



AN INTEGRATED STRATEGY OF CHRISTIAN AND TRADITIONAL PARENTING IN GUSII COMMUNITY, KENYA

AYIERA Zablon Nyaenya¹, Prof CHOGE Emily², Prof KOECH Joseph³

¹Student: School of Arts and Social Sciences, Moi University

²Lecturer: School of Arts and Social Sciences, Moi University

³Lecturer: School of Arts and Social Sciences, Moi University

Abstract: The nature of parenting globally is not only the cause of many society's ills but also a key to positive change that determines the quality of the community. This is the case within traditional Gusii community, where parenting was systematically structured life cycle process as compared to the Christian church where empowerment of parents is minimal and without a systematically structured programme. This study presents strategy that combines both Christian teaching and practices with traditional Gusii teaching and practices on parenting, aimed at addressing increased anti-social ills in the present Gusii community. The paper examines the perceptions of the Christian church and traditional Gusii approach of equipping parents with quality parenting skills. The major role of the traditional Gusii community which was equipping parents with quality parenting skills should be carried out by the Christian church. The Christian church is viewed in this study as the alternative social institution that has the potential to create an enabling environment of equipping parents with quality parenting skills that will help reduce increased anti-social ills. This role that the church can play not only reduces anti-social ills but encourage support, care and protection of the disadvantaged children in the community. The church can serve as a conduit for the empowerment of parents and subsequently improve the quality of the community. The fundamental question addressed in this study is what the Christian church can do to address the challenge of increased antisocial behaviour among children in Gusii community. When children are well raised, parents are assured of peace and unity in families and the community. People will respect each other in the community. Parenting contributes greatly on addressing antisocial behaviour in the community. Thus this paper discusses and analyses how the church can make a significant contribution to equipping parents with quality parenting skills aimed at reducing anti-social ills in Gusii community and beyond. The emphasis of the paper is the importance of and the need for the Christian church to equip parents with quality parenting skills with a goal of reducing anti-social ills in Gusii community. Unless the Christian church addresses this important task, the community is headed to a social decay and disintegration. Empowering parents to competently guide children on moral values and provide them with basic needs will go a long way of reducing anti-social ills in Gusii Community. This paper is informed by data from Kisii and Nyamira county, which is home of the abagusii. Data was collected through interviews with informants of both Christian and traditional parenting who were selected purposefully.

Key words: Parenting, Traditional Gusii community, Christian church, Strategy, Anti-social ills and Alternative social institution.

Introduction

The current state in African Society is that of decline of morality. This can be noted in the rise of crime and increase of delinquency among the youth (Harris, 1998). Scholars have attributed this to various

factors including lack of quality parenting skills, secularization, poverty, unemployment and decline of traditional African family values among many others (Sleek & Staff, 1998).

Christianity with all its positive moral values is expected to have helped in curbing the breakdown of society, but this does not seem to be the case. Christianity was brought to Africa by European Missionaries who were faithful both to Christianity and their culture. They viewed the Africans as uncivilized, pagans and having a backward culture that by all means should be uprooted and civilized (Ogbu, 2005). Those who converted to Christianity were expected to take on a new identity, that of the white man. This new identity comprised of the nature of dressing, social cultural associations, belief systems, education, eating habits, naming children among others. Christian Missionaries did not fully meet the needs of the Africans. Consequently the European missionaries introduced Christianity with overtones of Western culture. The Western culture has influenced the upbringing of the African child significantly by introducing principles that were foreign to the African parenting styles. The centre of the Western cultural paradigm is self which can be explained as follows 'I am because I' the individual hero dream and do' (Mbigi, 2005). The individuals believe that what they think and do is the only way which is right. They don't acknowledge collection and guidance.

Whereas the traditional African culture addressed the concerns of Africans in a holistic manner, moral development is at the heart of the African way of life. The entire community participated in the establishment of the individual into an all-round moral agent, able to positively contribute to the growth and stability of society. This was accomplished communally through many ways such as rites of passage, taboos, traditional ceremonies among others. The family was the main institution for nurturing morally responsible persons. Mbiti, 1969 says "African families let a foundation upon which to build their parenting. In adopting the European way of upbringing of children, they became neither Western nor African but adopted a half-way house identity" (p.57). Presently there seems to be a breakdown of traditional family values, resulting in a vacuum for moral development. The survey conducted by the Daily Nation newspaper involving selected parents on what might have significantly contributed to the youth actively participating in the disturbances of the post-election violence in Kenya in 2008, one explanation came to dominate "the idea of the breakdown of the family values have paved the way for civil unrest" (Daily Nation, March 2008). Going further, some commentators lamented the decline of traditional family values as one of the driver of social disintegration. The survey conducted by one of the developmental NGO's, ADRA-Kenya suggested that the general public concurred with this diagnosis, blaming poor parenting as the drivers of the behaviour by looters (Adventist Magazine, September 2009).

According to Manga children remand home director, Gusii community is faced with all kinds of social ills emanating from the youth such as crime, divorce, corruption, teen pregnancy, drug and substance abuse, prostitution, violence in schools, accidents, suicide, abortion, juvenile delinquency, street children, abandoning children, defilement of children, dysfunctionality of the household. It is a challenge to bring up responsible children within its context (oral interview, July 2013).

The irony of the whole picture is that more than 80% of the population of the Gusii people claim to be Christian adherents (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). If this were so, what went wrong in the Christian churches as regards to parenting? The family is the first and basic institution of learning. Life skills and formation of a child is expected to take place in family circles. In this primary institution, it is expected that Christianity should provide an environment for interactions and relationships intended to nourish, protect and guide each life through its course of development.

Studies have shown that the quality of relationships between parents and children is emerging as an important life course in adulthood (Harris, 1998). The nature of parenting determines the quality of the community. Poor parenting contributes to antisocial behaviour among children such as educational failure, criminality, poor mental and physical health (Benardshaw, 2004). This demonstrates that parenting remains the most important aspect that determines the quality of society.

The above scenario is the motivating factor for carrying out an analysis engaging of the Christian teaching and practices and traditional Gusii teaching and practices on parenting to determine the intervention on these increased trends of anti-social ills in Gusii community. The intention is to provide the community with a holistic parenting strategy that is both critical and affirms relevant traditional family values on rearing a child. The Church as a central social institution needs to stand up and play a key role on equipping their adherents with quality parenting skills. To find out the right balance between supporting parents on developing their parenting skills and capabilities and working to lessen the pressures of parents is basic for a healthy society. To achieve this successfully a positive framework (strategy) for equipping parents with parenting skills should be created and concrete steps taken towards creating a more friendly family society.

Parenting is a social role and for us to parent well we will require a family friendly society. Without a strong social cohesion, infant mortality, mental illness, drug and substance abuse, abortion, dropping out of education, rates of imprisonment, teenage births, and crime (violence) are all higher. An American psychologist William Kessen rightly observes that “critical examination and study of parental practices and child behaviour are paramount importance for social economic development” (2005, p.106). The best way to nurture good behaviour is to intervene early and support parents to help encourage confident parenting (Macarthur, 1998). The aim of this study is develop an integrated parenting strategy that equips parents with parenting skills necessary for quality parenting.

Situational Analysis

Among the Gusii community of Kenya, traditional values in raising children seems to have been watered down as a result of many factors such as Christianity and secularization process. Antisocial behavior is on the rise among the youth which has resulted in crimes leading many children being placed in remand homes. In Gusii there is a children remand home meant to keep children in safe custody whose cases are still pending in court. The constitutional requirements of children that are kept in the remand home are aged between 10-17 years. These comprises of children who have either conflicted with the law or in need of care and protection. This remand home is situated at a centre called Manga, sub-county headquarters, Nyamira County, in the Gusii community. The records of Manga children’s remand home show that:

In the year 2010/2011, the children who were in remand due to various criminal cases were 313 boys and 93 girls, in 2011/2012, they were 361 boys and 106 girls, and in 2012/2013 they were 520 boys and 147 girls. The children who were in need of protection and care because of various reasons including abandonment, truant, girls rescued from early marriages, found begging or receiving alms among others were in 2010/2011, 13 boys and 8 girls, 2011/2012, 32 boys and 21 girls and 2012/2013, 53 boys and 33 girls (Manga Children Remand home, August, 2013 records).

The above records describe the situation in the present Gusii community suggesting a continuous upward increase in the number of young people participating in antisocial behaviour (Manga children's home director, oral interview, August 2013). This could point to a breakdown in family values especially those of raising children.

There are several other children cases which have not come to the attention of the law enforcers. The other cases have been determined and taken to rehabilitation schools, released to their homes, others in probation orders, taken to borstal institutions, taken care in children's homes and others placed under supervision of children officers (Manga Children remand home, August, 2013 records).

The research conducted by Lexmond (2010) came to the conclusion that the quality of parenting is a key determinant in predicting a child's involvement in anti-social activity and criminal behaviour whether as a child or later in life. This concurs with the conclusion that "as the search for the impact that parenting has on children's outcome continuous to grow, parents have come to be seen not just cause of many society's ills but also the key to unlocking positive change such as improved social mobility" (Macarthur, 1998, p.103). There is a growing recognition of the need for a study which specifically focuses on equipping parents with quality parenting skills. The responsibility that parents have in the development of morals among the youth is critical. Equally the role of the community in nurturing young people is paramount to controlling antisocial behaviour among the youth in the society. The church is expected to be a central social institution that should play a key role in equipping their adherents on parenting. Children are the building blocks of a cohesive health society. The quality of children brought up determines the quality of the society. The Christian church being the predominant religion in Gusii community has a special position in determining the quality of parenting and subsequently the nature of children brought up in the community. The Church as a community of believers and the traditional Gusii community are conceived as the source of addressing the social challenges brought about by parenting. This provides a basis upon which an integrated quality parenting strategy will be developed. The strategy will help parents to play a key role in nurturing of morals in young people that have positive impact on morals displayed in the Community.

The focus will be more on parents whose responsibility is to socialise their children on the expected moral values. Parents are understood in this study as to anybody involved in the upbringing of children. The subsequent sections will discuss and analyse the strategy the Christian church can adopt and adapt to address the increased anti-social ills in the present Gusii community.

The Strategy to be Adopted and Adapted by the Christian Church in Addressing Increased Anti-Social Ills in Gusii Community, Kenya

The role of parents is integral in determining the quality of the community. This is due to the fact that building a morally upright society is dependent upon their role as significant contributors to the social behaviour among children. Their parenting skills serve as a conduit for the prevention of behaviour problems in children which will help curb anti-social ills. The study presents the integrated strategy of Christian teaching and practices and traditional Gusii community teaching and practices on parenting. The goal is to provide quality parenting skills. This will go a long way to address increased anti-social ills in the community.

Five strategy points form the integrated strategy of empowering parents. These includes, first, the Christian church considers parenting as a communal responsibility. Second, the Christian church

considers developing a structured systematic programme for empowering parents. Third, the Christian church considers developing an alternative rite of passage with the purpose of empowering the youth who are potential parents with parenting skills. Fourth, the Christian church needs to act as a moral agent that can hold the government and other agencies accountable to child care and protection. Lastly, the Christian church considers adopting and adapting the traditional Gusii norms, taboos, customs and practices in the Christian context. These pillars will form an integrated strategy of Christian and traditional parenting in Gusii community. The study discuss and analyses on how these strategic points can be incorporated in the church programmes aiming at empowering parents on carrying out parenting responsibility effectively.

Consider Parenting as a Communal Responsibility

What we are experiencing in Gusii community is largely founded on the relationship between an individual and society. Shapiro (1999, p.109) argues: “Our moral legacy will be distinguished primarily by the manner in which we have treated others.” It is important, therefore, that this crucial topic has to be dealt with while children are growing up, because the quality of their lives is measured by the quality of their relationship with other human beings in the community (Shapiro, 1999, p.109). An individual within the community is expected to live for the wellbeing of other human beings. Community harmony and social cohesion is built on the social ethics of an individual. One has to define one’s individuality within the community. In explaining how an individual relates to the community, Mbiti (1969, p.108) says: “It is only in terms of other people that the individual himself is conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and toward other people: I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.” This understanding as articulated by Mbiti is contrary to an emphasis on an individual’s sense of self, autonomy or being. This is the self that does not place much value on the social relationship (Kigongo, 2002, p.57). It is crucial for the Christian church to empower parents to teach their children the importance of being good citizens of their community. They do that by defining their individuality within their community. They are to view themselves as pillars to build the community. A community cannot be what it ought to be without the involvement of individuals.

In traditional Gusii community, parenting was a core responsibility of parents, grandparents, relatives and the whole community. The behaviour exhibited by children in the community was a major interest of everybody in the clan. They understood that in the event children misbehaved, it had a negative effect on the family, clan and the whole community. The parents and elders took the young people through the theory and practice of parenting. The children were taught what was expected of them and guided to doing it. Traditional Gusii teaching and practice on parenting was communal. The parents, grandparents, relatives and people of the clan ensured that the children of the community did the right thing. If any community member found the child doing something wrong he/she was expected to correct the behaviour instantly. The child was taught to accept correction from the elders of the village. The instructions on the moral behaviour expected of a child to grow up as a responsible citizen was emphasized by whoever a child came into contact. Those children who were born in poor homes were provided for by the relatives who were able. Orphans were taken care of by their relatives. The brothers or sisters’ children were considered as your own children (Bosire, personal communication, December 4, 2015).

It was a disgrace to the community in traditional Gusii community to bring up children who displayed bad moral behaviour (Nyantika, personal communication, December 10, 2015). The family roots were

considered in every choice that was made. If somebody wanted a partner for marriage, the relatives and community members inquired about the behaviour of a particular family or community (Magesa, 1997).

Traditionally in Gusii community all members participated in the establishment of the individual into an all-round moral agent able to positively contribute to the growth and stability of society. Under the direction of elders, and grandparents, young parents were equipped with quality parental skills. They contributed their experience to support and empower young parents with skills on parenting (Nyanchama, personal communication, December 6, 2015). The church can take up from here and enrich programmes associated with life skills. Due to the modern social economic trends, traditional Gusii community structure has disintegrated. It is no longer possible for people with common roots to stay in the same locality. Extended family members are scattered all over the globe (Onundu, personal communication, December 5, 2015). The only social institution that attracts families together is the church. The church can take over this traditional Gusii community function of empowering parents with quality parenting skills. It is in the church that many families and individual members of certain families fellowship together. When different families and members of certain families come to the church, they form a community of believers. This community of believers have a common set of beliefs and goals. The different families and individual members of certain families that congregate and worship together as a community of believers form a special family. In all their programmes and functions, the sense of family is fundamental. It is on this basis we propose that the church is the social institution that took over from the traditional Gusii community. The traditional Gusii community structure comprised several families with common roots. They had common ancestor, norms, taboos, customs and practices. They considered themselves as of one blood and flesh with a common believe and goal in life (Bosire, personal communication, December 4, 2015). Fundamental to any family is moral development. Perceptions of Christian teaching and practice and traditional teaching and practices on parenting recognizes the fact that upholding parenting as a communal responsibility is crucial in addressing anti-social ills in Gusii community. This is because the church can provide a sense of community of warmth and love. Everyone in the church should be interested on the well-being of each other.

Due to colonialism and modernism the Gusii people were robbed of their instruments to understand and investigate the order imbedded in their sense of communal life. For Gusii children there is a discrepancy between the language of their schooling and the world of their immediate environment in the family and the community. Colonial language became a means of transporting culture. Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986, p.17) reminds us of this sad truth as follows: "For a colonial child, the harmony existing between the three aspects of language as communication was irrevocably broken. This resulted in the disassociation of the sensibility of that child from his natural and social environment, what we might call colonial alienation. The alienation became reinforced in the teaching of history, geography, music, where bourgeois Europe was always the centre of the universe." Language is an instrument that we use to understand the world. In order for Gusii Christian parents to face this challenge, they must start to promote the use of their own language in church services and in the education of their children. If we fail to face this challenge, we will continue to rob our children of the means to understand the world from within their own context. How will they become responsible human beings to their communities if they are alienated from their own environment? The sense of community was deeply imbedded in the African human mind. By sense of community we refer to the fact that a child is made aware through teaching that he is living in a community where there are other human beings that he has to take care of. A child is expected to live in such a way that his actions

promote the wellbeing of other community members. The child traditionally was urged to exercise fair and generous treatment towards his neighbours. Christian parenting's focus should not be solely on the wellbeing and development of an individual, but also on social cohesion. Children are to be raised, of course as individuals, but also raised to become responsible, mature members of the community. Children are to learn from home that they are to define their individuality within the wider community. Therefore, the members of the family in this wider sense have an obligation to help and to protect one another (De Vaux, 1961, p.21). The advancement of life in the community rests on the shoulders of all individuals in the community. However, we are to acknowledge that we are living in times in which individualism is a dominant worldview. We should reject Rene Descartes' saying: "I think, therefore I exist" (Mbigi, 2005, p.81), and our embrace of the African saying: "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1969, p.108). Mbiti (1969, p.108) further argues: "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." This should never be interpreted as meaning that one's individuality is not recognised within the community. However, it means that one's individuality is to be realised and interpreted within the community.

This is what is expected to be the central focus of Christian teaching. It will qualify the church as the most relevant social institution that can competently address the function of moral development in the society. The church can get professional volunteers that can contribute their time and talent to provide parents with skills on parenting to achieve this goal of inculcating communal mind set in our children. If the church community will provide this support, it would have contributed positively on addressing the anti-social ills in Gusii community.

The church as a community of believers can also play a role in ministering to the disadvantaged children of their church. It should stand on the forefront on addressing the basic needs of children from poor families. A good Christian religion should find means of alleviating poverty among its adherents and empowering families to provide basic needs to their children. The church needs to develop programmes of mobilising able members to donate resources that can be channelled towards needy cases.

Equally empowering parents with skills of creating wealth and job opportunities is central to addressing anti-social ills in the community. Professional volunteers who are experts on training parents and the youth on how to exploit available opportunities to create wealth and job opportunities should be sought by the church to offer their services. Empowering poor families and unemployed youth on how to create resources for their daily livelihood is a responsibility that the church can competently address. The church can act as a link to assist the abused children access legal and medical assistance. This is the communal role the church can also do to address increased anti-social ills in Gusii community.

The warmth of the church, acceptance and respect offered to each child and family, and creation of the church as a community of believers that feels more like extended family are characteristics that can reduce increased anti-social ills in the community. The cohesiveness of the community is nurtured through empowering members with quality parenting skills. The church's design, support and implementation of programmes of equipping parents with quality parenting skills are fundamental to the quality of the society.

Develop a Structured Systematic Programme for Empowering Parents

Children, as they grow, face many challenges that they need to overcome. Parents' role is critical to ensuring that children are well-armoured to face the challenges and pressures of life (Adams, 1968). Parents play an important role in helping their children to face the world of pressures and temptations. There are many negative and powerful forces that are thrown at our children from all angles of life, and it is from home that children are to pick up tools to deal with these external forces or to succumb to them (Adei, 1991, p.13). Parents, as agents of socialisation, play a crucial role on how children acquire a sense of right and wrong (Shaffer et al., 1981, p.83). Groome (2003, p.206) argues: "For it is the ethos of the home, the shared life as a family that is most educational... Parents are to consciously attend to the value system, worldview and self-understanding of children that can only be mediated through the whole family." It is the role of the parent to attend to issues related to a value system, worldviews and to the self-understanding of a child. Nobody can do this better than parents. However, in Gusii community we are faced with huge challenges that alienates parents from the education of their children to such an extent that they think it is the responsibility of the school and the church to raise children. President Julius Nyerere (1967, pp.2-3) articulates the cause of this attitude as follows: "The education provided by the colonial government was not designed to prepare young people for the service of their country; instead, it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals for the service of the colonial state." So, this is the reality we are dealing with today. Parents are still confused with regard to the role they have to play in the lives of their children.

According to parental instructions in Proverbs 1-9, parents are to play an important role in helping their children to face the world that is full of pressures and temptations. Parents have to give their children instruments to deal with the temptations of this world. Nzimande (1987, p.42) argues: "The major family responsibility is to socialize its new members and help them to integrate with social systems adequately." This calls for an institution that can take up the responsibility of empowering parents to carry this duty competently and effectively. This can't be a one day event, but a clearly structured programme ensuring that each potential parent is well equipped to carry out this noble task with tact and skill.

Traditionally Gusii community teaching and practice on parenting was a life cycle process. At the heart of traditional Gusii community was an intensive systematic programme of instructing parents with quality parenting skills that commenced at the rite of passage of initiation and continued throughout the period of parenting. Initiation ceremonies served a special purpose in equipping young people with quality parenting skills (Ongera, personal communication, December 9, 2015). It was a ceremony that marked a transition from childhood to parenthood (Kenyatta, 2004). It was at this rite of passage that young people were initiated to womanhood or manhood. Mature boys and girls were prepared at this stage for an important role in life. The initiates were equipped with moral virtues essential for parenting. This was done through special ceremonies conducted during the period of initiation and while the initiates were in seclusion. This systematic programme of equipping potential parents commenced at putting the initiates in seclusion for at least four weeks under the guidance of experienced elders, grandparents and parents. Secondly by taking the male initiates to "*Gesarate*" for further training on parenting under the guidance of the elders, grandfathers and fathers. The female initiates remained in the homestead for further training under the tutorship of mother, grandmother and experienced elderly women. Thirdly, after marriage, and during delivery, the daughter in-law moved to the mother in-law's house for further guidance on parenting. The young husband went back to

“*Gesarate*” for practical training on how to bring up the child. The young couples were not allowed to move from the parents homestead immediately after marriage and delivery. They continued to stay in the homestead for further guidance on parenting until such a time that the parents were satisfied that they have attained the parenting skills necessary to help them stand alone. At this level, they were allowed to establish their own homestead (Onchana, personal communication, December 10, 2015).

Instructions on parenting were designed in a manner that it matched with the appropriate stage of parenting. Parenting lessons passed on from one generation to the other was through taboos, norms, customs and practices of the Gusii community. The taboos, customs, norms and practices were embedded in the Proverbs, riddles, wise sayings, parables, stories, narratives and songs. The ceremonies that were carried out provided an environment of cementing the communal relationship. Traditionally there was a clearly designed process of ensuring that parents are equipped with quality parenting skills (Nyaboke, personal communication, December 12, 2015).

The Gusii Christian church which the study proposes as the alternative social institution that took over from the traditional Gusii community’s role of empowering parents on parenting does not have a systematic programme of carrying out this crucial function. This may describe the reason why there is a paradox in the Gusii community by having the majority being Christian adherents and yet antisocial ills being on the increase. The Christian church seems to neglect the core function of instructing parents on the parenting skills which is a key determinant of addressing moral development. To address the challenge of moral erosion, the Christian church needs to review its programmes and give empowering parents with quality parenting skills a priority. This will equip their adherents with the necessary competence of parenting well and hence addressing antisocial behaviour in Gusii community. This study may serve as a wakeup call that the church is the most appropriate institution that can address moral erosion in Gusii community. This can be adequately addressed if those who bring up children are equipped on how to do it competently. There is an urgent need for the Gusii Christian church to review its programmes and include this primary and crucial aspect of teaching parents the parental skills. This will contribute immensely in addressing the challenge of increased antisocial behaviour in Gusii community and beyond.

There is need for the integration of traditional Gusii teaching and practices on parenting which was a life cycle process with the Christian teaching and practice on parenting. The church should design a programme of instructing parents on quality parental skills. The most important programme the church should design is that of systematically equipping parents with quality parenting skills. Parents will be in a good position to instruct children on good morals if they are empowered constantly (Bosire, personal communication, December 4, 2015). Most Christian churches have established children and youth departments that teach them spiritual matters a few minutes during the day of worship. These departments are doing a good work in the spiritual development of children and youth once a week. The whole week, children are under the care of parents. These parents are not systematically empowered to carry out this crucial role (Okero, personal communication, December 8, 2015).

The church should design a structured systematic programme that equips parents weekly on age appropriate skills on parenting. The empowered parents will carry on the instruction of children and youth within the week before they come back to church on Sunday or Saturday to receive instruction in their department. The vacuum created of instructing children and the youth within the week will be adequately addressed by empowered parents. The traditional Gusii community recognized the fact that children spend most of their time with parents. They dedicated their energies in instructing parents who

have a direct influence on children. With the breakdown of traditional Gusii community family structure, the church is the most ideal social institution that took over this noble task.

This programme should be conducted by professionally qualified people on parenting. The occasional family life seminars conducted in the church is either by the priest, pastor or unprofessional lay people. The church can establish an in-service training for training of trainers (TOTs). Just like what is done for the children teachers in church. Contrary to popular belief that parenting is experienced aspect, I think it is critical that parenting should be taught by professionals. There are many professionals who are church members that can readily offer volunteer services in training TOTs to empower parents.

I think it is a matter of appreciating the fact that there is need to equip parents with parenting skills. Most services in the church are offered on volunteer basis. It requires that the church recognizes and appreciates the role of these professionals who are also church members. The church is enormously endowed with untapped human resource. But obviously they can't offer the support unless a forum is created for them. They recognize that the church is a structured system. Unless a space is created for them to offer their support, then their services are left unutilized. The church comprises of gifted members. The gifted members should be managed by the church system in offering services. Why should other programmes take precedence over empowering parents with quality parental skills in church? Why spend so much time addressing other things and ignoring the very basic reason of our existence? The church exists to develop good morals in the society. Children are the building blocks of any given community. Any social institution engaged on nurturing morals should not ignore this basic group that contributes immensely on the social behaviour of any given community. We should go any mile to ensure that this group is adequately nurtured to reduce anti-social ills.

Children are born and raised in the family. The parents are members of the church. They play a key role in determining the moral development among children. Why then, should the church not spend an hour every Sunday or Saturday to empower these key determinants of moral behaviour in the society? The church should take the breakdown of the family as a serious disaster to the society. They will give parents a sense of community, a sense of growing and developing their capacity of parenting well.

Key to the empowerment of parents with quality parenting skills is the ability to integrate into the church programme the traditional aspect of intensive instruction of parents. The church as a community of believers will make sense as it looks on the amount of time they spend each worship day to empower parents. It is paramount if the Christian church empowers parents to nurture children who will be morally upright. Fundamental to the church, is its role to empower parents to parent well.

Develop an Alternative Rite of Passage

The third strategy is the Christian church's consideration of developing an alternative rite of passage with a purpose of offering potential parents opportunity for intensive training on parenting skills. Traditionally the role of Gusii community elders, grandparents and parents on equipping young potential parents with quality parenting skills commenced at initiation (Bosire, personal communication, December 4, 2015). According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, (2005, p.837), initiation is "the process of officially introducing someone into a club or group, or of introducing a young person to adult life, often with a special ceremony." The English definition agrees with the traditional Gusii understanding of initiation. In the traditional Gusii community initiation was a process of introducing a young person to adult life. It involved both girls and boys who were mature

enough for marriage and parenthood. The initiation rite involved some rituals for young boys and girls of marriageable age. Initiation was a practice that involved a series of ceremonies and training of Gusii norms, taboos, customs, and practices. During this time the boys underwent traditional circumcision (a cut of the foreskin) and the girls underwent the cut of the clitoris (FGM). Initiation ceremony was a special rite of passage. Both male and female aged between 15-18 years went through the ceremony. The purpose of the ceremony was to mark a transition from childhood to parenthood (Okero, personal communications, December 8, 2015).

Those who went through the initiation ceremony were considered as mature boys and girls ready for marriage. The initiates were put under seclusion for a period not less than four weeks. Seclusion period provided an opportunity for the initiates to commence the basic training on the skills of parenting. At this period, the basic moral values expected of a parent were instilled. This was passed on through ceremonies which served as practical lessons. They taught the basic skills of parenting such as bravery, hard work, patience, perseverance and carefulness (Kenyatta, 2004).

Initiation ceremony provided a special opportunity for potential parents to be adequately prepared for the significant task of parenthood. This is an important concept that can be borrowed from the traditional Gusii community. Initiation ceremony is the preparation accorded to the initiates to learn parenting skills. As we endeavour to eradicate some of the dangerous aspects that accompanied the initiation ceremony such as the “female cut” of the genital organ (FGM), the church should in the same measure work on retaining some of the positive aspects associated with the said ceremony. Gusii community may be experiencing increased anti-social ills due to negligence of preparing potential parents adequately because of throwing away the initiation ceremony in wholesale. I tend to believe that we concentrated on the negative aspects of the initiation ceremony without taking stock of the positive aspects of the ceremony. I think that is one of the areas where Gusii community lost terribly. The repercussion of that is reflected on parents who really don't know their role as parents as they should. Then it produces a whole generation of parents who just don't have a clue on parenting skills (Arwonga, personal communication, December 11, 2015). The church should develop an alternative rite of passage that comprises the positive aspects of traditional Gusii community initiation ceremony to teach the potential parents on parenting skills. I really think that was one of the biggest things the Gusii community lost. Most of our potential parents have no idea of how they should go about parenting in the event they get married and give birth to children. Most of us keep wondering what is expected of us in marriage and parenthood. We end up applying our own personal experiences in parenthood. The church developing an alternative rite of passage that incorporates the Gusii traditional initiation ceremonies that were positive will provide potential parents with the opportunity of systematically receiving parental skills. During this occasion the church can engage the services of professionals who can provide volunteer services on empowering parents with parenting skills.

The significance of the church developing an alternative rite of passage can't be emphasized in any better words than these. Offering potential parents with quality parenting skills and developing alternative rite of passage to discourage female Genital Mutilation should be at the heart of the church. The ceremonies that accompanied this rite of passage to offer practical lessons need to be modified, designed and implemented in the modern context. The church can have a programme that runs for a period not less than four weeks to empower potential parents on the essential skills of parenthood. Experienced and professionals on parenting will be requested to volunteer their services as educators (facilitators). They can build on some subjects relevant to parenthood. All the church potential parents should go through a certain form of certification on parenting. If every potential parent goes through

that, the church will comprise of potential parents fully equipped to nurture children who are morally upright.

To reinforce the concept of equipping potential parents on parenthood is an important foundation for moral development in the community. The church will build a strong foundation that will propel morality of the community to the higher levels. The church shall live up to what is expected of it and serve as a role model in the community.

Adopt And Adapt the Traditional Gusii Norms, Customs, Taboos and Practices in the Christian Context

Traditionally parenting was a way of passing on the customs, taboos, norms and practices of the Gusii community. These norms, taboos, customs and practices aimed at bringing up a child who participated positively in the development of the community (Onundu, personal communication, December 5, 2015). During the initiation ceremony, while the initiates were in seclusion, they received intensive training on the customs, taboos, norms and practices of the traditional Gusii community. It was crucial for the initiates to be instructed on the deeper meaning of the traditional Gusii community customs, norms, traditions and practices by the elders, grandparents and parents. These norms, customs, taboos and practices were embedded in the riddles, Proverbs, songs, stories, wise sayings and parables. They served as the medium through which the instructional lessons about moral development were passed on from one generation to the other. These forms of speech had an aspect of entertainment. Children and potential parents enjoyed listening to them as they were narrated by elders, grandparents and parents. The main purpose was not for entertainment, but instruction. They included the desired moral behaviour expected of them to display in the society (Ongera, personal communication, December 9, 2015).

The ideal of moral development, central to the traditional Gusii teaching and practices on parenting, was deeply rooted in the norms, customs, taboos and practices of the community. Some aspects of these practices may have become obsolete over time but not everything should be discarded as primitive and barbaric. There are valuable aspects of traditional Gusii norms, customs, taboos and practices that are relevant to the modern moral development. These can assist to organize and regulate the thinking, feeling and behaviour of people in the society (Nyaboke, personal communication, December 12, 2015). The traditional Gusii norms, taboos, customs and practices themselves are not evil, but probably a composite of how they were presented may have become irrelevant. The church should look for a way to peel out those irrelevant aspects and then expose the positive features that will be essential to enhance moral development in Gusii society. Instead of discarding traditional Gusii norms, taboos, customs and practices wholesale, the church should engage them with care and discernment in order to save the Gusii society from moral disintegration (Arwonga, personal communication, December 11, 2015).

The Christian teachings and practices were not established in a vacuum. They were introduced in an already established society. The Gusii society had already established standards that governed their behaviour. It was not a neutral society. The traditional Gusii community had deep rooted customs, taboos, norms and practices that shaped their way of life. In fact the people's culture shapes a person's perception of new ideas. The traditional Gusii people should have embraced Christianity in the medium that was readily understood to them. With the introduction of Christianity the change was not abrupt, but was gradual. Some traditional Gusii community norms, customs, traditions and practices

continued to be practiced. The greatest problem that the European missionaries encountered was that they viewed the traditional Gusii norms, taboos, and customs as uncivilized, paganism and backward which were by all means supposed to be uprooted and civilized. Instead of taking time to understand why they practiced them and serve as a medium of evangelization, they engaged themselves in destabilizing the Gusii social systems (Onchana, personal communication, December 10, 2015). The missionaries should have first engaged themselves on understanding their new environment. They should have patiently studied the way of life of the people they wanted to convert. Have full understanding of their customs, norms, taboos and practices. Then systematically engage themselves in meeting their converts in the local form upholding that which was good and guiding them to eradicate that which was bad. The missionaries should have endeavoured to broaden their understanding of traditional Gusii people to include dynamic and flexible ways of dealing with moral issues. They should have been open and able to enrich the positive aspects of the taboos, customs, norms and practices they encountered in the traditional Gusii community. These was to be achieved by seeking to understand the traditional Gusii riddles, parables, songs, stories, Proverbs and wise sayings. Then by adjusting or accommodating these forms of instruction, it could have been possible to adopt and adapt ideas that were already familiar to their cultural setting.

The strategy of adopting and adapting traditional Gusii norms, customs, taboos and practices in the Christian relevant way is essential in addressing antisocial ills. No one ever meets universal Christianity in itself. We ever meet Christianity in a local form and that means a historically, culturally conditioned form. We need not to fear this, when God became man he became historically, culturally conditioned man in a particular place. What he became, we need not fear to be. There is absolutely nothing wrong in having local forms incorporated in Christian way of teaching about moral behaviour in the society. Provided we remember that they are local. The teachings of Christianity remain objectively true in all times and in all places and cultures.

In fact the argument is that we receive Christianity wrapped in the baggage of a particular cultural context. As I have put it, adopting and adapting of traditional Gusii norms, customs, taboos and practices matters because we are not eternal timeless and a cultural. Christianity's way of life depends on how it presents eternal truths, live in and relate to the society. How we see things, understand them and present them to others must take into account the evangelization context.

A failure to understand the norms, customs, taboos and practices of the community can actually lead to the breakdown of morality of that particular society. It leads to resistance of new ideas presented. People begin to believe that their cultural ideas are under attack. This action will be unhelpful, because the potential converts will feel that somebody is trying to force a distant culture to their way of life (Mbiti, 1969).

People have different worldviews which in turn impact how they interpret themselves, the world and the things they do. The Gusii people interpret their own moral values in forms of their unique parables, Proverbs, wise saying, songs, riddles and stories. Support should be provided in adopting and adapting this form of moral instruction. It will provide an opportunity to equip parents with skills they can readily identify themselves with and relevant to their cultural setting (Onundu, personal communication, December 5, 2015).

The Christian church should display a strong incarnational model. Jesus Christ's incarnation not only took on human flesh, he also accepted a specific cultural context. Shaping the moral behaviour of the

society in a way that is most relevant to the culture of the community is important in addressing anti-social behaviour.

These process of adopting and adapting of traditional Gusii norms, customs, taboos and practices is worthy for further consideration. Christian moral values should be encoded in forms that are understood by the people. This is an ongoing process of embodying the moral values in an ever changing world. Here the cultural norms, taboos, customs and practices are seen as a vehicle for understanding the acceptable moral requirements of the community. When examining these customs, norms, taboos and practices, the church should critically decide what parts to accept, what parts to reject and what parts to adjust that add value to good moral values. I believe this assessment will be beneficial in enriching the church's role in equipping parents with quality parenting skills.

The goal of adopting and adapting of these traditional Gusii customs, norms, taboos and practices is to create an indigenous expression of local forms of instruction that the community can easily relate to. When the local community think of the moral values as their own not foreign ideas, they can readily embrace and nurture them as their own moral values. The Christian church should conduct an honest evaluation, develop an awareness of the history of the customs, taboos, norms and practices and maintain a focus for the purpose of adopting and adapting them. This will be an important component of the Christian church addressing the breakdown of moral behaviour in Gusii community effectively.

Act as a Moral Agent that can Hold the Government and other Agencies Accountable to Child Care and Protection

The last strategy is that the Christian church has a role to invest in child care and protection and at the same time act as a moral agent that can hold the government and other social agencies accountable to child care and protection. Because of the social challenges in the community such as poverty, divorce, separation, single mothers/fathers, orphans, inter-parental conflicts and work-family conflict, children find themselves in the receiving end (Adams, 1968). These social challenges hit children hardest. In most cases, they find the cost of child care for poor families unaffordable. These families find themselves having resources barely sufficient to access the basic needs for child care and protection. Because of the sub-standard economic status of these families, children are suffering from the effects of poverty (Nyanchama, personal communication, December 6, 2015). The church cannot afford to ignore the economic and social necessity of child care. The church should make deliberate plans to cushion the underprivileged children access to basic necessities of life. The church has a significant role to play in responding to the needs of child care for the disadvantaged families. Touching lives of the under privileged members of the community should be the main agenda of the church as a social institution. This will go a long way to helping reduce anti-social ills such as stealing, drug and substance abuse, early marriages, prostitution and even dropping out of school.

The second role of the church in child care and protection is to hold the government and other agencies accountable. The government must play its proper role in providing child care and protection to those families that are economically challenged. There is dire need for the government to define child care as a public responsibility rather than a purely personal one. This is one major area the voice of the church as an important social institution to hold the government accountable should be heard. There is need for legislation on this aspect. Children are the building blocks of any community. Taking a proper care and protection of children is a major determinant of the community's moral behaviour.

Stability of the nation is founded on the principles of caring and protection of the vulnerable in the community (Kaguti, 2011). I think living in poverty and inability to provide for the powerless, causes the greatest depression in human life. Child care and protection is the most important issues facing the Gusii community and the main driver for anti-social behaviour in the community (Okero, personal communication, December 8, 2015). The church has a role to play in calling the attention of the government and other social agencies in apparent recognition of this. The government can develop programmes aimed at making child care more affordable for low income families, developing the supply of child care services, and improving the quality of these services.

In apparent recognition of the need for child care and protection, the Kenyan government has developed some measures of mitigating the challenge by giving a stipend subsidy to orphans, poor, widowed people and the elderly people. Also the Kenyan government has developed low-interest loans for the youth and women. The greatest challenge to this service is the inability of right people accessing these provisions. This is made possible because of corruption, nepotism, clannism, and tribalism. Here is where the role of the church as moral agent to hold the government and other social agencies accountable to child care and protection is required. Corruption, nepotism, clannism, and tribalism have played a great role in propagating anti-social ills in Gusii community. The services provided for the vulnerable members of the society to cushion them from the challenges of poverty does not reach them. The low interest loans for the youth and women, the government subsidy for the orphans, poor widowed people, and the elderly poor is not accessed by those who deserve it. These resources end up in the pockets of some of those in government positions and their relatives. This complicates the problem more because it is assumed that very low income and children with special needs access these services, when in reality the child care and protection problem is not tackled at all.

The church as a moral agent that holds the government accountable to child care and protection should push for the creation of systems and structures which ensure that eligible recipients access the funding in a simple, effective and efficient way. These systems and structures should be able to evaluate and identify that those eligible for assistance are accessing it. The systems and structures can be able to provide strong internal controls. The government agencies should carry out monitoring and evaluation while other independent social institutions such as banking facilities handle the distribution of funds to the eligible recipients. Without the assurance of child care, it is all but impossible to have a morally upright society. The church should take their moral role seriously and diligently.

The church equally has a role to play as a moral agent to hold accountable other social agencies. These social agencies include the banking institutions, the private employers and business people. These social agencies should not exploit the public in profit making without participating in the communities' social needs. Addressing the social needs should be part of the goals and objectives of any social agencies. The church stands at a good chance on approaching these agencies to give back to the community assistance to cushion needy families. These other social agencies have a crucial social responsibility to impact on the development of social behaviour in their sphere of influence. The role of the church as a moral agent to hold social institutions accountable to child care and protection is essential. Social agencies may not have the systems and structure of identifying needy cases for assistance. But the church as a social institution that deals with moral development of humanity has the capacity. The church can approach these social agencies to provide child care to deserving families.

The social agencies can take part in confronting the issue of child care. The employers most likely if approached by the church as a social institution, they can provide child care assistance to its employees

and other underprivileged families in the community. The employers should be family-friendly, sending important message that helping workers balance work and family is good for business.

The social agencies operate within the community setting. The increased anti-social behaviour has a direct effect on their operations. Participating in reducing these anti-social ills will not only be beneficial to the individual families but the community at large and the agencies in particular. Empowering families to mitigate the factors exerting pressures on parenting in Gusii community should be part of the agenda of the social agencies operating at its environs. The church as a social institution can play its moral role of networking these social agencies for this noble task.

The church will not have the moral authority to serve as a moral agent to hold the government and other social agencies accountable for child care unless it serves as a role model. The church will achieve much on its role as a moral agent to hold the government and other social agencies accountable for child care if it serves as a role model. There are occasions where the church has participated in corrupt deals, propagation of tribalism, nepotism and clannism. Internal reorganization and reform should be worked on so that the public can have confidence in the church to act as a moral agent.

Shunning all evil deals that can put the church on jeopardy should be addressed by the church diligently and urgently. The church should work on maintaining its glory as the mouthpiece of the community. Their systems and structures should be strengthened to attract public confidence on their operations. Serving as a role model in all areas of church life is important to its role as a moral agent holding the government and other agencies accountable on child care and protection.

The transcendental aspect of religion should be reflected in all activities of church life. Having a concern that the government, social agencies and everybody is participating in child care and protection should be one of the agenda of the church. Taking a concerted effort to participate in child care is important in addressing the moral development in the community

Conclusion

The quality of parenting is measured by the results it produces in the lives of the individuals and in the life of the community. The paper has presented strategies that correctly construe that the aim of parenting is to build the moral character of the young person. The social institution that can empower parents for this worthy cause in Gusii community is the Christian church. Consequently, we can conclude that the goal of these strategies is not simply the transmission of a body of facts into the mind of the young person, but the development of the moral character of the young person. This moral character or maturity is essential in functioning well in personal disciplines, in interpersonal relationships, in the family, at work and within the community. For the wellbeing of the family and society, we need individuals whose moral character is well-developed. Character development cannot be expected to happen at school, but rather at home. A family is the primary source of the child's education on moral values. Other institutions build on the foundation laid by the family. To empower Gusii families with quality parenting skills to discharge this noble task is paramount. For the Gusii Christian church to address concretely the serious concerns of increased anti-social behaviour in the Gusii community, those strategies that we have presented, are to be taken seriously. These will provide a framework for the church to guide parents as the foundation upon which learning in the family is to be built.

References

- Adams, R.M. (1995). Dilthey, Wilhelm (1833-1911). In Audi, R, ed. *The Cambridge dictionary of philosophy*. Cambridge, UK: University Press. P.235-236.
- Adei, S. (1991). *The Challenges of Parenting: Principles and Practice of Raising Children*. Nairobi, Kenya: African Christian Press.
- Benardshaw, S. (2004). *His Life and Works*. New York: Free Press.
- DE Vaux, R. (1961). *Ancient Israel: its life and institutions*. London, UK: Darton, Longman & Todd.
- Gaitho, M. (2008). *Role of parenting on the emergence of post-election violence*. Daily Nation, 4th March 2008. Pg14
- Groome, T. (2003). Children and parents: two-way partners in faith development. In Osmer, R. *Developing a public faith: new directions in practical theology*. St. Louise, MO: Chalice Press.
- Harris, J, R. (1998). *The Nature Assumption*. New York: Free Press.
- Kaguta, R. J. N. (2011). *Socialization and Drug Abuse among students*. Paris: Muller GmbH & Co.KG Publishers.
- Kenyatta, j. (2004). *Facing Mount Kenya*. Nairobi: Kenway Publications.
- Kessen, W. (1979). The American Child and Other Cultural Inventions: *American Psychologist*, 34,(19), 815–820.
- Kigongo, J.K. (2002). The relevance of African ethics to contemporary African society. In Dalfovo, AT., ed. *Ethics, human rights and development in Africa Ugandan Philosophical Studies III*. Washington D.C: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. pp. 51-65.
- Lexmond, J. & Reeves, R. (2010). *Building Character*. London: Demos.
- Macarthur, J. (1998). *Successful Christian Parenting*. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing.
- Magesa, L. (1997). *African Religion: The Morals of Abundant Life*. New York: Orbis Books Maryknoll.
- Mbigi, L. (2005). *The Spirit of African Leadership*. Randburg: Knowress Press.
- Mbiti, J. (1969). *Africa Religion and Philosophy*, London, UK: Heineman.
- Ngugi Wa Thiongo, (19860). *Decolonizing the mind*. Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.
- Nyerere, J. K. (1967). *Education for self-reliance*. Dar es Salaam: Government Printers.

- Nzimande, V.S. (1987). Family structure and support system in black communities, In Steyn, A. F., ed. *Marriage and family life in South Africa: research priorities*. Pretoria: Human Science Research Council.
- Ogbu, U, K. (2005). *African Christianity: An African Story*, Nairobi: Action.
- Shaffer, D. (1981). *Parental and peer influences on moral development*. (In Henderson, R.W.,ed. Parent-child interaction: theory, research and prospects. New York, NY: Academic Press.)
- Shapiro, D.A. (1999). *Choosing the right thing to do*. San Francisco, CA: Berret- Koehler.
- Sleek, S. & Staff, M. (1998). Better Parenting May Not Be Enough For Children. *American Psychological Association, APA Monitor*, 29(11), 77–95
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2009). *The Gusii Community*. Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.