

A socio-historical background to the Keswick theology¹ in East African Revival Movement as “walking in the light”

Perspectives from Kenya

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Abstract

The socio-historical background for walking in the light has been the dominant theme that has characterised socio-ethical beliefs and practices of the East African Revival Movement (EARM) since the arrival of the Keswick movement in East Africa in the early years of the 20th century. The early Keswick teachers propounded teaching of two types of Christians; the saved and those who have surrendered. This teaching found affinity in the social fabric of the East African Cultural setting influenced by factors from within and without. Thus, the prevailing experiences and circumstances in East Africa found fertile ground for entrenching Keswick theology in the EARM of walking in the light.

Keywords: Keswick Theology, East African Revival Movement, Kenya, “walking in the light”, socio-ethical beliefs and practices

1. Introduction

East Africa comprises of ten countries, but among these only Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya could be said to have experienced the profound influence of the East African Revival Movement (EARM) since its origin at Gahini, Rwanda in 1929 (Ward, 2012:3). The four countries provide a sufficient socio-historical background for the EARM’s beliefs and practices for walking in the light⁴. The focus of

¹ According to Naselli (2008:29), this phrase denotes five days of progressive teaching commonly referred to as spiritual clinic. Naselli further contends that this teaching characterised early Keswick conventions (1875-1920) that had a stereotyped sequence (2008:29). This early Keswick theology appears to have found fertile soil in the EARM beliefs and practices of walking in the light that led to discord in the revival in Kenya.

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⁴ The phrase ‘walking in the light’, as used by the members of the EARM, refers to a daily sanctification that is attained by a life of daily walking with the Lord, a regular examination of one’s heart and repentance which in essence means being transparent and open with one another (Gitari, n.d.:2; Ward & Wild-Wood, 2012:215 quoted in Knoetze & Mwangi, 2018:1).

this article has been narrowed to Kenya⁵, the home country of the researcher, where the movement entered via Uganda in 1938 (Langley & Kiggins, 1974:198). Indeed, the analogous socio-historical context of walking in the light has been found across the East African region, especially in the nations mentioned above. It is important therefore to establish the daily life circumstances and experiences that led to the acceptance of walking in the light, particularly by the ordinary members of the EARM. These circumstances and experiences appear to have been informed by both external and internal influences.

2. Background

The Roman Catholic Church was the first to set foot in East Africa in 1498, courtesy of the Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama and the catholic priests who introduced both European and Christianity (Langley & Kiggins, 1974:1). The Church Missionary Society (CMS) that heralded Protestant missionaries arrived much later in Mombasa in 1844 led by Ludwig Krapf and in 1877, Alexander Mackay arrived in Uganda (Ward, 2006:166). CMS played a significant part in the origin and spread of the EARM that influenced social-ethical life, particularly in the Anglican Church in East African region.

The arrival in the Ruanda Mission of the two young medical doctors, Leonard Sharp and Algie Stanley Smith pioneer missionaries in Ruanda-Urundi, appeared to set the pace. The two doctors, in their College days at Cambridge, had expressed an eagerness to missionary calling at some world unreached with the Gospel. An invitation in 1914 by a renowned Missionary, Albert Cook, to work in Mengo Hospital, Uganda, seemed to confirm their calling (Guillebaud, 1959:12). Later, Sharp and Smith were joined in 1922 by Dr. Joe Church and his wife Decie (Ward, 2006:176). Reed (2007:19) argues that like most of the Ruanda missionaries of this period, Dr. Church was a creation of Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (CICCU) influenced by revivalist ideals and Keswick holiness spirituality.

Perhaps this religious background, in 1929, worked in on Joe Church so that he became aware of not only his spiritual bankruptcy but that of the Anglican Church in Uganda. He met Simeon Nsibambi who seemed to share his need for Bible study, prayer, and mutual encouragement. Thus, Nsibambi and Church surrendered themselves to Christ and sought the fullness of the Holy Spirit that led to personal transformation. This realisation could have had historical significance because revival Brethren (Ward, 2012:3) preferred 1929 as the date of the origin of the East Africa Revival when Joe Church and Nsibambi met at Gahini resulting in the latter supplying the mission at Gahini with committed hospital workers and educationists. It is

⁵ Since one of the researchers was born and raised in Kenya, it was found prudent to situate the study in the Kenyan context. Again, although he is not a member of EARM, he came to faith through the ministries of the Brethren in Kenya.

reckoned that revival emerged first among these workers at Gahini in the 1930s and spread to other Ruanda Mission stations and Kigezi in Uganda.

The fact that some defining features of early Keswick teachings, like exclusive lifestyle and devotional reading of the Bible, find affinity with the EARM's lifestyle suggests not only some favourable socio-historical environment, but also somewhat dry orthodoxy propounded by the mainstream Protestant churches in East Africa – the Anglican, Methodists and Presbyterian denominations have remained haven to the EARM to date. Thus, while the daily life circumstances and experiences in East Africa milieu led to the accommodation of Keswick teachings of two sets of Christians – the born again and the ordinary – the maxim of walking in the light came to be the due consequence. These dictums appear to be reinforced by some consistent trends of exclusive coexistence rather than an inclusive one.

3. External influences

The external influences, in this context, will refer to a situation that was inspired by events or forces from outside or beyond the powers of the East African people. The researcher considers racial segregation, epidemics and diseases as the major threats that could have influenced Africans' livelihood at the beginning of the 20th century.

4. Racial segregation

In 1905, the white settlers in Kenya, following the example of South Africa, made the British government enact racial laws to control and subjugate Africans. According to these laws, not only were African Native reserves created but also the Masters and Servants Ordinance, poll tax and pass system were established (Muita, 2003:4). This denied Africans their tribal land and reduced them to servanthood under strict labour policies. Indeed, Odhiambo (1977:157) notes that the European demarcation of the Kenyan land was at best racist with the best land going to the Europeans, the so-called white highlands. Furthermore, Odhiambo (1977:157) argues that the 1915 Crown Lands Ordinance made the Reserves Crown Land and the African tenants could be evicted at any time.

This led to Africans feeling insecure in their own country for they were subdued and subjected not only to harsh means of earning money but to poll tax as well (Odhiambo, 1977:156). More hardship and suffering were in the offing when in 1919 the new governor, General George Northey issued a circular to increase the labour force (Odhiambo, 1977:156). This circular subjected African males over sixteen years of age to carry a *kipande*⁶. It was illegal to be found without it. In principle, the *kipande* became a badge of servitude. These abuses aroused

⁶ This was an identity (pass) card contained in a metal box.

national feelings culminating in social unrest. Harry Thuku who received mission education became secretary of the Young Kikuyu⁷ Association, a mouthpiece for African grievances. In 1922, he was arrested leading to a bloody violence in Nairobi that left many Kenyans dead (Sagay & Wilson, 1978:369). This signalled the beginning of concerted pressure by Africans for complete independence from the white-dominated rule.

Africans felt let down even by missionaries who meticulously worked alongside the colonial officials in such a way that there was little point in distinguishing one set of white people from another (Walls, 2002:103). This observation seems familiar to a saying by the Kikuyu people of Kenya during the colonial era, *gutiri Muthungu na Mubia* (there is no difference between a priest and a colonial administrator). As Gatumu (2008:30) observes, many CMS missionaries of this period assumed that their European nationality was a crucial issue for them; but ironically, this negative appraisal of their status proved more significant, culminating in Africans' conclusion that European domination was equivalent to the spreading of the Gospel. Indeed, the CMS had to follow secularising drifts despite reservations that these might betray the principles associated with the previous years of heroic evangelism (Beidelman, 1982:72) that as Walls (2002:98) notes, never regarded Africans as children.

Thus, both the European settlers and missionaries seemed to approach Africans from a racist point of view, where Africans' interests were considered inferior to that of the white people. This being the case, Africans might have felt betrayed and could have sought for ways to make their grievances heard primarily through the political outlet. The formation of a militant group led by Harry Thuku in 1922 was a high point of defiance against racism (Odhiambo, 1977:155) and inspired the Africans to protest openly [walking in the light] against colonialism in Kenya. Thus, entry of Keswick theology into East Africa could have found adherents who had already experienced segregation. It was not difficult therefore to accommodate Keswick teachings of two sets of people, the saved and the surrendered Christians⁸. This led to the beginning of the *abaka*, "those on fire, from the verb *kwaka*, to set light to" (Church, 1981:100). This describes the wave of evangelistic zeal by those who were getting saved leading to moral transformation exemplified by the changed life of being in the light with

⁷ The Kikuyu people are one of the tribes in Kenya.

⁸ Kevin de Young (2010:3) recalls his high school days: "When I shared my Christian 'testimony' in my high school and early college years, I would say something like this: 'I was saved when I was eight years old, and I surrendered to Christ when I was thirteen. By 'saved' I meant that Jesus became my saviour and that I became a Christian. By 'surrendered' I meant that I finally gave full control of my life to Jesus as my Master and yielded to do whatever he wanted me to do". This description outlines two levels of Christians.

one another. Indeed, their acquired lifestyle contends with besetting sin in the life of the believer. Thus, the formation of the Brethren, those who walk in light and share testimony with one another. Brethren became a group of Christians in Kenya whose teachings set themselves apart from other Christians. Indeed, they exemplify a life-style pattern, akin to what could be regarded as socio-ethical racism which could be compared with European prejudice over Africans during the colonial era, whereby the white and black Christians in Nairobi worshipped at All Saints and St. Stephens respectively. Thus, in the same way that the White felt they were better than Africans, likewise Brethren perceived they were better than other Christians. However, as the blacks gained independence and acceptance by the White, likewise Brethren should accept other Christians to join their fellowships. Let's now turn to the other continuum of circumstances beyond Africans' control.

5. Epidemics and Diseases

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Kikuyu people of Kenya were frequented with diseases and famines such that these maladies were sometimes used to compute years or events (Wambugu, Cagnolo, Ngarariga & Kariuki, 2006:139,210-214). Also, the year of the famine of 1917 came to be called the famine of *Kimotho* (Gikuyu name for left-handed, his real name was Lawford) who was the District Commissioner of Fort-Hall, today known as Murang'a (Wambugu et al., 2006:211). This naming proves the intensity of the occurrences and the impacts left in its wake.

The phenomena were widespread even outside the borders of Kenya. For instance, Guillebaud (1959:35) records the intensity of dreaded leprosy in Uganda and Rwanda, such that the first missionary doctors had to secure a special block at Kabale Hospital for leprosy sufferers. The problem of this scourge was underlined by the proposal to build a Leprosy Hospital at Kabale, Uganda in 1928. This is not to suggest leprosy was the only challenge facing the East African countries, other diseases were common too. Church (1981:35-36), in his Rwanda notes, recorded a unique malady:

Now a word about yaws – this extraordinary disease hardly ever heard of in Europe. It is somewhat like syphilis, but not spread in the same way; incurable, chronic, crippling, often ending in limb contractions and blindness, and even babies in arms came covered all over their bodies with the secondary infections stage and swarming with flies. But by the mercy of God... a rapid and dramatic cure [was found] called Sobita, a water-soluble white powder of sodium bismuth tartrate... We reckoned that about 90% of the people were or had been infected by yaws in Eastern Ruanda... [The] injections hurt, but the more they hurt, the more the people liked them, and the name of the hospital went far and wide.

Yaws, among other skin diseases, was also common in Kikuyu land as observed by Wambugu et al., (2006:140):

Very few of the *Agikuyu* escaped the disease called yaws (*muchari*⁹). This was usually contracted in childhood. After incubation of twelve to twenty days, the prodromic period begins, and the skin loses its brightness and becomes pale and discoloured. The patient feels indisposed; general relaxation sets in with pain in the lumbar region and at the joints, cephalaea, gastric troubles, and fever. After some time, there appears a cutaneous eruption, itching and painful at pressure. In less than one week the eruption becomes vascular and suppurates. Within about three weeks it is fully developed, and secondary groups appear elsewhere on the body. At this stage, fever disappears.

In 1919 the Gikuyu land of Kenya was devastated by a plague that killed tens of thousands. Kariuki (1985:22) underlines the intensity of this plague by the fact that his *rika* (age-set) came to be called *Rika ria kimiri*¹⁰ (the age-mate of the slayer).

Another unusual incident worth mentioning was the entry into Ruanda. Notes by Bert Jackson in August 1928 of a sickly baby receiving treatment. He wrote:

I was walking across the country a few days ago when the cry of child faintly caught my ear. As I drew nearer the cry developed into one never-ending howl which I think I shall never forget. I found a poor little chap about five or six years old just covered with sores from head to foot so that he could neither lie, sit nor stand without pressing on some of them, and surrounded by a cloud of flies. A fond parent was in the process of picking off old mud from the sores and putting on fresh. This is the Native idea of a healing dressing. It certainly does prevent the flies from eating the child alive and also hinders the spread of infection, but imagine what a comfortable dressing sunbaked mud makes on raw flesh! Now with an injection, all these sores soon heal up, and a child takes an interest in life once more (Church, 1981:36)

Such were the circumstances and experiences meted against East Africans by diseases they could hardly handle except sometimes through outside help. The coming of Europeans with conventional medicine that could do wonders, in comparison with traditional alternatives, must have led Africans to change sides from traditional and cultural ways of treatment to the modern medicine. No wonder Guillebaud (1959:35) notes that some of the first people to respond to the Gospel messages

⁹ An infectious tropical disease marked initially by red skin eruptions and later by joint pains. It mainly affects children and is caused by the Bacterium *Treponema pertense*.

¹⁰ Kimiri is a kikuyu name which could variously be interpreted as destroyer or exterminator. It was a term used to refer to a machine used to crush sugarcane to produce juice in the Gikuyu land.

were leprosy patients at Kabale. Given this background of maladies, it could not have been difficult for Africans to see the light in the missionaries' method of dealing with diseases. This trust in the missionary ways of curing most of the physical ailments (Church, 1981:35) could have influenced Africans to accept salvific messages. Consequently, many Africans left behind ways of darkness to the modes of light. Nevertheless, many also combined the old and the new.

Surely, a recap of discussion on external influences at the dawn of the Keswick theology in East Africa shows that, while racism brought to the fore preferential treatment of one person against the other, diseases and epidemics appeared to bring the races together. However, in both ways, a need to embrace a new way of life [a new light] was remarkably evident. They needed to move away from dehumanising forces that seemed to oppress and maim, to freedom and well-being. Since Africans lived in communities, this turnaround could not be hidden.

Let's now turn to the internal influences.

6. Internal influences

The other spectrum of influences was motivated by Africans themselves as a way to safeguard their culture and posterity. These are internal forces and include public confession, African sacrifices, rites of passage, age-sets marriage, and communal life. Each item is discussed in turn showing how their unique nature could have reinforced a need to walk in the light.

7. Public confession

Karanja (2012:147) observes that confession played a significant role in the African religion and culture. It was used among the Gikuyu to drive away effects of ritual defilement/taboo (*thabu*) to achieve healing. Symbolic vomiting (*gutabikio*) was done by a traditional healer to treat supernatural illnesses. A case in point is Kenyatta's (1965:281-82) description of a healing ritual where the sick person is led to confess all evils.

Before the magician proceeds with his actual work of healing, the sick man who is about to be treated is asked to spit on the healing magic or to lick it. In this way, direct communication with the ancestral spirits is established through the medium of the magician. At this juncture, the magician starts to chant the healing ritual with a strong voice and unusual tone and rhythm, accompanied by the tinkling of the *rugambi*¹¹. At the same time, he swings the magical horn over the head of his patient. Suddenly, in a mystical state of mind, he stops chanting and, looking

¹¹ This is a small hand bell which is part and parcel of the healing magic. It is easily recognised by its peculiar sound, which is believed to have the power of frightening the evil spirits.

the sick man straight in the face, he addresses a few words of magical formula to him, saying:

‘Sick man, I have come to chase away your illness. I will also chase away the evil spirits which have brought it. Confess the evils which you know, and also those you do not know. Prepare yourself, for you are about to vomit all these evils’.

The magician had dug a round hole in the ground into which he poured some water. At this point, he dipped what was believed to be healing magic into the water to induce the evil spirits to come out. The sick man kneels, facing the water as if he was vomiting while the magician squats on the other end facing the sick man. The magician recites the following spell:

‘This (pointing to the healing magic) is a root. I root out the evils which are in your body.

This is clearing away. I clear away the evils which are in your body.

This is a weakening. I weaken the evil spirits which are in your body.

This is a calming. I calm the illness which is in your body.’

After each sentence, the sick man licked the *githitu* (the healer’s magical charm) and spat in the water. He pretended to vomit saying: “I vomit the illness and the evil spirits that are in my body” (Kenyatta, 1965:283). By the act of symbolic vomiting, the sick person was assured that he had received total healing and thus calming his psychological anxiety.

This vomiting gesture meant that the victim was now set free to walk and mingle with people as a clean person, a fact that was acclaimed and certified by the medicine man. It appears like the sick man was now declared righteous, no longer guilty of the charges that had been directed against him hitherto. Therefore, public confession of sin as was taught by Keswick movement could have been found in the East African setting of vomiting of the evil spirits familiar ground.

Certainly, early Keswick convention had what they called *Spiritual Clinic* which displayed a five-day progressive teaching on how to live a victorious life over sin. The first day they taught diagnosis of sin as to reveal spiritual need; second day, the cure, which depicted God’s provision for victorious Christian living; third day, the crisis for the cure, described as consecration; fourth day, the prescription, which demonstrated spirit filling and fifth day, the mission, depicted as powerful Christian service (Naselli, 2010:171).

It is at that point in time that the believer gave himself “entirely over to the Mastership of the Lord Jesus”. A believer “let go” when he surrendered to God every habit, ambition, hope, loved one, possession, as well as himself, confessing that he is now ready to have God’s will done at every point of his life, no matter what it costs (Naselli, 2010:200-201). This process of cure of sin/evil through a crises of

consecration demonstrated publicly a lifestyle change akin to the confession of evil deeds in the East African milieu.

Hence, the need to walk in the light could have made sense as a way to achieve a not guilty verdict/ not guilty of sin. Indeed, sometimes propitiation was done by performing a sacrifice to redeem the victim.

8. Ritual sacrifices

Wambugu et al., (2006:190,191) state that a sacrifice was more of public worship that would require a sacrifice of a goat by a medicine man to appease the spirits or avert a taboo. Some Gikuyu people either sprinkled blood while others sprinkled *tatba*¹² as exemplified by Wambugu et al., (2006:192):

[Firstly] Anyone who touched a corpse or was bereaved contracted a special impurity called *Gikuu* (death). If such a person drunk cow's milk or passed through cattle's herd, all the cattle became unclean. A medicine man had to be called to slaughter and sprinkle the herd with its *tatba*.

[Secondly] If anyone was heard to whisper in the night near the hut, or a stick fell on the thatch or struck against the wall, it was believed the enemy poisoned it. A goat had to be slaughtered the next day. Enough sprinkling of blood was to be done in the direction where whispering was heard or where the sound of the stick was heard.

The list of incidences that warranted sacrifice is endless, and Wambugu et al., (2006:191-194) could only manage to record twenty-seven cases. This shows that circumstances that led to the slaughter of an animal were frequent. The fear of the evil spirit was an ever-present phenomenon in the people's mind. The shedding of blood – to appease the spirit – was a significant gesture that assured the victim and the community of salvation from evil. Similarly, the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross to save humanity from sin was one of the fundamental teachings of Keswick theology. Thus, Keswick teachings could have found bearing in the East African circumstances of the shedding of sacrificial blood to appease the spirits. Again, these sacrifices were made in public, declaring salvation of the evil spirits. The victim could now walk in the light or publicly acknowledge salvation from evil/taboo. He or she was welcomed back to the full participation in the affairs of the communal life.

9. Communal life

Kunhiyop (2008:20) observes that the 'we' and 'us' concepts are deeply rooted in Africans from childhood. Mbiti's exposition of the concept of community, cited in Kunhiyop (2008:21), is sensational:

¹² The contents of the stomach and intestines of the animal.

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must, therefore, make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group.... Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people. When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and his relatives whether living or dead. When he gets married, he is not alone, neither does the wife "belong" to him alone. So, also the children belong to the corporate body of kinsmen, even if they bear only their father's name. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. Therefore, the individual can only say, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am".

Hence the Gikuyu saying: *kamuingi koyaga ndiri*¹³, which means corporate activities make massive works easier. This fits well with relationships and community values. As Kenyatta (1965:113) contends, "an old man who has no children of his own is helped by his neighbour's children... his hut is built, his garden dug, firewood is cut, and water is fetched for him". This justifies another Gikuyu proverb, *ruu runenebagio in tutbima* (a river is enlarged by its tributaries) and demonstrates the importance of the individual. At the same time the person must not forget that he is an individual among others, and so must consider the rights of other people. Thus, the daily expectations for human beings have been to live as an individual and as a community.

This is better illustrated through the age-set system. A Gikuyu proverb *Nyumba na riika itiumanagwo* (a family/clan and an age group are inseparable) could be a case in point. The proverb cautions an individual that he cannot be separated from his clan and age group no matter what the individual may have done. The need to stay in tune with the community norms could thus not be stressed. It may not have been a big surprise, therefore, that the seed of the Keswick beliefs and practices, which displayed community set up, found fertile ground in East Africa.

To be a full member of the community with rights and privileges, one had to pass through a rite of passage, as applicable in different African cultural systems. Rites of passage form important community group dynamics that include the age-set system referred to above. These dynamics could have created the necessary facets for Keswick theology which also prided in community undercurrents.

¹³ Ndiri is a heavy wooden mortar and requires many people to lift it.

10. Rites of passage

A rite of passage is one single circumstance that more than any other favoured Keswick spirituality in East Africa. It was performed on special occasions to indicate entry into a new stage of life like birth, puberty, marriage, and death. When any of these rituals took place, it did not only attract the immediate family but the surrounding community. Puberty and marriage rites' dynamics are community centred and therefore seem to offer suitable socio-historical circumstances that could have favoured Keswick theology in East Africa.

11. Let's start with puberty rites.

Puberty rituals have been practised for centuries on young men and women across Africa and beyond. In Kenya, circumcision is common except among the Luo and Turkana societies. In the past, it was usually performed in a public ceremony.

The significance of it being held publicly had implications to the initiate and community. Firstly, as Magesa (1997:101) observes, the initiation confirmed the initiate's connection with the ancestors through formal induction into the ethnic group. It was a mark of unity with the people. Secondly, it was intended to instil courage. Magesa (1997:09) argues, "Without courage among the youth, the life-force of the clan withers and will eventually die. For if the young men of the community are cowards, who will then defend the people? Similarly, will there be live births if the mothers-to-be cannot bear pain, namely; the pain of childbirth?" Kenyatta (1965:141) observes that "the parents would sing for joy saying our children are brave, *ee-bo* (hurrah). Did anyone cry? No one cried - hurrah!" It was bad news for the community to hear of a cowardly gesture from an initiate, more so a male. Each community expected to raise strong and bold young men to defend the tribe from outside aggression which cannot be possible by a weak hearted. Thirdly, it was a public recognition that one has passed from childhood to adulthood, and thus one could now marry. Fourthly, one was ushered into tribal secrets. Mbiti (1975:96) states that during seclusion the young people underwent a period of education in tribal life to overcome difficulties and equip them mentally, emotionally and morally. Thus, no single member, let's say of the Gikuyu tribe, could have remained uncut. Finally, every young person who is circumcised at a particular time entered a special age-group commonly known as *Rika* or age-mate.

Rika, argues Magesa (1997:101), was the most reputable group relation established by the very act of initiation. Magesa (1997:102) further contends that such people enjoy a unique social and moral tie of loyalty and devotion with one another. They stood in the very closest relationship with each other, in spite of their geographical distance regarding where age-set members were initiated or presently living. Kenyatta (1965:114) observes, "If one member of an age-group

is insulted and is physically unable to avenge the injury, the other members of his age-group will cooperate with him in attaining satisfaction. For an insult to one member of an age-group is regarded as an insult to the entire age-group... in the matter of paying off a fine... age-group, *rika*, will contribute toward the payment..." Magesa (1997:103) concurs with Kenyatta and shows the unique oneness validated by the simultaneous spilling of their blood. Thus, they referred to each other as brothers, and to the parents of each one of them as father and mother and their female siblings as sisters, who deserve apt respect. This practice, Magesa (1997:103) argues, is replicated by the Nuer people, a Nilotic ethnic group of South Sudan.

The importance of age-sets was further amplified by the fact that they marked seasons. Thus, Kariuki (1985:22), Bishop of Mount Kenya South (1975-1976), gives a vivid description of the 1918 global influenza pandemic that killed 40 million people across the globe. Those circumcised in 1919 when this pandemic was sweeping through the Kikuyu land killing tens of thousands came to be known as the *Rika ria kimiri*¹⁴ (age-group). Kariuki (1985:23) and Magesa (1997:103) further contend that the bond that was established by the Rika was often stronger than blood relationship, but maybe equated to blood-brotherhood¹⁵. Kariuki explicates his argument, thus:

Age-mates have an abiding confidence in one another, because of their common experiences during the entire process of initiation. It does not matter if a member of my age-group happens to come from as far afield as Nyeri, Murang'a, or Rift Valley. Once he enters my homestead and identifies himself as a member of my age-group, even before I have discovered his name, I welcome him wholeheartedly. I would not hesitate to slaughter a ram or a he-goat (*Thenge*) for my *wakini* [my true friend] if my wealth at that time allowed it. For indeed we Gikuyu still regard it as the highest honour to slaughter an animal for one's fellow *wakini* (1985:23-24).

This public acknowledgement and acceptance of one's age-mate depicts strong ties of the *Rika* as to slaughter an animal for him. This gesture would be brought to light to the other fellow members of the *Rika* in the vicinity. They were bound together by their common experiences through the entire initiation process and would call one another *wanyua wakini* (your real friend). This demonstrated togetherness

¹⁴ *Rika ria kimiri* insinuates those circumcised when the destroyer struck the Kikuyu land.

¹⁵ A blood brotherhood or blood pact was an initiation ritual where blood was exchanged, "either by mixing it with food and eating it or by sucking one another's blood from an incision" (Magesa, 1997:106).

and trust that not only defined respect for senior age-groups but very importantly structured and knitted the community together openly and transparently.

Marriage, argues Magesa (1997:121), is a journey to attain full humanity and begins with rituals and ceremonies to establish and solidify ties of common knowledge and understanding necessary for kinship. For example, Kenyatta (1965:165) illustrates how a girl was seemingly abducted by the young man's female relatives and carried "...shoulder-high. The girl struggles and refuses to go with them and even to seem to shed tears, while the women giggle joyously and cheer her with songs and dances. The cries and cheers can be heard for miles around, and the Gikuyu people will know that the son of so-and-so has taken the daughter of so-and-so in marriage". Sometimes the parents could arrange the marriage of their children to get married to a particular family from a young age. However, Nyaga of the Meru of Eastern Kenya argues that this pre-arranged marriage could not materialise if the young man or lady chose to marry elsewhere (1997:108).

This rite of passage was crucial to the sustenance of the kinship structure and had social-ethical implications as described by Kisembo, Magesa and Shorter (1977:182) when he quoted an address by a Zulu pastor to a newly married couple. The pastor says to the bride: "Mapule, you should bear in mind... that you are married not to your husband Paul, but to his family. That means you have to identify completely with all his relatives, look after them, care for them, go out of your way to make them happy. If you do that, you will have no cause for regret". And to the groom, he says: "you, Paul, will have to do likewise with Mapule's relatives. Her people are your people and vice versa. Both of you will notice that old people in the community will tend to visit you, even for a brief moment... to show their interest in your welfare". The social ties thus established unify and solidify the tribe as one organic whole such that the community could be mobilised quickly for a corporate activity like digging or building bridges. It was not a private affair but a family affair.

12. Keswick theology empowered by socio-historical context

The study looked at external and internal influences that could have played a part in establishing the EARM. The external circumstances were unwelcome phenomena that Africans loathed and fought against. The experiences of being prejudiced against and the debilitating diseases forced many East Africans, particularly in Kenya to seek for socio-political solutions, Young Kikuyu Association (YKA) airs grievances, *Mau Mau* solidarity to take back their land rights, and hospitals to deal with marauding pandemics. Africans needed to speak out their concerns through social-political organisations like YKA and while medically, missionary doctors were able to provide the necessary injections. On the one hand, Africans had to physically take swords to defend their human rights which had been grossly violated by the

colonial masters. On the other hand, they had to acknowledge the power of western medicine over that of the African medicine man. In both ways, they had to make a paradigm shift to regain their full humanity.

Internal influences emanated from internal circumstances and experiences that were fostered and reinforced by African cultural systems. They were public and communal, enhancing collective responsibility and belonging in line with John Mbiti's dictum, 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am' (Mbiti, 1982:108-109). The involvement of the entire community in the affairs of an individual shows the strength of kinship and another relatedness that have to be weaved together through moral fabrics and various initiations.

From the above discussion, a few observations can be made regarding why East Africans found it necessary to walk in the light with each other in their daily life, which has a two-fold meaning. On the one hand, it meant that they are together in their belief and practice and thus in the light with one other. On the other hand, they are not together and thus not in the light with each other. Thus, the following observations are made from the perspective of the two mentioned scenarios:

Firstly; Africans were exposed to a colour bar and discrimination by the colonial masters. This seems to have set boundaries between blacks and whites. This background could have influenced East Africans to readily associate with Keswick theology that divided Christians into saved and surrendered. This may have led to the rise of the *abaka*, those on fire – the ones who have surrendered their lives to Jesus (Franklin, 2017) as their Lord and Saviour.

Secondly; Africans found European missionaries to have medicine that worked wonders, so they associated themselves with missionary doctors who not only provided a solution for physical healing but also led them to spiritual healing. This transition could not be hidden and might have provided an avenue for second blessings teaching. This teaching divided Christians into two groups: those who had received the blessings and those who had not.

Thirdly; the practice of publicly vomiting evil through a process of psychological manipulation could have sounded well to Keswick teaching about the public confession of sin. Public confession of evil was by far the most profound circumstance that could have found a parallel with Keswick theology. Thus, those who confessed their sins were thought to be in the light with one another and vice versa.

Fourthly; rites of passage were by nature steps towards full community integration. It is for this reason that one had to undergo the ritual, mostly in the full glare of the entire community. This was important because of the recognition by either juniors or seniors to avoid misrepresentation in various forums which could lead to taboo warranting a sacrifice to thwart danger in the community. Africans' rites of passage could have found affinity, especially in the sanctification process, as

was taught by Keswick theologians. The process required a step by step movement towards spiritual maturity in what was called spirit-filled life. This rendered a Christian to live a victorious life without which one was relegated to a spiritual casualty. Thus, a real need to pass through the laid down process or else suffer condemnation. A circumcision candidate who cried or showed signs of cowardice during the actual operation was a great let down to the community and will have to live with the stigma.

These factors required public display as the community was one whole unit and anything affecting its stability needed the attention of everybody. In other words, all had the right to know what was happening within the community. Thus everything, as much as possible, had to be brought into the public scrutiny or into the light. As Mbiti (1991:174) rightly states, community awareness has been critical to the security and peace of its members since an individual exists only because others exist. Thus, as noted earlier, Kunhiyop (2008:20) argues that the idea of *we* and *us* is entrenched in Africans mindset from childhood, so that as they grow they know that they belong to and must function within the community in which they are rooted. This concept, argues Knoetze (2017:1), does not only associate African identity with Ubuntu principle, but also with Biblical humanity and discipleship perspectives of “I am, and you are, because he (God) is”. Moreover, contends Knoetze (2017:1), this viewpoint negates individualistic understanding expounded by Descartes, “I think therefore I am”, which is especially prevalent in modern South Africa. Indeed, the *I am* principle still hinders inculturation of the gospel in many Africans cultural setting today.

13. Conclusion

This article demonstrates how walking in the light found affinity in the East African milieu. On the one hand, factors beyond African control such as racism, epidemics and diseases motivated Kenyans to embrace a new way of life of freedom and well-being [a new light] from debasing forces that seemed to oppress and hurt. On the other hand, factors within African control such as public confession of evil, ritual sacrifice, communal life, and rites of passage buttressed by African cultural systems signified they are together and in the light with one other. Indeed, external and internal circumstances appeared to lubricate affinity of walking in the light within the African social setting. While the former exposed Africans to emotional and psychological trauma that beckoned enlightenment or a changed worldview, the latter appeared to mark boundaries alongside distinct moral codes within which members of the community were confined. The new worldview and the ensuing moral codes fostered inclusive and exclusive tendencies which found fertile ground in the beliefs and practices of walking in the light among members of the EARM even to this day.

Indeed, in our day, the EARM seems to have not only contextualised much of its inheritance from Keswick theology expressed through practical holiness but have correspondingly taken a contextual perspective fashioning a theology with a Kenyan face. Firstly, public confession of sin, as was taught by the Keswick movement, seems to continue unabated entrenching a scenario of born-again testimony that has entrenched Brethren beliefs and practices of walking in the light culminating in dissension among Christians. Secondly, it is clear that a typical Keswick week form of assembly has been replicated in Kenya in the same format it had been done in Keswick England since 1875. Although, the seven-day Keswick week has been reduced to three, and the topics profoundly changed to focus more on evangelism than hitherto countering sin, the annual convention has endured to this day. Thirdly, to some extent devotional reading of scripture, prevalent in the weekly Brethren Fellowship meetings, seems to display Keswick distinctive. Such outstanding consistencies between Keswick teachings and EARM beliefs and practices of walking in the light epitomise Keswick heritage albeit clothed in African attire.

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