturation by describing it as:

"… the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures."[605]

This definition highlights two complementary movements: first, the evangelization and purification of culture by the Gospel, and second, the enrichment of the Church through the gifts and values present in diverse cultures. Inculturation therefore represents a mutual exchange in which faith and culture interact creatively and fruitfully.

4.2.1.8 *Ecclesia in Africa*

In this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation John Paul II of 1995, the Pope termed inculturation as an "a priority and an urgent task in the life of the particular Churches" in African.[606] He regarded it as an essential requirement for rooting Christianity profoundly within

---

[604] John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in our Time, in *AAS* 71, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), 53.
[605] John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* Encyclical on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate, in *AAS* 83 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1991), no. 52.
[606] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa,* Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission, in *AAS* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1996), no. 59.

African societies and enabling Africans to express their faith through their own cultural categories.[607]

He went further insisted that inculturation should touch on all the dimensions of ecclesial life including theology, catechesis, spirituality and liturgy.[608] For Africa therefore, inculturation was presented by the holy father not as an optional Pastoral strategy but as a theological necessity. From this perspective, inculturation is not a mere adaptation or accommodation, rather, it is a profound encounter in which the Gospel penetrates a culture and becomes incarnate in its symbols, values, language, and institutions.[609] The document is therefore of the view that African symbols, music, gestures, and communal ritual structures may serve as authentic vehicles of Christian worship when subjected to theological discernment.[610]

> The field responses give practical content to this magisterial principle. The bishop respondent's insistence on careful catechesis indicates that the use of a local symbol must be interpreted within the faith of the Church rather than left to assumption. The respondents therefore reflect the two movements contained in the Church's teaching on inculturation: openness to authentic cultural values and discernment that protects the integrity of Christian worship. In the present study, this means that the Mũthĩgi is evaluated for the values it communicates and not simply because it is indigenous.[611]

4.3 John Paul II Message to the Bishops of Kenya

During his 1980 visit to Kenya, Pope Saint John Paul II, addressing the Kenyan bishops, said: “The inculturation that you rightly promote will truly be a reflection of the incarnation of

[607] *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 62
[608] *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 78
[609] Pedro Arrupe, “Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation,” in *Jesuit Primary Sources on Inculturation*, (ed.) Jerome Aixala, (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985), 172.
[610] *Ecclesia in Africa*, 79.
[611] George Muthaka, interview, 18.2.2026.

the Word when a culture, transformed and regenerated by the Gospel, produces from its own tradition original expressions of life, celebration, of Christian thought."[612]

Further, in this same encyclical the Pope continues to expound on the notion of inculturation where he says: "Inculturation means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human culture."[613]

In 1988, the International Theological Commission offered in its publication on Faith and Inculturation an equally important doctrinal clarification where it defines inculturation as deliberate effort undertaken by the Church "to make the message of Christ penetrate a given sociocultural milieu."[614]

4.4 African Theologians on Inculturation

There has been a good number of African theologians who have significantly developed the theology of inculturation and demonstrated that the Christian faith can take root authentically in african cultures without compromising the integrity of the Gospel. Their work has challenged earlier missionary approaches that often identified Christianity with European cultural forms and has contributed to a more contextual expression of Christian faith in Africa.

4.4.1 John S. Mbiti (2031-2019)

John S. Mbiti is a Kenyan theologian who has written widely on African religions and the coming of Christianity and is regarded as one of the pioneers of the African theology. He argues

[612] John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of Kenya, Retrieved from https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1980/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19800507_vescovi-kenya.html, (accessed 12.6.2026).
[613] *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 52.
[614] International Theological Commission, *Faith and Inculturation* (Rome: Vatican Press, 1988), no.11

that African peoples possessed a profound religious heritage that prepared them for the reception of the Gospel. According to Mbiti, African traditional religions contain values and beliefs that can serve as points of dialogue with Christianity. He maintains that Christianity should never attempt to stifle or destroy African cultures but should purify and elevate them through the transforming power of Christ. His famous assertion that "Africans are notorious religiously" underscores his that religion permeates every aspect of African life, making inculturation an indispensable element of evangelization.[615]

4.4.2 Charles Nyamiti 1931-2020)

Charles Nyamiti developed one of the most influential models of African inculturation theology through his theology of Christ as ancestor. Drawing on the African concepts of ancestry, he argued that Christ is the perfect Ancestor who mediates between God and humanity. He maintained that authentic inculturation must faithfully preserve Catholic doctrine while expressing it through African philosophical and cultural categories. His work illustrates how African concepts can illuminate Christian theology without reducing the uniqueness of Christ.[616]

4.4.3 Bénézet Bujo (1940-2021)

He emphasized the communal aspect of the African life and argued that Christian theology in Africa must reflect the African understanding of personhood, community and solidarity. Bujo proposed that African ethics, centered on life and relationships, provide valuable resources for expressing the Gospel. For him, inculturation is not merely the adoption of African customs but

[615] John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 1-15
[616] Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African perspective*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984), 20-26

the transformation of culture by the Gesoel so that faith becomes genuinely African and authentically Catholic.[617]

4.4.4 Laurenti Magesa (1946-2022)

Laurent Magesa consistently argued that African traditional religion contains moral and spiritual values that are compatible with Christianity. He emphasized that inculturation requires a respectful dialogue between the Gospel and African cultures rather than the rejection of indigenous traditions. According to him, evangelization becomes more effective when Christian teaching is presented through concepts and symbols familiar to African communities.[618]

4.4.5 Engelbert Mveng (1930-1995)

Engelbert viewed inculturation as a process of cultural liberation. He argued that colonialism deprive Africans of confidence in their cultural identity and that Christian theology should contribute to restoring this lost dignity. For him, inculturation enables Africans to encounter Christ without abandoning their authentic cultural heritage. He maintained that Christianity should enrich African cultures while allowing those cultures to contribute to the universal Church.[619]

4.4.6 Patrick N. Wachege

Patrick has made tremendous contribution to inculturation theology in the Kenyan context, particularly among the *Agĩkũyũ* community. Through his presentation of Christ as *Mũthamaki*

[617] Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 35-61.
[618] Laurenti Magesa, African Religion: The Moral Tradition of Abundant Life, (New York: Orbis Books, 197), 15-43.
[619] Engelbert Mveng, "Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa," in *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 165.

(Ideal elder or leader), he demonstrates that the *Agĩkũyũ* concepts of leadership and elderhood provide fruitful categories for understanding Christ and the Church. His work strongly supports the use of culturally meaningful symbols in evangelization, provided they remain faithful to the Catholic teaching.[620]

4.5 Concept of Liturgical Inculturation

Unlike the term inculturation which is broad in scope and meaning, liturgical inculturation is a more specific reality. It concerns the adaptation integration of authentic cultural elements into the Church's official liturgical worship. The Dicastery for Divine Worship defines it as the process by which the liturgy becomes capable of expressing self in the language, symbols, gestures, music and cultural patterns of a particular people while remaining faithful to the Roman Rite and the universal tradition of the Church.[621]

Sacrosanctum Concilium opened the door for such adaptations by stating that the Church does not wish a rigid uniformity in matters that do not affect the faith or the good of the whole community. However, because the liturgy belongs to the entire Church and is a privileged expression of ecclesial unity, liturgical inculturation is subject to careful discernment and ecclesiastical approval.[622]

Liturgical inculturation therefore involves concrete elements such as local musical forms, ritual gestures, artistic designs, vestments, processions, symbols and ceremonial expressions that can be incorporated into the celebrations of the sacraments and other liturgical rites. In Africa,

[620] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Eldership as Mũthamaki* (2020), 83- 125.
[621] Dicatery for Divine worship and the Discipline of Sacraments, *Varietates Legitime*, (Vatican City): Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), no. 4.
[622] *Varietates Legitimae,* 65.

examples would include the use of indigenous musical instruments, traditional rhythms, dances, local artistic motifs, and culturally meaningful symbols within approved liturgical celebrations.[623]

The theological foundation of liturgical inculturation finds its meaning and reference to the mystery of the Incarnation. Just as the eternal Word of God entered a specific human culture, language, and historical context, the Church seeks to embody the celebration of the mystery of salvation within the cultural forms of different peoples.[624] The liturgy, as the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed and the source from which her power flows, must therefore be capable of finding authentic expression in the life and traditions of every nation and people.[625]

Just as the Word became flesh within a specific culture, so too the liturgy must become intelligible and spiritually fruitful with the symbolic universe of a people.[626] Chupungco has developed extensively this incarnational principle and his work remains foundational for liturgical theology. He insists that liturgical inculturation must be understood as a dynamic dialogue between the Roman liturgical tradition and local ritual culture, rather than a mere borrowing of cultural forms.[627]

Viewed from the perspective of the liturgy, liturgical inculturation refers to the process of inserting the texts and rites of the liturgy into the framework of the local Church. This is expressed through the language, symbols, gestures, music, and cultural values of a particular people values of a particular people while preserving the essential elements and doctrinal integrity of the Roman

---

[623] Marm R. Francis, *Shape a Circle Ever Wider: Liturgical Inculturation in the United States*, (Chicago: Litugy Training Publications, 2000), 21-39.
[624] Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation and Theologian: A Postmodern Critique* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 35.
[625] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 10.
[626]Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, (1988), 15
[627] Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 32.

Rite.[628] This is an invitation to a specific application of the broader theological principle of inculturation to Church's worship, sacraments, and public prayer.[629]

4.5.1 Magisterial Documents on Liturgical Inculturation

4.5.1.1 Sacrosanctum Concilium

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, is the foundational magisterial document for liturgical inculturation. Although the document predates the widespread use of the term "liturgical inculturation," it establishes the essential principles that later magisterial teaching develops. The Council affirms that the Church does not intend to impose rigid uniformity where the faith or the common good is not at stake. It encourages respect for the traditions and genius of different peoples and authorizes legitimate adaptations to the liturgy, particularly in mission territories, provided these are carefully studied, approved by episcopal conferences, and confirmed by the Apostolic See.[630]

4.5.1.2 *Varietates Legitimae*

Among post-conciliar documents, *Varietates Legitimae* stands out as the most authoritative text of the Church specifically devoted to liturgical inculturation. The document defines inculturation as the process by which the liturgy becomes incarnate in different cultures while simultaneously introducing those cultures into the life of the Church by safeguarding doctrinal orthodoxy and ritual unity.[631] At the same time, the document asserts that liturgical inculturation should not be viewed as merely about external adaptation but:

---

[628] Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, (1992), 30.
[629] Aylward Shorter, *Towards a Theology of Inculturation* (1988), 35
[630] *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 37.
[631] Dicastery for Divine Worship and Discipline of Sacraments, *Varietates Legitimae*, IV Instructions on Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy, *AAS* 87 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 4

"an intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity and their insertion into the liturgical life of the Church."[632]

The document continues to stress that inculturation is characterized by a reciprocal enrichment between the liturgy and culture. It also establishes practical norms for inculturation where it insists that innovations must preserve the substantial unity of the Roman Rite and receive approval from the Apostolic See.[633] Further, the document cautions against syncretism by emphasizing that inculturation should always be founded on sound theological reflection and Pastoral discernment.[634]

4.5.1.3 The Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Catechism which was published in 1992 provides significant guidance regarding liturgical inculturation. It affirms that the liturgy must take account of the culture in which it is celebrated while remaining faithful to the apostolic tradition from which it derives.[635] It continues to stress that the mystery of Christ transcends every culture and possesses the capacity to purify and elevate human traditions.[636] Thus, cultural diversity enriches the Church without undermining her unity.

4.5.2 Qualitative Understanding of Liturgical Inculturation in the Study

> The interviews indicate that participants understood liturgical inculturation chiefly as a matter of meaningful communication and not as cultural display. The priest respondent's concern about the limited local adaptation of the conventional crozier reflects a Pastoral question about whether the sign is readily understood by the people.[637] the bishop respondent's emphasis on catechesis provides the corresponding safeguard: a culturally

[632] *Varietates Legitimae*, no. 5
[633] *Varietates Legitimae* 62-63
[634] *Varietates Legitimae* 47
[635] Catechism of the Catholic Church, in *AAS* 84 (1993), 1204
[636] Catechism of the Catholic Church 1205
[637] Lawrence Mbugua, interview, in Nairobi, 24.2.2026.

> familiar form should lead the faithful more deeply into Christian meaning rather than simply reproduce a traditional object.[638]

This interpretation is consistent with the magisterial principles outlined above. The respondents' views support the incorporation of authentic cultural values, artistic forms and symbolic associations, but only through a process of ecclesial discernment. Qualitatively, the data therefore point to three conditions for the proposed inculturation: the symbol must be culturally intelligible, its meaning must be compatible with Catholic faith, and its use must be accompanied by formation and appropriate ecclesiastical approval.

4.6 Necessity of Liturgical Inculturation

Liturgical inculturation is necessary because the Christian liturgy celebrated by concrete communities of believers who live within particular cultural, historical, social and linguistic contexts. Christianity is not an abstract religion detached from the human cultures; rather, the Gospel enters cultures, purifies them, assumes what is good in them, and enables them to express Christian faith through forms that are meaningful to the people who receive and celebrate it. The Second Vatican Council provided an important theological foundation for this process by affirming that the Church "fosters and takes to herself, insofar as they are good, the abilities, resources and customs of the people."[639] Liturgical inculturation is therefore not merely an aesthetic adaptation of worship but an ecclesial process through which the one Catholic faith is authentically expressed within the cultural world of a particular Christian community.

[638] George Muthaka, interview, Nairobi, 18.2. 2026.
[639] *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 7.

4.6.1 The Gospel must become Intelligible within particular cultures

The first necessity of liturgical inculturation arises from the missionary nature of Christianity. The Gospel is universal, but it is always received and celebrated by people who belong to particular cultures. The Church consequently cannot evangelize effectively if the symbols, gesture, language, music, artistic expressions, and ritual forms used in worship remain completely foreign to the people. John Paul II observed that the encounter between Christianity and cultures is indispensable because the Gospel is intended to enter the lives of peoples and transform them from within.[640]

The liturgy is particularly important in this regard because it is the principal context in which Christians encounter, celebrate and embody the mystery of Christ. When cultural symbols that genuinely communicate values compatible with the Christian faith are incorporated into the liturgy, worship can become more immediately intelligible to the faithful. Inculturation therefore assists believers in perceiving that Christianity is no an imported cultural system but the faith of the universal Church expressed within their own cultural contexts.

From the *Agĩkũyũ*, this consideration is particularly significant. The *Mũthĩgi* traditionally associated with Elderhood, authority, guidance, responsibility, justice and communal leadership, possesses a cultural vocabulary that can potentially illuminate the meaning of the bishop's Pastoral Staff. A properly discerned use of the *Mũthĩgi*-inspired Pastoral Staff could enable *Agĩkũyũ* Catholics to recognize familiar cultural values within the Christian understanding of episcopal ministry while maintaining the theological meaning of the episcopal office.

[640] *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 53.

This issue of intelligibility was directly reflected in the interviews. The observation that the conventional crozier remains only partly adapted to local Pastoral realities indicates that theological richness does not automatically guarantee cultural comprehension.[641] For the participants, the Mũthĩgi offers familiar associations with elderhood, public responsibility, wisdom and guidance. The qualitative finding is therefore not that the faithful reject the crozier, but that a culturally resonant form could make its meaning more immediate and easier to explain.

4.6.2 Liturgy Should Engage the Whole Person

Human beings communicate through more than words. Culture is embodied in gestures, objects, clothing, music, architecture, movements, stories, symbols and ritual actions. Consequently, liturgical communication cannot be reduced to verbal proclamation. The Constitution On the Sacred Liturgy recognizes the importance of signs and sensible realities in communicating invisible divine realities.[642]

This principle makes cultural symbols particularly important for liturgical celebration. A symbol can communicate complex theological realities through a form that is accessible to the human imagination. The Pastoral Staff, for example, is not merely functional object carried by a bishop. It symbolizes Pastoral authority, leadership, guidance and bishop's responsibility for the particular Church entrusted to him.[643] Similarly, the *Agĩkũyũ Mũthĩgi* can function as a visible sign associated with Elderhood and leadership.

[641] Lawrence Mbugua, interview, February 24, 2026.
[642] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 33.
[643] *Ceremonial of Bishops*, no. 59.

Liturgical inculturation is therefore necessary because it allows the Church to employ culturally meaningful symbols to communicate Christian mysteries. Such symbols can engage the intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions of the worshipper.

> The elderly lay respondent's account illustrates this capacity of symbols to engage memory and imagination. She noted that the mere presence of the Mũthĩgi in important communal rites could communicate continuity and recognised authority without requiring physical interaction with the object.[644] This response supports the theological point that human beings receive meaning through visible and embodied forms. In an inculturated liturgical context, the Pastoral Staff can therefore teach not only through formal explanation but also through culturally recognisable material, shape and gesture.

4.6.3 Inculturation is necessary for authentic active participation

One of the principal objectives of liturgical renewal after the Second Vatican Council was the promotion of conscious, active and fruitful participation of the faithful.[645] Participation, however, involves more than external presence at liturgical celebration. It also involves interior understanding and the ability of the faithful to enter meaningfully into the mystery being celebrated.

The use of culturally intelligible signs like the *Mũthĩgi* from the *Agĩkũyũ* can contribute significantly to such participation. When believers recognize a symbol from their cultural experience and encounter it within the Christian liturgy, the symbol can become a bridge between their cultural identity and their Christian faith. This does not mean that every traditional cultural practice should automatically be introduced into the liturgy. Rather, cultural elements require theological discernment, purification and adaptation.

For the *Agĩkũyũ* faithful, the *Mũthĩgi* offers such possibility. If its cultural meanings of guidance, authority, responsibility, wisdom and service are critically examined and harmonized with

[644] Grace Mumbi, interview, Nakuru, 22.4.2026.
[645] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 14.

Catholic teaching, they can assist the faithful in understanding the bishop as shepherd, teacher, sanctifier and guardian of ecclesial communion.

> The interviews also show that recognisability alone is insufficient. A bishop respondent cautioned that traditional gestures and symbols become Pastorally useful only when they are carefully catechized. Active participation therefore requires both cultural familiarity and Christian interpretation. A Mũthĩgi-inspired Staff would need to be introduced through parish catechesis, formation of clergy and lay leaders, and explanation during appropriate liturgical or Pastoral settings so that the faithful understand why the adapted symbol is used.[646]

4.6.4 Respect Legitimate Cultural Identity

The catholicity of the Church does not require the destruction of legitimate cultural identity. On the contrary, catholicity embraces diversity within unity. The Church is universal simply because the Gospel can take root among different peoples without requiring the abandon everything that constitutes their legitimate identity.

Ad Gentes teaches that the Church seeks to enter into the life and culture of peoples and that the Gospel should be communicated in forms appropriate to different cultures.[647] Pope Paul VI similarly emphasized that evangelization is incomplete when it does not engage the cultures of the people being evangelized.[648]

In the Kenyan context, therefore, the recovery of legitimate *Agĩkũyũ* symbols such as the *Mũthĩgi* can contribute to the development of an authentically African expression of Catholic worship. The objective is not to Africanize the liturgy in opposition to the universal Church but to allow the universal Church to be genuinely Catholic within the African cultural context.

> The Kĩama elder respondent's reflection on the historical incorporation of outsiders into elderhood also broadens the meaning of cultural identity. His contribution suggests that an Agĩkũyũ-inspired Pastoral Staff need not make the bishop an ethnic elder or limit his ministry to one lineage or clan. Rather, it can draw on a local language of respected leadership while the bishop remains pastor of all the faithful in the diocese. This distinction

[646] George Muthaka, interview, 182.4.2026.
[647] *Ad Gentes*, no. 11.
[648] *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* no. 20.

> is essential in a multi-ethnic Church and safeguards the universal character of episcopal ministry.[649]

4.6.5 Development of Genuine African Christianity

The necessity of liturgical inculturation has received particular emphasis in the African context. The Synod for Africa and subsequent papal teaching emphasized that African Christianity should become deeply rooted in African cultures. John Paul II described inculturation as a necessary requirement for the evangelization of Africa, stressing the need for the Gospel to penetrate African cultures and for African cultures to contribute to the life of the church.[650]

The Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa presents inculturation as one of the major challenges facing the African Church. It describes inculturation as an important process by which the Gospel becomes incarnate in cultures while cultures are transformed by the Gospel.[651] Pope Benedict XVI continued this emphasis in *Africae Munus*, calling for a profound encounter, calling for a profound encounter between the Christian faith and African cultures.[652]

The implication of the present study is that the *Mũthĩgi* should not be regarded merely as an archaeological remnant of pre-Christian *Agĩkũyũ* society. Rather, its surviving cultural meaning can be critically studied as possible resources for expressing Christian theology in an *Agĩkũyũ* context.

> The responses of a seminarian respondent[653] and a priest respondent add a formative dimension to this argument. Their comparison of Kĩama preparation with ecclesial formation suggests that cultural dialogue can illuminate not only external symbols but also the ethical qualities expected of Christian leaders. The value of the Mũthĩgi for African Christianity therefore lies partly in the moral world surrounding it: discipline, humility,

[649] James Kagona Mungai, interview, February 20, 2026.
[650] *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 52.
[651] *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 62.
[652] *Africae Munus*, no. 38
[653] Dominic Mbugua Kamau, interview, Kiambu, 14.12.2026.

> responsibility and service. These values can be appropriated without importing every traditional ritual associated with elderhood[654]

4.6.6 Preservation and Purification of Valuable Cultural Values

Inculturation does not simply preserve cultures. It also involves discernment. Not everything in a culture is automatically compatible with Christianity. There those elements that can be assumed into Christian worship and those that require purification or rejection. In *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church teaches that the Gospel purifies and elevates the moral and spiritual qualities of peoples rather than destroy what is genuinely good in their traditions.[655] This principle provides a useful framework for evaluating the *Mũthĩgi*. Its associations with wisdom, responsible leadership, communal unity, justice, protection and service contain values capable of illuminating the episcopal ministry. At the same time, any meanings or ritual associations incompatible with Christian doctrine have to be excluded. Furthermore, it should always be noted that liturgical inculturation is a process of continuity and transformation. The cultural symbol remains recognizable, but it meaning is deepened and interpreted in the light of Christ and the faith of the Church.

4.6.7 Symbols Facilitate Theological communication

Liturgical symbols possess an important theological function. The sacraments of the Church and her liturgical life communicates divine realities through visible signs. The Catechism explains that liturgical signs signify and make present the realities they represent within the economy of salvation.[656]

[654]Linus Mwangi Mugo, interview, Muranga, 19.3.2026.
[655] *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 58.
[656] CCC, no. 1149.

The Pastoral Staff illustrates this principle. The shepherd's Staff has biblical roots in the imagery pf Pastoral leadership, especially in texts such as Psalm 23 and John 10. The Staff of the bishop consequently becomes a visible reminder of his responsibility to shepherd the Christian community. The *Mũthĩgi* also has a symbolic vocabulary connected with *Agĩkũyũ* Elderhood. The encounter between these two symbolic traditions therefore offers an opportunity for theological dialogue. The inculturated Pastoral Staff would not cease to be a Catholic Pastoral Staff. Rather, its form and cultural resonance could communicate the universal theology of episcopal shepherding through a symbol intelligible to the *Agĩkũyũ* faithful.

4.6.8 Strengthening Ecclesial Identity and Belonging

Liturgical celebrations contribute significantly to the identity of Christian communities. When legitimate cultural expressions are represented within liturgy, believers may experience a stronger sense of belonging to the Church. They can recognize that their history, language, symbols and cultural heritage are not necessarily obstacles to catholic faith. This is especially important for younger generations. Cultural disconnection can weaken the transmission of traditional values from one generation to another. When legitimate cultural symbols are integrated into Christian worship through careful theological discernment, the Church can become an important context for transmitting both Christian faith and valuable cultural heritage.

In this respect, Inculturated Pastoral Staff inspired by the *Mũthĩgi* could serve an educational function. It could communicate to the younger *Agĩkũyũ* Catholics that their cultural heritage can enter into constructive dialogue with catholic faith without compromising the universality of the Church.

> The concern for younger generations is reinforced by the elderly lay respondent's testimony about the Mũthĩgi as a visual carrier of continuity. Her response suggests that an inculturated Staff could serve a double catechetical function. It could teach the Christian

> meaning of the bishop's ministry while also helping younger Agĩkũyũ Catholics encounter legitimate elements of their cultural heritage within the life of the Church. Such use would have to avoid romanticising the past and should communicate those values that remain Pastorally and theologically sound.[657]

4.3.9 Exercise of Genuine Ecclesial Catholicity and Deepening the Missionary Effectiveness of the Church

Catholicity does not cultural uniformity. The unity of the Church is founded upon the one faith, one baptism, one Lord and communion with the universal Church. Cultural diversity can exist within this unity. *Sacrosantum Concilium* allows legitimate adaptations of the liturgy to the genius and traditions of different peoples, subject to ecclesial authority.

This principle is crucial to the theological justification of an *Agĩkũyũ*-inspired Pastoral Staff. The purpose is not to replace the Catholic understanding of the crozier with an entirely independent *Agĩkũyũ* symbol. Rather, it is to develop a culturally appropriate expression of the same ecclesial reality. The *Mũthĩgi* can therefor serve as a hermeneutical lens through which the *Agĩkũyũ* faithful understand the Pastoral Staff. Its incorporation must remain within the liturgical norms of the Church and receive the necessary ecclesiastical approval.

The Church exists for evangelization. Liturgical inculturation can strengthen evangelization because people are more likely to perceive the Christian message as meaningful when it engages their cultural imagination. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* emphasized the profound relationship between evangelization and culture by insisting that the Gospel must transform culture while avoiding superficial or merely decorative adaptation.

[657] Grace Mumbi, interview, Nakuru, 22.4.2026.

4.7 Areas of Inculturation

Sacrosanctum Concilium defines liturgy as the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed and the source from which all her power flows, must speak through the symbols, rhythms, and ritual language of the people who celebrate it.[658] In Africa, inspired by this spirit, inculturation has taken concrete form in several interrelated aspects such as language, music and dance, symbols and gestures, ritual processions and offerings, vesture and art, communal participation, and the use of indigenous symbols of authority.[659]

4.7.1 Local Languages in Liturgy

The use of vernacular African languages in worship is one of the most visible aspects of liturgical inculturation. Liturgical books such as the Roman Missal, lectionaries, sacramental rites, and even devotional texts have been translated into local languages making it possible for the faithful to participate more consciously and actively in worship.[660] This is very much in line with the principle of *actuosa participation* of Vatican II.[661]

It should be noted that reference to language in African context is not merely about verbal communication but also symbolic, carrying memory, identity, worldview, and a deep sense of belonging to a particular community.[662] Both Mbiti and Magesa have emphasized that religious experience is inseparable from language and symbols.[663]

---

[658] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 10
[659] Anscar Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*, 40
[660] Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 18.
[661] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 14.
[662] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 99.
[663] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 93.

4.7.2 Music, Rhythm, and Dance

Since Vatican II, the aspect of incorporating African music, rhythm, and dance into liturgical celebration is present everywhere. This is evident in African worship which often include drums, clapping, ululation, call-and-response singing, and rhythmic body movement, especially during the entrance procession, Gospel procession, and offertory.[664]

This aspect tallies very well with the African Anthropological understanding of worship as holistic, in which the body, voice, spirit, and community are engaged. Saint John Paul II expressed this profound acknowledgment during the African Synod and in his Post-Synodal document *Ecclesia in Africa* where African instruments and ritual expressions are positively received when they are properly integrated into worship.[665] in reference to this aspect Chupungco says that music and movement are among the most fruitful ways of liturgical inculturation for they are deeply embedded in cultural identity.[666]

4.7.3 Symbols and Gestures

Since the reforms brought about by the Vatican II and other subsequent documents, the indigenous liturgical symbols, gestures and vestments have been incorporated in the celebration of liturgy.[667] These includes culturally meaningful forms of greeting, bowing, kneeling, hand gestures, communal acclamations, and reconciliation rituals. In most cases, these gestures carry theological meaning related to reverence, kinship, blessing, and communal solidarity.[668] *Varietates*

[664] Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*, 55.
[665] *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 78.
[666] Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*, 61.
[667] John Lukwata, *The Integrated Liturgy* (AMECEA Gaba Publications, CUEA Press, 2003), 157.
[668] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 178

Legitimae strongly when it explicitly permits ritual adaptations where they express authentic cultural values and remains doctrinally sound.[669]

> The field evidence gives particular weight to this area of gestures. A Kĩama elder respondent considered traditional judicial gestures associated with the Mũthĩgi capable of deepening local comprehension of the bishop's responsibility when interpreted appropriately. a bishop respondent likewise affirmed the communicative potential of local gestures while emphasizing catechesis. These responses suggest that inculturation of the Pastoral Staff should consider not only what the object looks like but also how it is carried, presented and explained in ritual action.[670]

4.7.4 Procession and Offertories

In many African countries, every liturgical celebration includes this aspect of offertory procession in which, local produce like maize, bananas, milk, arrow roots, eggs, and many other items are presented to the presiding minister.[671] These items carried in the procession are not mere decorations but profoundly symbolize community's gratitude, labour, life, and the offering of the community's daily existence to God.[672]

4.7.5 Liturgical Art, Vesture, and Sacred Space

This is another area in which liturgical inculturation has been effected in a tremendous way. African motifs, textile patterns, carvings, and local artistic styles and found almost everywhere. Concretely, these have been realized the vestments, altar cloths, crosses, and Church architecture which often reflect local symbolism.[673]

> Material and craftsmanship also emerged from the interviews as concrete areas of adaptation. A catechist respondent argued that the Church could make greater use of indigenous materials and specifically proposed locally meaningful wood as a way of linking the Pastoral Staff with the Agĩkũyũ symbolic world. His response does not by itself settle the theological suitability of any particular sacred tree, but it identifies an important principle: local craftsmanship can make an episcopal insignium visibly belong to the

[669] *Varietates Legitimae*, no. 52.
[670] George Muthaka, interview, Nairobi, 18.2.2026.
[671] Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation*, 72.
[672] Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation*, 73
[673] Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*, 68

> Pastoral environment in which it is used. Such material choices require discernment so that cultural associations are understood and any incompatible religious meanings are excluded.[674]
>
> The priest respondent's reflection on the capacity of Mũthĩgi to express both physical and spiritual responsibility further suggests that artistic design can communicate layered theological meaning. An inculturated Pastoral Staff could therefore retain the recognisable Christian form of the crozier while using indigenous wood, restrained Agĩkũyũ motifs or symbolic features that communicate service, reconciliation, wisdom and responsibility.[675]

4.7.6 Indigenous Symbols of Authority and leadership

This aspect of inculturation includes Staffs, seats of authority, insignia of an elder, ritual robes, and processional objects.[676] Thus, the muthigi of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder should be studied as a symbol of eldership, guidance, and Pastoral authority which may enter into theological dialogue with the bishop's Pastoral Staff. The document *Ecclesia in African* fully supports the use of authentic African symbols in order to enrich Christian worship.

> The respondents generally treated the Mũthĩgi as a symbol whose value lies in the cultural meaning attached to responsible elderhood. The priest respondent's concern about the visual gap between the conventional crozier and local concepts of leadership shows why indigenous symbols of authority deserve serious Pastoral study. The qualitative evidence therefore supports the Mũthĩgi as a hermeneutical resource: it helps interpret the episcopal Staff in a language of leadership already known within the community, without becoming the theological source of episcopal authority.[677]

4.8 An Inculturated Pastoral Staff

The Western Pastoral Staff forms the baseline for comparison in this section. Among the Western Christians, the Pastoral Staff is curved like a shepherd's crook and in most cases, it is made of metal or wood (though wooden Staffs are rare to find or even if they are, the bishops prefer the metal ones from Europe) and sometimes highly ornate which may render it more

[674] George Githinji, interviewed, Kiambu, 12.12.2025.
[675] Moses Mwangi, interview, Nyeri, May 20.5.2026.
[676] Constanzo Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore*, (1933), 120
[677] Lawrence Mbugua, interview, February 24, 2026.

expensive than the plain ones. It reflects the bishop as a shepherd of the flock, with its root in the biblical imagery. This form of the Staff reflects European Pastoral imagery which may not be applicable in every culture among the Africans.

> The interviews point toward an adapted rather than merely imported Pastoral Staff. The catechist respondent's emphasis on indigenous material[678], the priest respondent's attention to layered symbolism[679], and the bishop respondent's insistence on catechesis[680] together suggest a model in which local artistic expression, theological continuity and Pastoral explanation operate together. This model avoids two extremes: retaining a symbol that may remain culturally distant without further interpretation, and replacing the Christian crozier with a traditional object whose religious associations have not been discerned.

4.8.1 Inculturated Pastoral Staff in Africa

4.8.1.1 The Zairean (Congo) Rite

One of the most celebrated examples of liturgical inculturation in Africa is the Zairean Use of the Roman Rite which was formerly approved in 1988.[681] Though much stress is given to the gestures, music, and ritual structures, the episcopate and the insignia associated with it including the Pastoral Staff have also been adapted in the local ecclesial praxis to reflect African Symbolic forms.[682]

Most bishops in the dioceses of the Democratic Republic of Congo use croziers incorporating African curved wood, traditional motifs of chieftaincy, and symbolic forms which resonates with the ancestral authority.[683] In this Rite, the Staffs function less as juridical insignia and more as symbols of communal leadership and life-giving authority, which is very much in line

[678] George Githinji, interview, Kiambu, 12.12.2025.
[679] Moses Mwangi, interview, May 20, 2026.
[680] George Muthaka, interview, February 18, 2026.
[681] Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacraments, *Missel Romain pour les Diocèses du Zaïre* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana), 1988.
[682] Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press1992), 41.
[683] Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 81.

with African Cosmological categories.[684] This adaptation especially of the Staff of the bishop reflects a shift on how his authority of the is perceived not primarily as a feudal ruler as in medieval Europe symbolism, but as an "elder" or "ancestor in faith" embodying relational and participatory leadership.[685]

4.8.1.2 Ethiopian and Eritrean Catholic Tradition

In the Catholic Church of both Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Pastoral Staff reflects ancient African Christian traditions rooted in Ge'ez liturgical and monastic heritage.[686] Unlike the Western crozier, it often takes the form of a processional or monastic Staff, which is closely connected to the ascetic spirituality.[687] Staffs in these traditions are frequently decorated with geometric patterns and crosses portraying their Christian art which communicates continuity between local culture and ecclesial symbolism.[688] Thus, in this Church, the bishop's Staff expresses not only Pastoral authority but also spiritual pilgrimage and monastic discipline.[689] This inculturation according Shorter demonstrates how Christianity in Africa does not merely adopt local forms but develops organically from long-standing indigenous Christian traditions.[690]

---

[684] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 190
[685] Charles Nyamiti, "African Christologies Today," in *Trinity and Ancestors* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1984), 27
[686] Donald Crummey, *Priests and Politicians: Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 147.
[687] Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia*, 1270-1527 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 92.
[688] Stanislaus Kur, "The Ethiopian Church: Its Liturgy and Spirituality," in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica 39* (1973), 210-215.
[689] Paulos Tzadua, *The Ethiopian Church* (Addis Ababa, 1994), 58
[690] Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 70.

4.8.1.3 The Church in West Africa: Ghana and Nigeria

Among the Akan and Yoruba of Ghana and Nigeria respectively, the episcopal Staffs have been inculturated in dialogue with traditional symbols of authority.[691] With the Akan of Ghana, the Pastoral Staff is sometimes modelled after the linguist Staff (Okyeame poma), which was used as symbol of mediation and wisdom in traditional governance.[692] In most cases, these Staffs incorporate proverbial imagery and gold ornamentation, stressing the bishop's role as interpreter of divine wisdom.[693]

In the context of the Yoruba of Nigeria, influences of the episcopal Staff from royal and sacred Staffs are evident, with carvings that may include symbolic figures and cosmological motifs.[694] These designs express the bishop's authority within a sacred and communal worldview rather than a purely institutional framework.[695]

4.8.1.4 The Church in South Africa: Artistic and Historical Adaptation

In the Church of South Africa especially in post-apartheid context, some bishops have adopted Pastoral Staffs designed by local artists incorporating indigenous symbolism.[696] These Staffs carry on them motifs which reflects the struggle which they went through during the apartheid era, liberation and reconciliation.[697] This makes the Staff become not just a symbol of

[691] Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 228
[692] Kwesi Yankah, *Speaking of the Chief: Okyeama and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 36.
[693] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 171.
[694] Jacob K. Olupona, *African Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 201), 79.
[695] Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 116
[696] Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "Inculturation and Liberation in African Theology," in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 86 (1994), 10.
[697] Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999), 58

Pastoral care but also of historical memory of God's intervention and prophetic leadership which resonates very well with the role of the as champion of social transformation.

4.9 Promotion of an Inculturated Pastoral Staff in Kenya

In order to gain support and acceptance, the promotion of an inculturated Pastoral Staff in Kenya must be understood within the wider theological framework of liturgical inculturation as encouraged by the reforms of Vatican II Council and subsequent magisterial teaching. The Pastoral Staff which is traditionally viewed as a symbol of episcopal authority in the Church, requires reinterpretation so that it may authentically express the cultural, spiritual, and ecclesial realities of the Kenyan context.[698]

Among the *Agĩkũyũ* of Kenya, the Pastoral Staff finds a natural dialogue with the muthigi, the Staff associated with elders, which symbolizes authority, wisdom, continuity, and communal responsibility.[699] Promoting an inculturated Pastoral Staff therefore involves not merely aesthetic adaptation but a deep theological integration of symbol, culture, and ecclesial identity.[700]
Though these symbols have not been properly incorporated into the liturgy, there has been individual cases especially of bishops using the local symbol of eldership, guidance, and Pastoral authority of their dioceses. In Kenya for example, there was Bishop Ravassi of Maral Catholic Diocese who throughout his episcopate, carried the Samburu elder's Staff instead of the metallic one from Rome.

[698] Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 14.
[699] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938), 125
[700] Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 47

4.9.1 Field-Based Considerations for Promotion in Kenya

The qualitative findings indicate that promotion should begin with consultation rather than immediate liturgical adoption. The range of participants in this study shows that the issue touches different communities of knowledge: bishops and priests safeguard ecclesial and liturgical meaning; catechists interpret symbols for the faithful; elders preserve cultural knowledge; seminarians represent future Pastoral leadership; and lay faithful carry lived memory of both culture and Church. A credible process of inculturation should therefore bring these voices into sustained dialogue.

> The first practical priority emerging from the interviews is catechesis. A bishop respondent explicitly linked the communicative value of local gestures and symbols with careful catechetical preparation.[701] This implies that any proposed design should be accompanied by teaching on Christ the Good Shepherd, the bishop's ministry, the meaning of the crozier and the specific Agĩkũyũ values incorporated into the design. Such catechesis would reduce the risk that different groups interpret the same object in conflicting religious ways.
> The second priority is cultural authenticity. The catechist respondent's proposal concerning indigenous materials[702] and the Kĩama elder respondent's observations on the authority communicated by the Mũthĩgi[703] show the importance of consulting those who understand the traditional meaning of the symbol. Local artists and cultural custodians should therefore be involved in discerning appropriate materials, forms and motifs. Their role would be advisory and interpretive, while the final liturgical judgement remains with competent ecclesiastical authority.

The third priority is gradual implementation. The field evidence favours a process in which prototypes are studied, explained and evaluated before wider liturgical use. This is particularly important because the respondents themselves demonstrate that the *Mũthĩgi* carries multiple meanings: judicial authority, spiritual responsibility, cultural memory, peace, formation and communal legitimacy. An adapted Staff should communicate the values that illuminate Christian episcopal ministry while omitting or reinterpreting meanings that could create doctrinal confusion.

[701] George Muthaka, interview, Nairobi, 18.2.2026.
[702] George Githinji, interview, 12.12.2025.
[703] John Kĩmani wa Mũrũgũ, interview, February 20, 2026.

4.9.2 Theological Basis for Promotion

The Conciliar Decree on the Church's missionary activity states:

… If the Church is to be in a position to offer all the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, then it must implant itself among all these groups in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the people among whom he lived.[704]

This text and many others express that inculturation is an essential dimension of evangelization. In the Gaudium et Spes the Vatican Council affirms that the Church "fosters and assumes the ability, resources, and customs of each people."[705] This principle received further emphasize from John Paul II, who insisted that faith must become culture in order to fully lived.[706] Thus, in the African context, this means or implies that liturgical symbols – such as the Pastoral Staff – must reflect African cultural meanings of authority and leadership.[707]

4.9.3 The Theology of Inculturation

The theology of inculturation addresses how the Christian faith interacts with the various cultures where the Gospel is shared and lived out. It acknowledges that Christianity is not confined to a single cultural expression, language, artistic style, or social structure. Instead, the Gospel can be articulated through the genuine values, symbols, traditions, and experiences of diverse peoples. Therefore, inculturation entails both the embedding of the Gospel within a specific culture and the alteration of that culture according to Christian teachings.

---

[704] *Ad Gentes*, no. 10.
[705] *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 58.
[706] *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 78.
[707] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 190.

The Second Vatican Council established a significant theological basis for inculturation in the Catholic Church. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy affirms that the liturgy can be adapted to align with the traditions and contexts of various groups, as long as the essential unity of the Roman Rite is maintained. Adapting the liturgy does not change the substance of Christian worship; rather, it aims to clarify and deepen the understanding of Christ's mystery for particular communities. Consequently, the African Church is urged to convey the Gospel in ways that resonate with African histories, languages, symbols, and communal experiences.

In the *Agĩkũyũ* context, the understanding of religious and social life is traditionally shaped by a holistic worldview in which religious, ethical, social, and political aspects of life closely interact. God, referred to as *Ngai* or *Mwene-Nyaga*, is seen as the Creator, Sustainer, and ultimate authority of the universe. Identity, responsibility, authority, and moral order are communicated through family, lineage, clan, age-set, and councils of elders. Thus, religion is not viewed as a separate domain but as a reality that influences the whole existence of the community.

The spiritual and social development of individuals occurs through crucial life stages. The acts of birth and naming integrate a person into the community, initiation signifies social maturity, marriage creates new relationships and responsibilities, and elderhood represents wisdom, authority, and service. Within this worldview, elders act as custodians of tradition, mediators in conflicts, guardians of justice, and representatives of communal continuity. Their authority is expected to be exercised with honesty, moral integrity, and a focus on the common good.

The *Mũthĩgi* is intimately linked to this authority and responsibility. It is traditionally perceived as a ceremonial Staff held by respected elders who have completed the necessary social and ritual training and have been admitted to the council of elders, or kĩama. Thus, the Mũthĩgi is

more than a personal item; it is a public symbol of authority, wisdom, leadership, justice, reconciliation, protection, and service. Contemporary descriptions of *Agĩkũyũ* elder practices similarly regard the Mũthĩgi as a symbol of leadership, acceptance, elderhood, and the duty to guide the community.

In traditional gatherings, the *Mũthĩgi* emphasizes the gravity of the proceedings and the elders' authority to discuss and deliberate on issues concerning the community. It can convey a commitment to truth, the duty to resolve disputes, and the obligation to maintain peace. Its significance is relational: the Staff matters because it represents the trust between the elder and the community. The possessor is not expected to wield authority for personal gain but to safeguard the dignity and unity of the people.

The Pastoral Staff, often referred to as the crozier or baculus Pastoralis, carries a similar theological importance. The biblical portrayal of the shepherd serves as the primary basis for understanding the Staff. In the Old Testament, the shepherd's Staff is linked with guidance, protection, authority, and care for the flock. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is depicted as the Good Shepherd who knows and safeguards his people. The bishop, as a successor of the apostles, partakes in this Pastoral ministry. Therefore, the Pastoral Staff signifies the bishop's duty to teach, govern, sanctify, guide, protect, and care for the specific Church entrusted to his oversight.

Nonetheless, the bishop's authority does not equate to domination or political power. It is a form of Pastoral service modeled after Christ. The bishop is called to fortify the weak, correct harmful actions, encourage the faithful, reconcile divisions, and steer the community towards holiness. Thus, the Pastoral Staff serves as a visible reminder that ecclesiastical authority is

inextricably linked to responsibility. It exemplifies the bishop's dedication to serving the People of God and exercising leadership for the Church's edification.

A comparison between the *Mũthĩgi* and the Catholic Pastoral Staff highlights significant similarities. Both Staffs are associated with recognized leadership and entail authority that is conferred rather than self-appointed. Both suggest moral maturity, public responsibility, protection, and guidance.

4.9.4 Qualitative Synthesis of the Theological and Field Evidence

> When the theological sources are read alongside the interviews, a consistent pattern emerges. The participants did not call for the abandonment of Catholic tradition. Their responses instead focused on whether the Pastoral Staff can communicate more effectively through culturally recognisable forms. A priest respondent identified the problem of limited cultural adaptation[708]; a Kĩama elder respondent highlighted the communicative force of recognised authority[709]; a catechist respondent pointed to indigenous materials[710]; an elderly lay respondent stressed visual memory[711]; a priest respondent identified layered symbolism[712]; and a bishop respondent placed catechesis at the centre of responsible adaptation.[713]
>
> A second pattern concerns the moral meaning of leadership. The response of the seminarian respondent[714] and that of a priest respondent[715] show that the cultural dialogue surrounding the Mũthĩgi extends beyond an external Staff to the formation, humility and service expected of its bearer. A Kĩama elder respondent further demonstrates that communal recognition can extend to a leader who does not originate from the local community when that person is accepted through a legitimate process.[716] These insights strengthen the interpretation of the bishop as a Pastoral elder while preventing a simplistic identification of episcopal office with traditional elderhood.

The overall qualitative finding is therefore one of conditional support for inculturation. The Mũthĩgi offers a rich cultural vocabulary that can deepen understanding of episcopal authority,

[708] Lawrence Mbugua, interview, Muranga, 24.2.2026.
[709] John Kĩmani wa Mũrũgũ, interview, Nakuru, 20.2.2026.
[710] George Githinji, interview, Kiambu, 12.12.2025.
[711] Grace Mumbi, interview, Nakuru, 22.4.2026.
[712] Moses Mwangi, interview, Nyeri, 20.5.2026.
[713] George Muthaka, interview, Nairobi, 18.2.2026.
[714] Dominic Mbugua Kamau, interview, Kiambu, 14.12.2025.
[715] Linus Mwangi Mugo, interview, Nyeri, 19.2.2026.
[716] James Kagona Mungai, interview, Kiambu, 20.2.2026.

wisdom, guidance, reconciliation, responsibility and service. Its contribution becomes theologically sound when these values are interpreted in the light of Christ, incorporated through ecclesially approved artistic and ritual forms, and explained through sustained catechesis. The field evidence thus supports an inculturated Pastoral Staff inspired by the Mũthĩgi, rather than an uncritical transfer of the traditional Staff into Catholic liturgy.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the liturgical inculturation of the Pastoral Staff among the Agikuyu is both theologically justifiable and Pastorally desirable when undertaken in fidelity to the teaching of the Church. The *Mũthĩgi* provides meaningful points of convergence with the bishop's Pastoral Staff.

The chapter has also show that authentic liturgical inculturation is neither a superficial adaptation of external cultural forms nor an indiscriminate incorporation of traditional practices into Christian worship. Rather, it is a process of theological discernment whereby cultural symbols are purified, elevated, and transformed in the light of the Gospel while simultaneously enriching the liturgical expression of the Church. Consequently, the *Mũthĩgi* should not simply replace the episcopal crozier, instead, its symbolic values may legitimately inspire the artistic design, catechetical interpretation, and Pastoral use of the bishop's Pastoral Staff within the *Agĩkũyũ* context.

The qualitative data reinforce this conclusion. Respondents consistently valued those dimensions of the Mũthĩgi that communicate recognised authority, service, reconciliation, wisdom, communal responsibility and cultural continuity. At the same time, the interviews introduced important safeguards: cultural symbolism must be carefully explained, the adaptation

must remain recognisably Christian, and local meaning must be tested through theological and Pastoral discernment. The proposed inculturated Staff should therefore preserve the Christological and ecclesiological meaning of the crozier while allowing legitimate *Agĩkũyũ* artistic and symbolic values to enrich its local expression.

Accordingly, the chapter concludes that the symbolism of the Mũthĩgi can deepen the meaning of the Pastoral Staff among the *Agĩkũyũ* when inculturation is undertaken as a process of dialogue rather than substitution. The strongest contribution of the Mũthĩgi is not simply its shape as a Staff, but the moral world of elderhood that it represents: wisdom, responsibility, reconciliation, guidance, communal trust and service. These meanings provide a culturally intelligible language through which the bishop may be more clearly perceived as a shepherd and spiritual elder, while his authority remains rooted in Christ and the apostolic ministry of the Church. The next chapter presents promotion of inculcurated Pastoral Staff in Kenya.

CHAPTER FIVE

PROMOTION OF AN INCULTURATED PASTORAL STAFF IN KENYA

Introduction

This chapter presents recommendations arising from the study on the possibility of promoting an inculturated Pastoral Staff among the Agĩkũyũ Catholic community in Kenya. It builds upon the historical, cultural, biblical, theological and comparative discussions developed in the previous chapters.

The mission of the Church has always involved proclaiming the Gospel in ways that are faithful to the divine revelation while remaining intelligible and meaningful with diverse cultural contexts. From the apostolic age to the present, Christianity has encountered different peoples, languages and traditions, seeking not to abolish authentic cultural values but to purify, elevate and integrate them into the life of the Church. This dynamic process, commonly known as inculturation, has become one of the defining characteristics of the Church's evangelizing mission, particularly since Vatican Council.

In Africa, inculturation has assumed particular importance because of the continent's rich cultural heritage and its deeply understanding of religious life. African societies communicate profound theological, moral and communal values through symbols, rituals, music, language, dance, dress and objects of authority. The Church has constantly acknowledged that these cultural realities can become authentic vehicles for expressing the Christian faith, provided they remain consistent with Sacred Scripture, Apostolic Tradition and the Teaching Authority of the Church.

Within the Kenyan context, the *Agĩkũyũ* people possess one of the most developed systems of symbolic leadership through the Mũthĩgi, the ceremonial Staff of the elder. Throughout this study, the *Mũthĩgi* has emerged as a visible sign of legitimate authority, wisdom, justice, reconciliation, communal responsibility and service. Similarly, the Pastoral Staff (*baculus Pastoralis* or crozier) carried by the Catholic bishop symbolizes his Pastoral office as teacher, shepherd, sanctifier and governor of the people of God. Although these two Staffs arise from different religious and historical traditions, they share significant symbolic convergences that invite careful theological reflection within the framework of liturgical inculturation.

Having looked into the similarities and differences of the *Mũthĩgi* and the Pastoral Staff, this chapter proposes practical theological, liturgical, catechetical, Pastoral, artistic, ecclesial, religious, cultural, spiritual, historical and exegetical recommendations for promoting an authentic inculturated Pastoral Staff within the *Agĩkũyũ* dominated Catholic dioceses in Kenya. Building upon the biblical foundations, ecclesiastical tradition, the symbolism of the Pastoral Staff and cultural significance of the *Mũthĩgi* explored in the preceding chapters, it seeks to demonstrate that authentic inculturation can strengthen evangelization, deepen liturgical participation, affirm cultural identity and foster a more meaningful encounter between the Gospel and the Agikuyu.

5.1 Liturgical Recommendation

The idea and process of inculturating the *Mũthĩgi* into the ministry of the Catholic bishop among the *Agĩkũyũ* Catholic Christians should be taken with utmost caution. First and foremost, profound respect should be given to both *Agĩkũyũ* cultural values and the liturgical norms of the universal Church. Since inculturation seeks to allow the Gospel to take root within a people's

culture without compromising Christian doctrine, here are proposed recommendation on the use of local symbol to enhance the reception of the Gospel message.

The primary objective of carrying out this study is to propose ways in which the symbolism of the Mũthĩgi of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders can enrich the liturgical understanding and use of the bishop's Pastoral Staff without compromising the integrity of the Roman Rite. The following liturgical recommendations and therefore proposed.

5.1.1 Promote Liturgical Catechises

The introduction of an inculturated Pastoral Staff should be accompanied by systematic liturgical catechesis in which Bishops, priests, deacons, catechists and Pastoral agents clearly explain the biblical symbolism of the shepherd's Staff, the theological significance of the episcopal crozier and the cultural meaning of the *Mũthĩgi* of *Agĩkũyũ* elder. Such catechesis would enable the Christians to understand that the inculturated Staff derives its deepest meaning from Christ, the Good Shepherd, while drawing upon authentic cultural values that illuminate episcopal ministry.[717]

5.1.2 Promote Catechesis on the Bishop as Elder

Among the African theologians especially Charles Nyamiti the aspect of the leadership of Christ as well as that of his followers the Christians is presented in terms of ancestral categories.[718] The elders among the *Agĩkũyũ* are held with high regard as custodians of life, justice, and communal harmony.

[717] *Ecclessia in Africa*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995),
[718] Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancesto*r (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984), 64.

5.1.3 Focus on Common Values Instead of External Similarities

The liturgical inculturation envisaged here should emphasize primarily on those values embodied by both the *Mũthĩgi* and the Pastoral Staff. This values which have already been highlighted include, servant leadership, wisdom, reconciliation, responsibility for the community, protection of the weak or vulnerable, continuation of tradition and unity of the people of God. This approach would avoid superficial borrowing and instead promote what John Paul II describes as "mutual enrichment" between the Gospel and culture.[719]

5.1.4 Develop an inculturated Design of the Pastoral Staff

The Church in Kenya, through the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops and competent individuals within the liturgical commissions, should encourage the development of an episcopal Pastoral Staff whose artistic features are informed by the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi*. Such a design should preserve the essential characteristics of the bishop's Pastoral Staff while incorporating carefully discerned the *Agĩkũyũ* motifs that symbolize wisdom, justice, servant leadership, reconciliation and protection (spear and/or shield).

5.1.5 Ecclesiastical Approval for Liturgical Adaptations

Throughout her existence, the Church has always used visible sings and actions to communicate divine realities. Thus, the Christians should be made aware of this symbolic character of the Church and what every other symbol means or stands for. Since human beings encounter the world through the senses, the Church employs symbols drawn from ordinary human experience

[719] John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* Encyclical on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate, no. 52 in *AAS* 83 (1991): 249-339.

Every authentic liturgical inculturation must go through all the ecclesiastical structures in place. This means that, the diocesan bishops involved and the entire conference of Catholic Bishops, and finally, the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments should be involved because it has the final word.[720] This recommendation aligns with the principles outlined in *Varietates Legitimae* which insists that any cultural adaptation be introduced gradually under the authority of the Church.[721]

Any proposal for an inculturated Pastoral Staff should be subjected to theological, liturgical and canonical evaluation before being introduced into liturgical celebrations. In line with the norms of the Roman Rite, episcopal conferences should examine proposed adaptations before submitting them to the Apostolic See for the required *recognitio* in order to safeguard the unity of the Catholic worship while allowing legitimate cultural diversity.[722]

5.1.6 Incorporate *Agĩkũyũ* Artistic Symbols

Ones ecclesiastically approved, selected *Agĩkũyũ* artistic elements may be incorporated into the decoration of the Pastoral Staff. Such elements could include carvings that symbolize unity, peace, justice, responsible leadership and reconciliation. These artistic expressions should always remain subordinate to the Christological symbolism of the crozier and should never introduce meanings incompatible with Catholic doctrine.[723]

[720] Code of Canon Law (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), no. 838.
[721] *Varietates Legitimae*, no. 62.
[722] General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 390.
[723] *Varietates Legitimae*, 37-46.

5.1.7 Encourage Inculturated Liturgical Celebrations

The quest to inculturate the Pastoral Staff with *Mũthĩgi* should not be interpreted as an effort to replace the bishop's Pastoral Staff as such but rather illuminate its Pastoral significance. The Pastoral Staff remains the official liturgical insignia of episcopal office and symbolizes the bishop's role as shepherd of God's people. Consequently, the *Mũthĩgi* may serve as a complementary cultural interpretation through which the *Agĩkũyũ* Christians can better understand the Pastoral authority of the bishop as an elder, guide, reconciler, and guardian of unity among the people of God.

Dioceses in predominantly *Agĩkũyũ* regions should continue promoting liturgical celebrations that integrate approved cultural expressions, including sacred music, processions, gestures, language and symbols according to the norms of the Roman Rite. Within this context, an inculturated Pastoral Staff would become one visible expression of the Church's commitment to celebrating the Gospel through authentic cultural forms. Such celebrations should foster active participation while maintaining the sacred character and universality of the liturgy.[724]

5.1.8 Establish Liturgical Commissions on Inculturation

Each diocese which desires to embrace inculturated liturgy should strengthen or establish liturgical commissions composed of bishops, liturgists, theologians, canonists, artists, anthropologists and knowledgeable *Agĩkũyũ* elders. These commissions should evaluate proposed liturgical adaptations to ensure theological accuracy and advise bishops on the prudent incorporation of cultural symbols into liturgical practice. Such collaborative discernment reflects

[724] General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 386-399

the Church's understanding that authentic liturgical inculturation is an ecclesial rather than merely individual undertaking.[725]

5.1.9 Preserve the Christological Meaning of the Crozier with Ongoing Liturgical Formation

Throughout the process of inculturation, the bishop's Pastoral Staff must remain an unmistakable symbol of Christ the Good Shepherd. The incorporation of *Agĩkũyũ* symbolism should enrich rather than replace its biblical and ecclesial meaning. Consequently, the crook of the Pastoral Staff which signifies the bishop's Pastoral care, should be preserved as an essential element of its liturgical identity. The Mũthĩgi should therefore inspire the artistic and symbolic enrichment of the crozier without altering its fundamental theological significance.[726]

Continuous formation programs should be organized for bishops, priests, seminarians, religious, catechists and laity especially the lay leaders among them on theology of the liturgy and the principles of liturgical inculturation. Such formation should emphasize that authentic inculturation is a process of discernment guided by Scripture, Apostolic Tradition, the Magisterium and the Pastoral needs of the faithful. This will ensure that future liturgical developments remain faithful to both Catholic doctrine and the cultural heritage of the *Agĩkũyũ*.[727]

5.2 Theological Recommendations

Theological reflection is indispensable in any process of liturgical inculturation because it ensures that cultural expressions are interpreted in the light if divine revelation and the faith of the

[725] *Varietates Legitimae*, 63-69
[726] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 33
[727] *Ecclesia in Africa* 78-80.

Church. The inculturation of the bishop's Staff through the symbolism of the Mũthĩgi of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder must therefore remain firmly grounded in Sacred Scripture, Apostolic Tradition, the Teaching Authority of the Church and sound theological methodology. Thus, the following recommendations are proposed.

5.2.1 Maintain the Christological Foundation of the Staff

The Pastoral Staff of bishop should always remain a visible sign of Christ the Good Shepherd, who guides, protects, and gathers His flock. Although the *Mũthĩgi* provides important cultural insights into leadership, wisdom, justice and communal responsibility, these meanings must always be interpreted through the person and mission of Jesus Christ. Theological reflection should therefore present the *Mũthĩgi* as a symbol that illuminates the Pastoral office of Christ rather than replacing or redefining it.[728]

5.2.2 Preserve the Ecclesiological Meaning of the Episcopal Ministry

The inculturation of the Pastoral Staff should safeguard the Catholic understanding of the episcopate as the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders. The bishop exercises his ministry as successor of the Apostles in communion with the Roman Pontiff and the College of Bishops. Thus, any cultural adaptation of the Pastoral Staff should strengthen, rather than diminish its ecclesiastical significance as a sign of apostolic ministry and communion within the universal Church.[729]

[728] *Pastores Gregis*, no. 42.
[729] Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no. 22 in *AAS* 57 (1965): 5-75.

5.2.3 Avoid Syncretism

Without prejudicing the *Agĩkũyũ* traditions, care must always be taken not to introduce practices which are incompatible with Christian faith. It should be born in mind that inculturation differs from syncretism because it preserves the primacy of Christ and the integrity of the doctrine of the Church.[730] Therefore, any traditional meanings of the *Mũthĩgi* associated with beliefs contrary to Christianity should be purified and reinterpreted in light of the Gospel.

5.2.4 Interpret the *Mũthĩgi* in the light of the Gospel

The Church should encourage theological studies that examine the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* according to the principles of biblical revelation. Values such as wisdom, justice, reconciliation, protection, communal responsibility and servant leadership should be interpreted as preparatory values that find their fullest meaning in Christ. Such an approach demonstrates that the Gospel fulfills authentic cultural aspirations while purifying those elements that are incompatible with Christian faith.[731]

5.2.5 Strengthen Biblical Formation on the Symbolism of the Shepherd

Theological formation should give greater emphasis to the biblical theology of the shepherd and the Staff. The Staffs of Moses and Aaron, the shepherd imagery in the Psalms and the Prophets and Christ's self-revelation as the Good Shepherd provide the primary theological context within which the symbolism of the Mũthĩgi should be understood. Such biblical formation

[730] Aylward Shorter, *African Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation?* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977), 44.
[731] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission, no. 103 in *AAS* 88 (1996): 102.

will enable the faithful to appreciate the continuity between the Old Testament and legitimate cultural expressions.[732]

5.2.6 Encourage African Contextual Theology

Catholic Universities and theological institutes should involve themselves in theological research on African symbols of leadership especially those which would hold in shedding light on the episcopal ministry. Comparative studies involving the Mũthĩgi, the episcopal Staff and similar African symbols can contribute to a richer contextual theology that remains faithful to the catholic doctrine while responding to the Pastoral realities of African societies.[733]

5.2.7 Safeguard the Unity of the Roman Rite

Every theological reflection geared towards liturgical inculturation should consistently affirm that legitimate inculturation enriches but never fragments the liturgical unity of the Church. The external design of an inculturated Pastoral Staff may incorporate approved *Agĩkũyũ* artistic motifs, yet its essential theological meaning, liturgical function and sacramental symbolism must remain those of the Roman Rite. This fidelity preserves both Catholic universality and authentic cultural diversity.[734]

5.2.8 Encourage Ongoing Theological Dialogue

The Church in Kenya and more especially those dioceses where the Agĩkũyũ are dominant or in the majority should encourage sustained dialogue among bishops, theologians, liturgists, anthropologists and experts in the *Agĩkũyũ* culture concerning the theological implications of

[732] Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 123.
[733] *Ecclesia in Africa*, no.103.
[734] General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 397.

inculturating the Pastoral Staff. Such dialogue will foster greater theological precision, Pastoral effectiveness and ecclesial communion while contributing to the wider development of African liturgical theology.[735]

5.3 Athropological Suggestions

The science of anthropology provides an indispensable framework for understanding the symbols, values and social institutions that shape human communities. Since liturgical inculturation presupposes a profound appreciation of culture, the Church must engage seriously with the anthropological worldview of the *Agĩkũyũ* people. The Mũthĩgi is a cultural symbol that embodies authority, wisdom, communal responsibility, justice reconciliation and elderhood. These anthropological realities provide valuable insights for the inculturation of the bishop's Pastoral Staff, provided they are purified and interpreted in the light of the Gospel. Given this scenario, the following recommendations are proposed.

5.3.1 Promote Anthropological Research on the Symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi*

Catholic institutions of learning such as universities, seminaries, and research institutes should undertake interdisciplinary studies on the historical, anthropological and symbolic meanings of the Mũthĩgi. Such research should document its role in leadership, judicial processes, rites of passage, conflict resolution and communal identity among the *Agĩkũyũ*. A sound anthropological undertaking will provide an objective basis for theological reflection and prevent superficial or inaccurate interpretation of the symbol.[736]

[735] *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 118.
[736] Leakey, The Southern Kikuyu before 1903, Vol. 1, (1977), 252.

5.3.2 Dialogue between Anthropologists and Theologians

To have a successful liturgical inculturation, a sustained collaboration between anthropologists, theologians, liturgists, historians and cultural custodians is required. Anthropologists contribute an accurate understanding of the *Agĩkũyũ* cultural symbols, while theologians discern their compatibility with the Christian revelation. Such interdisciplinary dialogue helps to ensure that the inculturation of the Pastoral Staff is both culturally authentic and theologically sound.[737]

5.3.3 Promote Community Participation in Cultural Discernment

The process of inculturating the Pastoral Staff should involve broad consultation with the Agĩkũyũ elders, historians, cultural practitioners, women, youth, catechists, clergy and the lay faithful. Such participation reflects both communal character of the *Agĩkũyũ* society and synodal life of the Church. Community involvement would also help distinguish authentic cultural values from customs that may no longer express the deepest aspirations of contemporary Agĩkũyũ society.[738]

5.3.4 Differentiate Cultural Symbols from Religious Worship

Anthropological appreciation of the Mũthĩgi should not lead to confusion between cultural symbolism and Christian worship. The Mũthĩgi should be understood as a cultural expression of leadership and communal responsibility, while the bishop's Pastoral Staff remains a liturgical symbol of Christ the Good Shepherd and episcopal ministry. This distinction is important because

[737] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (1997), 43.
[738] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 115

it safeguards the integrity of both the *Agĩkũyũ* culture and the theological meaning of the symbols used in the Church.[739]

5.3.5 Promote Indigenous Artistic Expressions

Catholic artists and craftsmen should be encouraged to produce episcopal Pastoral Staffs that incorporate carefully discerned *Agĩkũyũ* artistic motifs, patterns and carvings. These artistic elements should symbolize virtues such as wisdom, justice, peace, reconciliation, hospitality and unity without compromising the essential Christological symbolism of the crozier. All artistic adaptations should receive the appropriate ecclesiastical approval before being introduced into liturgical use.[740]

5.3.6 Encourage Cultural Dialogue within Evangelization

Pastoral agents should engage *Agĩkũyũ* culture respectfully, recognizing that authentic evangelization begins with listening before teaching. Continues dialogue with cultural leaders, historians and community representatives will enable the Church to identify those cultural values that illuminate the Gospel while avoiding misunderstandings and unnecessary cultural alienation. Such dialogue reflects the commitment of the Church to evangelization through encounter rather than cultural domination.[741]

5.3.7 Discern Cultural Elements Suitable for Liturgical Inculturation

Not every cultural practice is suitable for incorporation into the liturgy. Therefore, diocesan liturgical commission should carefully evaluate the symbolism associated with the Mũthĩgi to

[739] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 40.
[740] *Varietates Legitimae*, no. 43.
[741] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Tradition of Abundant Life*, (1997), 76.

distinguish those elements compatible with Catholic faith from those requiring purification or exclusion. Values such as servant leadership, justice, wisdom, reconciliation and communal responsibility provide particularly appropriate points of dialogue with the theology of bishop's Pastoral ministry.[742]

5.3.8 Use Indigenous Agikuyu Wood

The use of indigenous wood from sacred trees traditionally valued by the *Agĩkũyũ* for their durability, dignity and symbolic significance should be promoted. The choice of locally sourced wood reflects the principle that the gospel takes root with the concrete life of a people.

5.4 Pastoral Recommendations

The Pastoral mission of the Church seeks to proclaim Christ in ways that are both faithful to the Gospel and meaningful within the cultural context of the people. The findings of this study demonstrate that the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder offers valuable Pastoral insights that can enrich the understanding of the bishop's Pastoral Staff. Given this perspective, the following Pastoral recommendation are proposed.

5.4.1 Foster Dialogue Between Church Leaders and the *Agĩkũyũ* Elders

Every diocese should plan and organize regular forums in which, dialogue between bishops, priests, theologians, catechists, and respected *Agĩkũyũ* elders. These encounters would facilitate a deeper understanding of the symbolic meaning of the Mũthĩgi, enabling the Church to identify those cultural values that are compatible with Catholic teaching. Such dialogue will also

[742] Sacrosanctum Concilium, 40:1.

strengthen mutual trust between ecclesial and cultural institutions while avoiding misunderstandings concerning the purpose of inculturation.[743]

5.4.2 Integrate the Symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* into the Pastoral formation

Where possible, seminaries, houses of formation and diocesan institutes should include the study of the Agĩkũyũ cultural symbols within programs of Pastoral formation. Seminarians and Pastoral agents serving among the *Agĩkũyũ* should understand how the Mũthĩgi symbolizes wisdom, service, reconciliation. communal responsibility and moral authority. This formation will prepare them to explain the Pastoral significance of an inculturated episcopal Staff with theological clarity and cultural sensitivity.

5.4.3 Encourage Community Participation in the Inculturation Process

Any authentic Pastoral inculturation should involve active participation by clergy, religious, catechists, youth, women, elders and lay faithful. Parish consultations diocesan Pastoral assemblies, workshops and seminars should be organized to bring together insights of the faithful regarding the appropriate incorporation of the Agĩkũyũ cultural symbols into Pastoral and liturgical life. Such participation reflects the synodal nature of the Church while ensuring that Pastoral initiatives respond to lived experience of the local community.[744]

5.4.4 Maintain Fidelity to the Catholic Doctrine

Every Pastoral initiative involving the Mũthĩgi should remain firmly rooted in Scripture, Apostolic Tradition and the Teaching Authority (Magisterium) of the Church. The *Mũthĩgi* should

[743] Patrick Njoroge Wachege, *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Eldership as Mũthamaki*, (2020), 101.
[744] *Ecclesia in Africa*, 92.

never replace the Christological significance of the bishop's Pastoral Staff but should serve as a cultural symbol that enriches the faithful's understanding of episcopal ministry. Continuous theological formation should therefore accompany all Pastoral initiatives to prevent syncretism and doctrinal confusion.[745]

5.4.5 Formulate Catechetical Teaching Materials on the Symbolism of the Pastoral Staff

Bishops in whose dioceses this venture is to take place, in collaboration with the diocesan catechetical offices and theological institutes should prepare catechetical manuals, teaching guides, audiovisual resources and parish study materials explaining the biblical, theological, liturgical and historical meaning of the Pastoral Staff. These resources should also introduce the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* and demonstrate how its positive values can enhance the ministry of the bishop without interfering with the Catholic doctrine.[746]

5.4.6 Integrate Inculturation into Parish Catechesis

The catechetical programs of the parish should include carefully prepared lessons on the relationship between Christian faith and the *Agĩkũyũ* culture. Catechists should be in a position to explain how the Church evaluates cultural symbols through the light of the Gospel and why the *Mũthĩgi* may legitimately enrich the understanding of the bishop's Pastoral office. Such instruction will deepen appreciation of both Catholic tradition and Agĩkũyũ cultural heritage.[747]

[745] *Lumen Gentium* (1964), 23.
[746] John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), 19.
[747] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 59.

5.4.7 Strengthen the Formation of Catechists

While training the catechists for their ministry, emphasize should be on specialized training in biblical theology, liturgy, African theology, Agĩkũyũ culture and the principles of inculturation. Formation programs should equip them to distinguish clearly between authentic liturgical inculturation and syncretism, enabling them to answer Pastoral questions with theological competence and cultural sensitivity.[748]

5.9.8 Promote Ongoing Mystagogical Catechesis

One of the many challenges in the Church especially in Kenya today, is that most of Christians and half-baked in matter doctrinal and traditions of the Church. Catechetical formation especially for adults is brief and superficial. It takes 3-6 months and then the person is baptized and other Sacraments follow. Thereafter the person is deemed to a grownup Christian and hence no more formation is required. This proposal insists that catechesis should not end with sacramental preparation but should continue through ongoing mystagogical formation. For example, whenever a bishop celebrates major diocesan liturgies using the Pastoral Staff, catechists and clergy should explain its symbolism within the celebration itself, enabling the faithful to appreciate more deeply the relationship between the liturgy episcopal ministry and the *Agĩkũyũ* cultural values.[749]

[748] Dicastery for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 240.
[749] CCC, 1074.

5.5 Spiritual Recommendations

The spiritual mission of the Church is to lead the faithful into deeper communion with the Triune God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Within this mission, symbols play an important role in communicating spiritual realities and nurturing the faith of the believers. The findings of this study suggest that the Mũthĩgi of the Agĩkũyũ, when interpreted in the light of Christian revelation, possesses crucial spiritual values which, if considered can enrich the understanding of the Pastoral Staff of the bishop. Thus, the following recommendations are proposed.

5.5.1 Develop a Servant Leadership Spirituality

The inculturated Pastoral Staff should be a constant reminder to the bishop that his ministry is one rooted in a remarkable way to the servant leadership of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. As the Mũthĩgi symbolizes the duty of the elder to guide, protect and care for the community, so too the Pastoral Staff of the bishop should inspire humility, charity, self-sacrifice and Pastoral dedication. The bishop should therefore cultivate a spirituality characterized by prayer, compassion, Pastoral availability and service rather than authority understood as dominance.[750]

5.5.2 Promote Prayer Rooted in the Scripture

The symbolism of the Mũthĩgi should encourage the people of God to deepen their relationship with God through the Scripture, personal prayer and participation in the sacramental life of the Church. The carrying of the Pastoral Staff by the bishop should be recognized as one who leads God's people by the light of the Gospel. Consequently, dioceses should encourage Bible

[750] John Paul II, *Pastores Gregis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003), 42.

study groups, Eucharistic adoration, retreats, recollections and parish missions that strengthen the spiritual life of Christians while relating the biblical images of the shepherd to the *Agĩkũyũ* understanding of the wise leadership.[751]

5.5.3 Promote a Spirituality of Reconciliation

Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, the Mũthĩgi symbolizes mediation, justice and restoration of harmony within the community. These values find their fulfilment in Christ, who reconciles humanity with God and with one another. The inculturated Pastoral Staff should therefore inspire bishops, priests and the faithful to become agents of reconciliation through the Sacrament of Penance, peace-building initiatives and the healing of divisions within families, parishes and societies.[752]

5.5.4 Promote Holiness by the Example of the Elder

The moral uprightness expected of the *Agĩkũyũ* elder provides an important point of dialogue with the Christian call to holiness. The Pastoral Staff should remind all the Pastoral ministers that authentic authority flows from a life of holiness, fidelity to the Gospel and total obedience to Christ. Bishop, priests, religious, catechists and the lay leaders should therefore strive to embody virtues such as humility, justice, honesty, patience, wisdom and charity become credible witnesses of the Gospel.

5.5.5 Strengthen Communion within the Church

The Mũthĩgi symbolizes the elder's responsibility to preserve unity within the clan. Similarly, the Pastoral Staff signifies his ministry of maintaining communion within the diocese.

[751] Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, (2010), 72.
[752] John Paul II, *Reconciliation et Paenitentia* (1984), 23.

Pastoral programs should therefore promote unity among clergy, religious and the lay faithful through synodal dialogue, collaborative ministry and shared participation in the mission of the Church. Such communion reflects the unity of the Body of Christ and strengthens the witness of the Church in the community.[753]

5.5.6 Integrate Indigenous Spiritual Values through Christian Discernment

Authentic spiritual inculturation requires careful discernment of indigenous values in the light of the Gospel. Positive *Agĩkũyũ* values such as respect for elders, communal solidarity, hospitality, responsibility, reverence for life and care for creation should be integrated into the Christian spirituality where they are compatible with the teaching of the Church. At the same time, any practices inconsistent with the Christian faith should be purified or excluded. Such discernment safeguards both the integrity of the Gospel and the dignity of the *Agĩkũyũ* culture.[754]

5.5.7 Promote Spiritual Formation for Pastoral Ministers

Programs of spiritual formation that integrate biblical spirituality, liturgical spirituality and appropriate African spiritual values should be strengthened in seminaries, houses of formation and diocesan Pastoral centres. Future bishops and priests should be formed to appreciate the symbolic richness of the *Mũthĩgi* while remaining deeply rooted in the spirituality of Christ the Good Shepherd. Such formation will enable them to exercise Pastoral leadership with spiritual maturity and cultural sensitivity.[755]

[753] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 25.
[754] *Varietates Legitimae*, (1994), 21.
[755] John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, (1992), 43.

5.5.8 Encourage Continuous Discernment Under the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

The process of inculturation the Pastoral Staff should always be accompanied by prayerful ecclesial discernment. Since the Holy Spirit guides the Church into all the truth, every proposal for spiritual and liturgical adaptation should emerge from prayer, theological reflection, consultation with the faithful and strict adherence to the Magisterium. This spiritual discernment ensures that inculturation remains an authentic work of the Holy Spirit rather than merely a cultural innovation.[756]

5.6 Historical Recommendations

History provides an indispensable foundation for authentic foundation for authentic liturgical inculturation because it enables the Church to distinguish enduring cultural traditions from later developments and to appreciate the historical evolution of Christian symbols. Both the episcopal Pastoral Staff and the Mũthĩgi of the Agĩkũyũ possess long and complex histories that have shaped their present meaning. The bishop's Pastoral Staff developed gradually within the Christian tradition as a symbol of apostolic authority and Pastoral responsibility, while the Mũthĩgi emerged within the Agĩkũyũ society as a visible sign of Elderhood, wisdom, justice, mediation and communal leadership. A historically informed process of inculturation should therefore preserve the integrity of both traditions while fostering a meaningful dialogue between them. The following recommendations proposed.

[756] Faith and Inculturation (1988), 24.

5.7.1 Promote Historical Research on the Origin and Development of the *Mũthĩgi*

The Church should encourage detailed historical research into the origins, evolution and changing functions of *Mũthĩgi* within the *Agĩkũyũ* society. Such research should examine oral traditions, archival sources, missionary records, ethnographic studies and archaeological evidence to establish a reliable historical understanding of the symbol. Accurate historical knowledge will provide a sound basis for theological interpretation and prevent the adoption of historically inaccurate assumptions in the process of liturgical inculturation.[757]

5.7.2 Study the Historical Development of the Episcopal Pastoral Staff

Seminaries, theological faculties and diocesan formation centers should strengthen historical studies on the evolution of the Pastoral Staff from the early church through the patristic, medieval, Tridentine and post-Vatican II periods. Understanding this historical development demonstrates that the Church has consistently allowed legitimate adaptation of external liturgical forms while preserving their theological significance. Such historical awareness provides an important precedent for contemporary liturgical inculturation.[758]

5.7.3 Preserve Historical Authenticity in Inculturation

Any adaptation of the Pastoral Staff inspired by the Mũthĩgi should faithfully preserve the historical identity of both symbols. The inculturated Pastoral Staff should neither reproduce the Mũthĩgi exactly nor obscure the historical continuity of the episcopal crozier. Instead, it should

[757] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903*, (1977), Vol. 1, 247.
[758] H. J. Schroeder trans. *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils*, (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), 154.

express an authentic synthesis in which the Pastoral Staff retains its Christian historical identity while incorporating carefully discerned *Agĩkũyũ* symbolic elements.

5.7.4 Document Oral Historical Tradition

Since much of the *Agĩkũyũ* history has been transmitted orally, dioceses, Catholic universities and cultural institutions should collaborate in recording testimonies from respected elders concerning the historical use of the Mũthĩgi. Such oral history projects are urgent, given the gradual loss of elderly custodians of indigenous knowledge. These historical records will enrich both academic research and future Pastoral activities.

5.7.5 Recover the History of Early Evangelization among the *Agĩkũyũ*

This venture should examine how the early missionaries (both Catholics and Protestants) encountered the *Agĩkũyũ* symbols of authority, including the *Mũthĩgi*. Studying missionary responses to indigenous leadership structures can help contemporary theologians identify both the strengths and limitations of earlier missionary approaches and contribute to more effective models of inculturation today.

5.7.6 Promote Historical Awareness among the Clergy and Catechists

Programs of priestly formation and catechist education should include historical studies on *Agĩkũyũ* culture, African Christianity and the development of Catholic liturgy. Historical literacy enables Pastoral ministers to explain why inculturation is a continuation of the Church's historical

missionary practice rather than a modern innovation. Such formation also strengthens confidence in the legitimacy of authentic liturgical adaptation.[759]

5.7.7 Establish Ecclesiastical and Cultural Archives

Dioceses serving the *Agĩkũyũ* communities should establish archives containing manuscripts, photographs, interviews, artistic designs, liturgical texts and historical studies relating to the Mũthĩgi and the Pastoral Staff. Such archives would preserve important historical materials for future scholars and support the continued development of inculturated liturgical practice. Collaboration with national museums and universities would further enhance the preservation of this cultural heritage.

Conclusion

The foregoing recommendations have demonstrated that an inculturated understanding of the Pastoral Staff, illuminated by the *Mũthĩgi*, offers a promising avenue for deepening the evangelizing mission of the Church while remaining faithful to Catholic doctrine and liturgical norms. The *Mũthĩgi*, as a symbol of wisdom, authority, reconciliation, justice, protection and communal responsibility, personifies values that resonate profoundly with the theological symbolism of the Pastoral Staff as a sign of the Good Shepherd's Pastoral Staff. Instead of creating a new liturgical symbol, this study proposes a hermeneutic through which the existing Pastoral Staff may be interpreted and appreciated within the cultural worldview of the *Agĩkũyũ* people, such an approach is consistent with the Church understanding of inculturation, whereby the Gospel

[759] *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (2016), 89.

enters into dialogue with authentic cultural values, purifies them where necessary and elevates them in the light of Christ's saving mystery.

The recommendations advanced in this chapter have emphasized that inculturation should proceed through careful theological reflection, ecclesial discernment and respect for the liturgical legislation of the Church. The Second Vatican Council encouraged legitimated adaptations that enable the liturgy to speak meaningfully to different peoples while safeguarding the unity of the Roman Rite. Subsequent magisterial documents have reaffirmed that authentic inculturaration is neither the mere transplantation of cultural practices into the liturgy nor the abandonment of Catholic identity, but rather the mutual enrichment of faith and culture under the guidance of the teaching authority of the Church. Within this framework, the symbolism of the Mũthĩgi can enrich catechesis, theological formation, episcopal ministry and Pastoral practice without altering the essential meaning of the Pastoral Staff.

This chapter has also underscored the Pastoral significance of engaging Agĩkũyũ cultural heritage in evangelization. Many *Agĩkũyũ* Christians continue to recognize the Mũthĩgi as a visible expression of integrity, Elderhood, communal service and moral leadership. By drawing responsible theological parallels between these values and the ministry symbolized by the Pastoral Staff, the Church can foster greater participation in the liturgy, strengthen cultural identity within Christian faith and promote a more profound appreciation of the episcopal office.

Furthermore, these recommendations point toward a broader vision of African vision of African liturgical theology in which local cultural symbols become authentic vehicles for communicating the Gospel. As Ecclesia in Africa observes, inculturation constitutes "a priority and an urgent task" for the Church in Africa because it enables Christianity to take deep root in

African cultures while transforming them through the power of the Gospel. Consequently, the *Mũthĩgi* should not be viewed as a rival to the Pastoral Staff but a cultural key that helps *Agĩkũyũ* Christians understand more fully the Pastoral mission of the bishop as shepherd, teacher, sanctifier and servant of God's people.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This dissertation, entitled **"The Symbolism of Mũthĩgi of the Agĩkũyũ Elders of Kenya and the Pastoral Staff of the Catholic Bishop: Towards a Liturgical Inculturation,"** has sought to explore how the cultural symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* can contribute towards a deeper understanding and possible inculturation of the Pastoral Staff within the Catholic Church among the *Agĩkũyũ* people of Kenya. The study has demonstrated that symbols are not merely external objects but powerful means through which community's express authority, identity, leadership, spirituality, and their understanding of social relationships. Through the dialogue between the Mũthĩgi and the Pastoral Staff, the research has attempted to show how the Gospel can engage positively with African cultural expressions while remaining faithful to Catholic tradition.

Chapter One examined the historical, social, cultural, religious, and political background of the Agĩkũyũ people of Kenya. It established that the *Agĩkũyũ* possess a rich cultural heritage with organized systems of leadership, elderhood, communal responsibility, and religious expression. The chapter argued that understanding the worldview of the *Agĩkũyũ* community is essential before proposing any form of liturgical inculturation because symbols derive their meaning from the cultural environment in which they exist. It further demonstrated that the institution of elderhood provides an important foundation for understanding leadership and authority within Agĩkũyũ society.

Chapter Two focused on the symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi* of the *Agĩkũyũ* elders. The chapter argued that the *Mũthĩgi* is more than a physical walking stick because it represents authority, wisdom, justice, guidance, responsibility, reconciliation, and communal leadership. Through its association with the *Kĩama* of elders, the *Mũthĩgi* expresses the dignity and responsibilities

entrusted to elders who serve the community. Therefore, the chapter established that the *Mũthĩgi* carries cultural meanings that can provide valuable insights into understanding pastoral leadership.

Chapter Three examined the Staff within biblical tradition and the in Church Tradition. It demonstrated that the Staff has always carried symbolic meaning connected with shepherding, authority, protection, guidance, and responsibility. The chapter traced the development of the Pastoral Staff as an episcopal symbol and showed that the bishop carries it as a visible sign of his pastoral mission to guide and serve God's people. This chapter provided the theological foundation necessary for comparing the Pastoral Staff with the *Mũthĩgi*.

Chapter Four presented a comparative study between the *Mũthĩgi* and the Pastoral Staff. It highlighted both similarities and differences between the two symbols, showing that both communicate leadership, authority, guidance, and responsibility within their respective traditions. The chapter argued that meaningful liturgical inculturation does not involve replacing Catholic symbols but allowing cultural expressions that are compatible with Christian faith to enrich the understanding of the liturgy. The possibility of an inculturated Pastoral Staff was therefore presented as a dialogue between faith and culture.

Chapter Five proposed ways through which an inculturated Pastoral Staff may be promoted in Kenya. The chapter emphasized theological, cultural, liturgical, pastoral, anthropological, historical, and catechetical considerations necessary for authentic inculturation. It argued that any adaptation must preserve the Christological meaning of the Pastoral Staff while allowing the cultural values represented by the *Mũthĩgi* to communicate more effectively with the *Agĩkũyũ* faithful.

Although this research has contributed significantly to understanding of the relationship between the *Mũthĩgi* and the Pastoral Staff, it does not claim to have exhausted every aspect of these two symbols. Further research remains necessary because both the Pastoral Staff and the Mũthĩgi contain wider theological, cultural, historical, and anthropological dimensions that require deeper investigation. Future studies may explore the perspectives of *Agĩkũyũ* Catholic communities regarding an inculturated Pastoral Staff, investigate artistic designs suitable for liturgical use, and examine similar indigenous symbols of leadership among other African communities.

For an inculturated Pastoral Staff to become truly accepted and understood among the people, two practical measures are necessary. First, the Church should develop continuous catechetical programmes that explain the theological meaning of the Pastoral Staff and its relationship with the cultural symbolism of the *Mũthĩgi*. Such formation would help the faithful appreciate the symbol beyond its external appearance. Second, the Church should encourage collaboration between bishops, theologians, cultural experts, artists, and local communities in designing and promoting an inculturated Pastoral Staff that reflects both Catholic identity and *Agĩkũyũ* cultural values.

This study affirms that authentic inculturation is a meeting point between the Gospel and human cultures. The *Mũthĩgi* and the Pastoral Staff reveal that symbols can communicate faith, leadership, and belonging in meaningful ways. When approached with theological wisdom and cultural sensitivity, an inculturated Pastoral Staff can become a visible expression of the Church's presence among the Agĩkũyũ people. Such an approach strengthens the relationship between Christianity and culture while enriching the universal mission of the Catholic Church.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bibles

Ibuku Ria Ngai (Kikuyu Bible), Nairobi: Bible Society of Kenya, 1965.

The Holy Bible Revised Standard Version, Grand Rapid: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1971.

The New African Bible, Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 2011.

The New Jerusalem Bible, London: Longman & Todd, 1985.

Church Documents

2. Church Documents

2.1 Liturgical Sources

General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2003.

The Roman Pontifical as Revised by Decree of the SECOND Ecumenical Council, Publication by Authority of Pope Paul VI and Further Revised at the Direction of Pope John Paul II: Rites of Ordination of a Bishop, Priest and Deacon, Second Typical Edition, Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002.

Sacramentarium *Gelasianum*, (ed.), L. C. Mohlberg – L. Eizenhöfer – P. Siffrin (Rerum ecclesiasticarum documenta. Series maior, Fontes 1), Rome: Herder, 1981.

Hippolytus of Rome, *Apostolic Tradition*, trans. Alistair Stewart (New York: St. Vladimir, s Seminary Press, 2015)

Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, (ed.), *Sacramentarium Veronense* (Codex Veronense LXXXV), Ecclesiasticarum Documenta, Series Maior 1, Rome: Herder, 1956.

Henry A. Wilson, ed., *The Gelasian Sacramentary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894.

Jean Deshusses, ed., *Le Sacramentaire Grégorien: Ses Principales forms d'après les plus anciens manuscrits*, 3 vols. Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1971-1982.

2.2 Conciliar Documents

Vatican II, Constitutions, Decrees, and Declarations, Austin Flannery (ed.), New York: 1986.

---------- *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy in *AAS* 56 (1964): 97–138.

---------- *Lumen Gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, in *AAS* 57 (1965): 5-75.

---------- *Presbyterorum Ordinis*: Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, in *AAS* 58 (1966): 991-1024.

---------- *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, in AAS 58 (1966): 837-864.

---------- *Ad Gentes Divinitus*: Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, in AAS 58 (1966): 987-999.

2.3 Papal documents

Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortyation on Evangelization in the Modern World, in *AAS* 68, (1976): 5-96.

John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in our Time, in *AAS* 71 (1979): 1296-1316.

----------, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate, in *AAS* 83 (1991): 249-340.

----------, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission, in *AAS* 88 (1996): 38-96.

_____, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Post-Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Presnt Day, in *AAS* 84 (1992): 657-804.

_____, *Pasores Gregis*, Post-Synodal Exhortation on the Bishop, Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World, in *AAS* 96 (2004): 825-927.

_____, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, Post-Synodal Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today, in *AAS* 77 (1985): 185-275.

Pope Benect XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, in *AAS* 102 (2010): 682-787.

_____, *Africae Munus*, Post- Synodal Exhortation on the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace, in AAS 104 (2012): 3-87

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, in *AAS* 105 (2013): 1019-1137.

2.4 Dicastery

Dicastery for Divine Worship and Discipline of Sacraments, *Varietates Legitimae*, IV Instruction on Liturgical and the Roman Liturgy 1994, in *AAS* (1995): 288-314.

Other Church Documents

The New Code of Canon Law (Codex Iuris Canonici), Autoritate Ionnis Pauli PP II, Promulgatus, in AAS 75 (1983): 1-371.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in AAS 84 (1993).

Catholic Church. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM). 3rd Typical Edition. Vatican City: Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2002.

Books

---------- *Introduction to African Religion*, London: Heinemann, 1975.

----------, African *Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*, Nairobi: Longman Kenya, 1989.

----------, *Jesus Christ Our Mũthamaki (Ideal Elder): An African Christological Study Based on the Agĩkũyũ Understanding of Elder*, Nairobi: Phoenix Publishers, 1992.

Battignole, S. S., *Kikuyu Traditional Culture and Christianity*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books (E.A.) Ltd., 1984.

Baur, J., *The Catholic Church in Kenya: A Centenary History*. Nairobi: St. Paul Publications – Africa, 1990.

Blunt, R., W. *For Money and Elders: Ritual, Sovereignty, and the Sacred in Kenya*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.

Cagnolo, C., *The Agĩkũyũ: Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore*. Torino: Istituto Missioni Consolata, 1933.

Francis, M. R., *Shape a Circle Ever Wider: Liturgical Inculturation in the United States*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2000.

Gatheru, R. M., *Child of Two Worlds*. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1964.

Himbara, D., *Kenyan Capitalists, the State, and Development*. Nairobi: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994.

Hobley, C. W., *Bantu Beliefs and Magic: With Particular Reference to the Kikuyu and Kamba Tribes of Kenya Colony*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1922; 2nd ed., 1967.

Jindra, M., and Joël Noret, eds. *Funerals in Africa: Explorations of a Social Phenomenon*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2011.

Kabira, W. M., *A Letter to Mariama: Reading African Women's Lives*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2006.

Kabiru, M., *Gikuyu Cultural Institutions*. Nyeri: Maitu Publications, 1999.

Kanogo, T., *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905–63*, London: James Currey; Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya; Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987.

Kenyatta, J., *Facing Mount Kenya*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1938; repr., Nairobi: Kenway Publications, 1978.

Lambert, H. E., *Kikuyu Social and Political Institutions*, London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1956.

Leakey, L. S. B., *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu*, London: Methuen, 1952.

Leakey, L. S. B., *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903*. 3 vols., London: Academic Press, 1977.

Lukwata, J., *Integrated African Liturgy*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 2003.

Magesa, L., *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa*, New York: Orbis Books, 2004.

Mbiti, J. S., *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1969; 2nd ed., Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1990.

Mbugua, J. N., [Johnson Ng'ang'a], *Funeral Rites Reformation for Any African Ethnic Community Based on the Proposed New Funeral Practices for the Agĩkũyũ*, Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2016.

Mbuthia, D. I., *The Challenges of Negotiating Between National and Sub-National Identities Through Heritage-Making in Kenya: With the Example of Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga Cultural Site*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2020.

Middleton, J., *The Central Tribes of the Northeastern Bantu (The Kikuyu, including Embu, Meru, Mbere, Chuka, Mwimbi, Tharaka, and the Kamba of Kenya)*, London: International African Institute, 1953.

Mugambi, J., *African Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1989.

Muriuki, G., *A History of the Kikuyu 1500–1900*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Mutongi, K., *Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Niebuhr, H. R., *Christ and Culture*, New York: Harper & Row, 1951.

Njoroge, L. M., *A Century of Catholic Endeavour: Holy Ghost and Consolata Missionaries in Kenya*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999.

Njoroge, P. N., *A People Called the Agĩkũyũ: Yesterday, Today… and Tomorrow?* Nairobi: Sycamore Tree Publishers, 2017.

Nyamiti, C., *Studies in African Traditional Religion and Theology*, Nairobi: The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) Publications, 1995.

Ronzani, R., *Apostolic Ministry: The Sacraments of Holy Orders*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2002.

Routledge, W. S., and Katherine Maria Routledge. *With a Prehistoric People: The Agĩkũyũ of British East Africa*. London: Edward Arnold, 1910.

Shillington, K., *History of Africa*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Swynnerton, Roger John Maynard. *A Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya*, Nairobi: Government Printer, 1954.

Thairu, K., *The African Mythical Heritage*, Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1997.

van Gennep, A., *The Rites of Passage*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.

Wachege, P. N., *Jesus Christ Inculturated into Agĩkũyũ Elderhood as Mũthamaki*, Kiambu: Little Eden Publishers Ltd., 2020.

Wamuyu, F. M., *Traditional Kikuyu Rites and Their Theological Significance*. Nairobi: Uzima Press, 2004.

Wanjau, G., *Mĩhĩrĩga ya Agĩkũyũ*, Nairobi: Gakaara Press, 1981.

Wanjohi, G. J., *The Wisdom and Philosophy of African Proverbs: The Gikuyu Worldview*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001.

Waweru, H., *The Bible and African Culture*. Limuru: Zapf Chancery Publishers Africa, 2011.

7. Articles

Daily Nation, "Kikuyu Elders: This Was Our State House Ritual." *Daily Nation*, March 28, 2022.

Gathogo, J., "The Re-Emergence of the African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Kenya." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 37, no. 2 (2011): 81–98.

Githinji, W., "The Kikuyu Traditional Religion and Christianity." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 22, no. 1 (1992): 45–62.

Kamau, J., "Kikuyu Elders: This Was Our State House Ritual." *Daily Nation Newspaper*, April 10, 2022.

Kamuyu-wa-K., "African Response to Christianity: A Case Study of the Agĩkũyũ of Central Kenya." *Missiology: An International Review* 16, no. 1 (January 1988): 23–38.

Lukwata, J., "Challenges and Opportunities for Liturgical Inculturation in Africa." *African Christian Studies* 26, no. 3 (CUEA Publications, September 2010): 73–85.

Maina, B. W., "Factors Leading to the Initiation of Christian Men into the Agĩkũyũ Cultural Eldership (Kiama)." *ShahidiHub International Journal of Theology & Religious Studies* 5, no. 1 (2025): 145–162.

Ndung'u, Stephen Njenga, Emily Onyango, and Sammy Githuku. "The Effects of the Missionaries' Strategies upon the Agĩkũyũ Rituals in the Light of Kiama Kia Athuri and Its Persistence: A Case of Anglican Church of Kenya, Diocese of Mt. Kenya South: 1960–

2020." *The Strategic Journal of Business & Change Management* 8, no. 4 (November 11, 2021): 642–658.

Omondi, F. "'Kiama Kia Athuri' Rituals and Challenges to *Agĩkũyũ* Christians." *African Theological Journal for Church and Society* 5, no. 1 (2024): 48–65.

The Standard Newspaper, "No Bible Verse nor Christianity at This Burial" (Report on the Ritual Role of Elders Carrying Mũthĩgi in Traditional Agĩkũyũ Funeral Ceremony for Elder Muhu Thuti in Kianabara Village, Mathira, Nyeri County). *The Standard*, April 24, 2022.

The Star, "Kikuyu Elders' Leadership Wrangles Deepen as Splinter Groups Lock Horns." *The Star Newspaper*, April 15, 2024.

Waliggo, J. M., "African Indigenous Religion and Culture." In *African Theology in Context*, edited by Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, 26–41. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979.

8. Internet Sources

Agĩkũyũ History and Culture. "Cultural History of the *Agĩkũyũ* Elders." Facebook Post. Retrieved from *https://www.facebook.com/AgikuyuHistoryAndculture/posts/1494050527302617/* Accessed on 22.5.2024.

Catholic-Hierarchy. "Archdiocese of Nyeri (Archidioecesis Nyeriensis)." Retrieved from *https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dnyer.html,* Accessed on 1.7.2026.

Catholic-Hierarchy. "Catholic Church in Republic of Kenya: Current Dioceses." Retrieved from *https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/scke2.html,* Accessed 1.7.2026.

Catholic-Hierarchy. "Diocese of Murang'a (Diocesis Murangaensis)." Retrieved from *https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dmura.html* Accessed on July 1, 2026.

Catholic-Hierarchy. "Diocese of Nyahururu (Diocesis Nyahururensis)." *https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dnyah.html,* Accessed on 1.7. 2026.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. "The Problem of Symbols." In *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, edited by Michael Lambek, Retrieved from, *https://is.muni.cz/el/phil/jaro2015/ETMB83/um/02_ReligionandAnthropologyreadingsfor01182012.pdf,* Accessed on 6.5.2026.

Finke, Jens. "Kikuyu – Traditional Religion." *Traditional Music and Cultures of Kenya* (BlueGecko), Retrieved from, *https://www.bluegecko.org/kenya/tribes/kikuyu/beliefs.htm,* Accessed on 13.11.2024.

Finke, Jens. "Traditional Music and Cultures of Kenya: Kikuyu Beliefs." *BlueGecko Culture Archive,* Retrieved from *https://www.bluegecko.org/kenya/tribes/kikuyu/beliefs.htm,* Accessed on 9.7. 2025.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS). "2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census Results." Retrieved from *https://www.knbs.or.ke,* Accessed on May 17.5.2024.

Unpublished Work

Kibicho, S. G., The Kikuyu Conception of God, His Continuity into the Christian Era, and the Question It Raises for the Christian Idea of Revelation, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Vanderbilt University / Columbia University, 1972.

List of Informers

Bishop

Rt. Rev. George Muthaka, Nairobi.

Priests

Rev. Fr. Lawrence Mbugu, Murang'a

Rev. Fr. Linus Mwangi Mugo, Murang'a

Rev. Fr. Moses Mwangi, Nyeri.

Catechists

George Githinji, Kiambu.

Beatrice Nyambura, Nyeri

Seminarians

Dominic Kamau Mbugua, Kiambu.

Lay People

Grace Mumbi, Nakuru

James Mungai Kagona, Kiambu.

John Kĩmani wa Mũrũgũ, Nakuru.

Philip Mutegi, Mpeketoni

Daniel Ngángá Kimani, Mpeketoni.

Joel Mugacia, Mpeketoni

Francis Gaitho Mburu, Ngong

APPENDICES

Appendix I: Questionnaire

LITURGICAL INCULTURATION OF THE PASTORAL STAFF OF THE BISHOP AMONG THE *AGĨKŨYŨ* CATHOLICS OF KENYA

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Name: _____ (Optional

2. Age: ☐ 18-30 ☐ 31–45 ☐ 46–60 ☐ 60+

3. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

4. Position in the Church: ☐ Bishop ☐ Priest ☐ Deacon ☐ Religious ☐ Seminarian ☐ Catechist ☐ Lay Faithful

5. Diocese/Parish: _____

SECTION B: GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

6. Are you aware of the symbol and function of the Pastoral Staff (crosier) of the Catholic bishop? ☐ Yes ☐ No

7. In Catholic liturgy, what is the Pastoral Staff primarily a symbol of?

☐ Authority

☐ Service and Pastoral care

☐ Apostolic succession

☐ All of the above

8. In liturgical celebrations, when does the bishop make use of the Pastoral Staff?

☐ Always

☐ Only on Sundays

☐ During solemn Masses, ordinations, and processions

☐ I don’t know

SECTION C: VIEWS ON INCULTURATION

9. In your view, is the present design of the bishop's Pastoral Staff culturally adapted into the local (Kenyan) context? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Somewhat

10. Should bishops be allowed to use African traditional symbols on Pastoral Staffs (such as carving, motifs, and indigenous materials)?

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

11. Are there traditional African symbols of authority (e.g., the mũthĩgĩ among the Agĩkũyũ) which function or symbolize similarly to Pastoral Staffs?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, please name and describe them:

_____

_____

_____

12. Have you ever seen a bishop using a visibly inculturated or locally made Pastoral Staff?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, give an account of the features that made it distinct:

_____

SECTION D: LITURGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL VIEWS

13. Do you think it is appropriate for the Churches in Africa to encourage inculturation in liturgical implements such as the Pastoral Staff?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

14. In your opinion, what can a Pastoral Staff inculturated into African traditions add to the Church's mission in Africa?

_____

_____

_____

15. Would you discern any theological risks or disadvantages in adapting the Pastoral Staff to indigenous culture?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, give reasons why:

_____

_____

_____

_____

16. What guide should the Church follow when inculturating symbols such as the Pastoral Staff?

_____

_____

_____

_____

SECTION E: FINAL REFLECTION

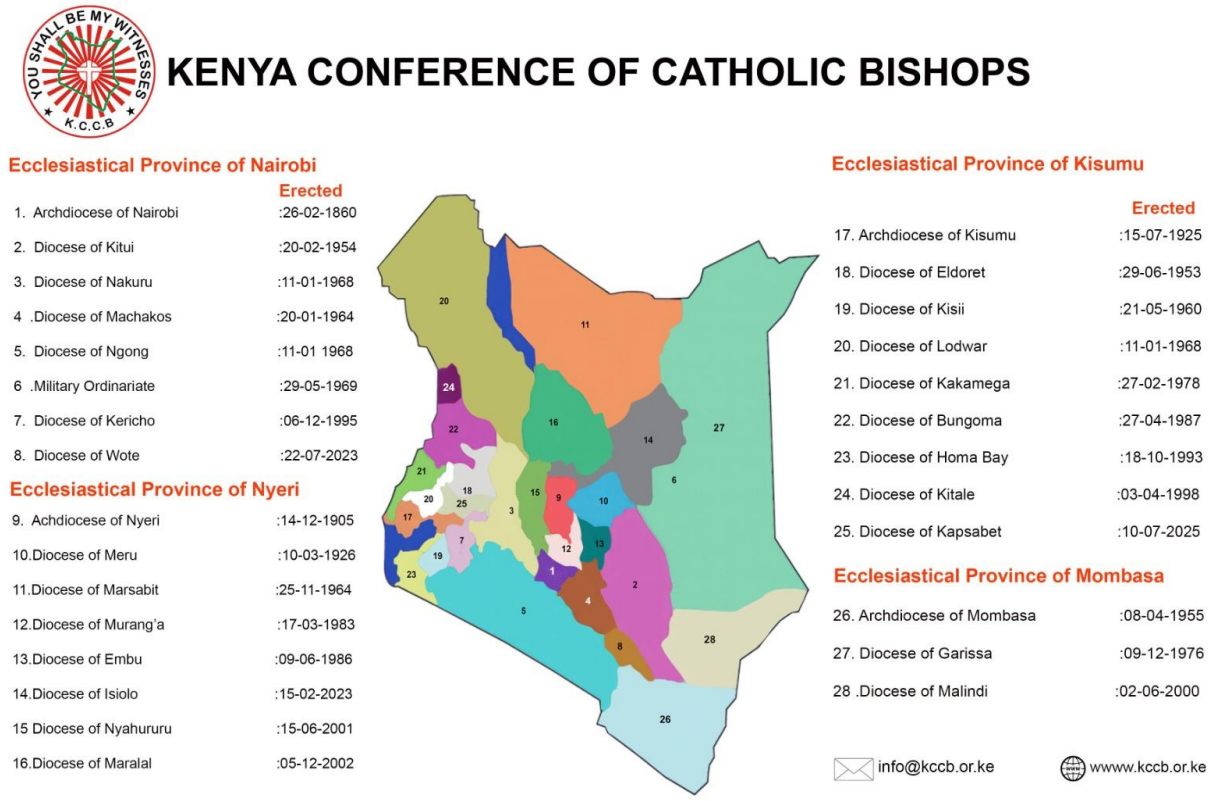
17. In your own words, how can the symbolism of the Pastoral Staff be deepened through dialogue with African traditions of leadership and sacred authority?

Appendix II: Maps



Map I: A map of Kenya showing the regions where the *Agĩkũyũ* are predominantly found.

Appendix III: Map of the Catholic Dioceses in Kenya



Appendix IV: Pictorials

Picture I: Mĩthĩgi



Picture II: The man in the middle has been made an Elder and given a *Mũthĩgi.*



Picture III: Y- Shaped with a curving of a lion



Picture II: The Crook of the Pastoral Staff of a Bishop

