



The Christian Contested Socio-Religious and Cultural Aspects of Idumi Ritual: A Catholic Perspective among Tirikis of Hamisi Sub-County

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Abstract

This study explains the Catholic perspective of the Christian-contested socio-religious and cultural aspects of *Idumi* circumcision rituals among the Tirikis. In some African communities, male circumcision rituals have persisted because of cultural beliefs. Christianity has struggled to discourage some of these cultural practices that contradict the Christian message in vain. This study aimed to explore the question; how has the Catholic Church perceived *Idumi* circumcision ritual? The study was guided by Niebuhr's Consultative/Dialogical Critical approach to cultural transformation. Particularly, one of the five approaches, Christ against culture was used to identify the contested aspects of *Idumi* rituals. Purposeful sampling was used to select twenty - four (24) respondents for the study. Twelve (12) key informants were interviewed, and twelve (12) respondents participated in two focus group discussions of six (6) members each. Data collected was analyzed qualitatively using the thematic method and presented by reporting key findings using appropriate verbatim quotes as narrated. The study revealed that there has been an effort by the Catholic Church to identify some of the Christian - contested Aspects of *Idumi* that cause challenges to evangelization.

Introduction

Circumcision is a common rite of passage. It is accompanied by rituals that define a set form of carrying out a religious action. Ritual communicates something of religious significance through words, symbols and actions (Mbiti, 1991, p. 131). In a religious sense, Morrison (2023) says that the biblical origin of circumcision is grounded in the scriptures as an outward sign of the covenant between Abraham and Yahweh. Abraham, his sons, slaves, and servants were to undergo the circumcision ritual (Gen 17:11ff). Moses and his progeny were subjected to the ritual of circumcision (Exodus 4:25). Abraham circumcised Ismael, the father of Arabs, at the age of thirteen and likely, Mohammed must have been circumcised at the same age. Circumcision is required for any Muslim to take Hajj, a holy pilgrimage to Mecca (Amin-El-Gohary, 2015).

In Vihiga County, 97.5% of the people are Christians, forming the majority of the population with 34.4% Protestants, 41% Evangelicals, 18.3% other Christians, and 3.8% Catholics (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Hamisi Sub-County is the headquarters of four main Churches, including the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG), the Friends Church (Quakers), the African Divine Church, the Israel (Nineveh) Church Catholic Church with minority Christians since the area is dominantly a Protestant stronghold (Burgman, 1990:72).



Among the Tiriki people, *Idumi* is a cultural practice through which young men are initiated into adulthood by circumcision. This cultural ritual is alleged to have posed challenges, the reason why Harriet and Kirsten (2012) stated that, during the process of evangelisation, missionaries attempted to do away with some cultural aspects such as polygamy, inheritance of widows, clitoridectomy and traditional circumcision with a claim that they were obstacles to evangelisation. However, while some missionaries opposed it, some, like the Catholics, did not give a blanket condemnation but sought to single out the areas of conflict with the Christian message. For instance, Cardinal Lavigerie, whose episcopal residence was in Algiers, believed that the missionaries to be successful, they needed to mingle with Africans and become intimate with them as individuals to understand their modes of thought and customs (Pawlikova, 2011, p. 273).

Sundukwa et al. (2021) observed that Hamisi Sub-County has been under the influence of Christianity for a reasonable time. However, the circumcision ritual affected evangelisation, reducing church attendance (Personal communication, February 5, 2024). Notably, the Church functions and celebrations are also affected, and there are anti-Christian practices such as burial rituals of initiates and elders of *Idumi* who may die during the circumcision period (Personal communication, February 4, 2024). Therefore, this study sought to explore the Catholic perspective on the Christian-contested aspects of *Idumi* to overcome the challenges of evangelisation.

Even though Catholicism has spread widely in Western Kenya, some male circumcision rituals have continued in some Luhya communities because of cultural and traditional beliefs. The missionaries tried to discourage some of these cultural practices in vain. An example of such a ritual is *Idumi*, a circumcision ritual practised by the Tirikis. Throughout *Idumi* season, people are so deeply immersed in this cultural practice. Subsequently, the community is rightly divided into two factions, the traditionalists and the converted, igniting inter-faction conflict. During *Idumi*, unusual behaviour such as laziness, vulgar language, disruption of learning and property destruction is witnessed. The faithful overlook Christian obligations and responsibilities to participate in the ceremony fully. Seemingly, the ritual has made Christians opt to live double lives, leading to a pastoral dilemma of evangelisation. Consequently, this study sought to fill the knowledge gaps in the Catholic perspective on the Christian-contested aspects of *Idumi* circumcision rituals to overcome obstacles to evangelisation.

Research Methods

This section deals with research design, study area, sampling procedures, and data collection instruments.

Research Design

The study was qualitative, with an exploratory design adopted to collect the data. The two data collection instruments are interviews and focus group discussions to understand people's experiences, perspectives and behaviour (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). The study explored the people's beliefs, practices, teachings, opinions, behaviours and attitudes; therefore, the phenomenological (study) method was most suitable. Therefore, the study focused on the lived experiences, perceptions and feelings of the people, exploring the participant's lived experiences of the phenomenon (Yokself & Yildirim, 2016:4) to identify the contested socio-religious and cultural aspects of *Idumi*.

Sampling Procedures

Hamisi Sub-County was selected through cluster sampling, and purposeful sampling was employed to select twenty-four (24) respondents for the study. Snowball sampling (Lipa et al., 2021) was adopted to select more participants through the respondents' social networks for interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).



Research Instruments

The study employed two main data collection tools: interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Twelve (12) key informants were purposefully sampled for interviews, namely two (2) priests, two (2) lay persons, two (2) initiates, two (2) Tiriki elders, two (2) school teachers, one (1) initiation chief and one (1) counsellor or guardian. For focus group discussions, twelve (12) respondents were purposefully sampled and exposed to two focus group discussions of six (6) each. Each group included one (1) Tiriki elder, one (1) lay person, one (1) catechist, one (1) counsellor, one (1) sub-chief, and one (1) initiate.

Results and Discussion

This section brings out the study's findings on the Christian perception of circumcision, the impact of Christianity on *Idumi* and the Christian-contested socio-religious and cultural aspects seen as obstacles to evangelisation.

Christian Perception of Circumcision

Many respondents interviewed agreed that circumcision per se as an act is good, and people are encouraged to go through it. As an act, it involves the cutting of the foreskin of the male sexual organ of boys (Personal communication, March 12, 2024). According to the priest (Personal communication, April 6, 2024), circumcision is a ritual that is biblically founded and embraced by many Christians all over the world. Quoting the sacred scripture, the priest (Personal communication, February 4, 2024) confirmed that, after the Israelite's forty years in the desert, Yahweh instructed Joshua to make flint knives and circumcise the people of Israel (Joshua 5:2-3).

One of the respondents, a priest, said that, from the Christian point of view, circumcision is understood as a covenant between God and Abraham (Personal communication, April 23, 2024). For Larue (1991), circumcision became the mark of the covenant made between God and Abraham as indicated in Gen 17:1ff: "You must keep my covenant, you and your descendants.... every male among you must be circumcised...you shall cut off the flesh of your foreskin, and that will be the symbol of the covenant between us." The first Christians were Jews, and therefore, they were circumcised according to the covenant relationship that Abraham had made with Yahweh, the God of Israel. Jesus was also circumcised on the eighth day after his birth, following strictly the Jewish tradition (Luke 2:2), and even St. Paul. The apostle was circumcised on the eighth day after birth (Phil. 3:5). Therefore, one respondent, a layman, attested that the Christians were not opposed to circumcision as an act but to the rituals and ceremonies that accompanied *Idumi* circumcision ritual (Personal communication, March 12, 2024).

Influence of Christianity on *Idumi* Circumcision Ritual

With the introduction of Christianity, the practice changed, and Asitiba (2017) stated that in 1946, two groups emerged regarding the Tiriki circumcision ritual. The Tiriki-Traditionalist group, in which all partakers of alcohol were classified as good Tiriki age-group members in good standing with the community. This group comprised all those who professed the original script called Tiriki *Musituni* (Personal communication, March 12, 2023). An interviewed layman explained that *Musituni* is taken from the Kiswahili word *Msitu*, "Forest," meaning (Personal communication, March 13, 2024). They are also called Tiriki - Full or *Vamasero*, meaning of the skin, since the initiates put on animal skins after circumcision (Personal communication, April 4, 2023). The term *Musituni* is normally used by the Tiriki Christian when referring to those strictly sticking to their traditional way (Personal communication, March 10, 2024). *Musituni* is used derogatively to belittle them (Asitiba, 2017). The Tiriki traditional circumcision rite is quite elaborate, with some rituals that contravene religious expectations, like too much alcohol involved (Personal communication, April 5, 2024).

The other one is the Tiriki-Christian faction or *Vasomi*, which means those converted to Christianity. They are also regarded as "Half-Tirikis" since they do not fully follow the tradition. This group includes all who abstain from alcohol as Christians and who, as a result, are highly



suspected by Tiriki elders. Generally, abstinence has become a symbol of both missionaries and African Christian church members. Christianity has greatly influenced the discarding of traditional aspects accompanying circumcision that directly conflicted with the gospel message (Personal communication, April 7, 2024). As a result, the traditional circumcision was altered to incorporate Christian elements such as songs and dances (Personal communication, April 10, 2024).

In the opinion of respondents from the Christian faith, with the coming of Christianity, the religious significance of circumcision is emphasised with the belief that the act symbolises spiritual purification and commitment to the Christian faith (Personal communication, April 10, 2024). The Christian faction still circumcises their boys, but the ceremony is not elaborate. According to views from a catholic priest, the term *vanusu* was coined by the traditional Tiriki faction and used derogatively to belittle those Tiriki people who have embraced Christianity (Personal communication, March 14, 2024).

Therefore, from views gathered regarding the church perspective, the Tiriki-Christian circumcision is a modified version incorporating Christian beliefs and practices, like the dance and songs sung during *Idumi*. Even the circumcision itself is performed by a religious leader, and prayers are included in the ceremony. This is important since it maintains the rite's cultural significance while aligning it with Christian values and beliefs (Personal communication, April 11, 2024).

Christian-Contested Aspects of 'Idumi' Circumcision Rituals

This section discusses all the findings on the contested aspects of *Idumi* circumcision rituals that aided one of Niebuhr's approaches to cultural transformation, namely, the concept of Christ and culture paradox, which shows the continuous conflict between culture and Christian message as an obstacle to evangelisation in Hamisi Sub-County.

Effect of 'Idumi' on education

From the perspective of the school teachers interviewed, several issues emerged concerning learning disruptions during the *Idumi* ceremony. For example, some schools close earlier than usual, and some pupils miss the chance to sit for their final exams (Personal communication, May 2, 2024). Mutsotso (2013) concurs by stating that there is a lot of disruption, allowing the youthful generation to disappear from home and schools. The singing and the dancing will always attract the school-going children and sometimes lure them to leave the school to join the celebration (Personal communication, May 4, 2024). The problem of Truancy is witnessed among pupils, leading to a high absenteeism rate. Some of the initiated learners develop tricks whereby a good number of them leave home in the morning as if they are going to school. Still, they do not reach out but hide while doing their things and go home in the evening with the rest of the students (Personal communication, May 6, 2024).

The prolonged seclusion period affects the school calendar since boys are kept out of school for a long time (Personal communication 15th April 2024). The situation worsens with every afternoon dancing of the initiates in public, attracting the multitude. If it happens when the schools are in session, then it is inevitable that many school-going children will leave school to join the celebrations (Personal communication May 5, 2024).

According to some of the respondents, there is a concern that after adolescence, many of the boys who undergo the *Idumi* do not go back to their churches and schools to continue with their education because of submitting to alcohol-indulging ceremonies (Personal communication May 5, 2024). It is observed that many girls and boys of early age have dropped out of school due to these irresponsible actions during the circumcision ceremonies (Personal communication, April 7, 2024). The boys may become parents very early by being forced by the circumstances. The same case will happen to girls of school-going age if they find out that they have conceived.



Moral Aspects of Idumi from the Perspective of the Catholic Church

The findings deal with some of the moral aspects contested by the Church among the Tiriki community as follows:

Rampart Cases of Indiscipline

The majority of respondents interviewed agreed that the boys graduating from the ceremony exhibit tendencies of indiscipline. They become arrogant and contemptuous to women, the uncircumcised and those who have not been circumcised in the Tiriki way (Personal communication May 13, 2024), and respect towards the female teachers diminished (Personal communication May 15, 2024). There is also a change of attitude among the initiates, which makes it hard to follow the instructions given by female teachers and even to take punishment from them. The initiated men can easily opt to drop out of school rather than get punishment from female teachers (Yegon, 1996, cited by Mukhongo, 2003).

Unobjectionable Behaviour

This study established that, during the circumcision ceremonies, some unobjectionable behaviours related to sexual activities are rampant. Unfaithfulness characterises the season as people engage in immoral activities. One respondent stated that there is a lot of sexual manipulation and blackmail, especially from wicked men to the mothers of the initiates, who are vulnerable since any of the elders can approach them and blackmail them by demanding sexual indulgence believed to contribute towards the well-being or healing of their son in seclusion (Personal communication, March 15, 2024). One respondent, a lay woman, stated that sexual immorality is aggravated by the behaviour exhibited during and after the *Idumi* circumcision ritual (Personal communication, March 26, 2024).

Unwanted Pregnancies and Early Marriages

The majority of the respondents lay faithful, and teachers agreed that there is a high rate of unwanted pregnancies since young girls are exposed to men who take advantage of them. Many girls who expect and give birth early in life get married (Personal communication, March 20, 2024). These marriages also negatively impact those involved since they have not matured enough to get married and take up the family responsibilities. Some boys and girls are forced into marriage because of the effects of their irresponsible behaviour (Personal communication, May 9, 2024).

Violence and Destruction of Property

Circumcision ceremonies are coloured with vulgar language and destruction of property by initiates after healing and before graduation (Barasa, Nyanhoga & Lilechi, 2020). Vulgar language is expressed in circumcision songs. Some of the songs are very obscene and dirty in content, which is a factor that is opposed to the ideals and teachings of the church (Personal communication, May 4, 2024). The initiate's destructive activities at night include raiding people's farms to get food, i.e., banana and maize plantations around their seclusion huts. However, other people also take the opportunity to steal from the farmer's lands (Personal communication, March 6, 2024). The majority of the respondents agreed that inter-faction violence was a common reality during *Idumi* between the traditionalists and the Christian groups. Asitiba (2017) confirms this by stating that there exists animosity between the two groups to the extent that they conduct their circumcision rituals separately and independently of each other.

Discrimination

The majority of respondents stated that strangers and the uncircumcised are discriminated against in social gatherings, meals and beer sharing by the elders. A stranger is not a Tiriki by birth but applies to a person who has not gone through the Tiriki way of circumcision (Personal communication, April 5, 2024). Strangers are not allowed to partake in the same drink as the traditional circumcised Tirikis (Personal communication April 5, 2024). The elders opined that



even the initiated young men belonging to the Tiriki-Christian faction are not also allowed to partake in a drink with the elders unless they “buy” the Tiriki traditional circumcision through a ceremony known as *shigongo* where they go through a brief ritual for them to be adopted by the traditional elders of the community. *Idumi* circumcision ritual puts a clear demarcation between those who have gone through the traditional rite and those who have not (Personal communication March 13, 2024).

Abuse of Alcohol and Drugs

The respondents revealed that there was a problem of alcohol and drug abuse during the *Idumi* ceremony since its phases are punctuated with beer festivals. These include the beer of the leaves, the beer of the fire, the beer of the back and the beer of leaving. On all these occasions, beer is served to the elders. There is a lot of alcohol consumption during the traditional circumcision ceremonies (Barasa, Nyanhoga & Lilechi, 2020). Alcohol is legalised, and the license for brewing is obtained. Everyone, apart from those exempted, is allowed to take alcohol to any level and any amount they wish. This time, most of the men, old and young, are likely to be drunk all day long (Personal communication March 10, 2024). In addition, the boys feel that they are now adults, and this gives them the temptation of getting involved in substance abuse. Drugs such as cannabis, cigarettes, and bhang are the drugs that are commonly used by young men (Personal communication March 13, 2024).

Economic Aspects of *Idumi*

This section deals with the findings concerning the economically contested aspects of the *Idumi* circumcision ritual.

Economic Burden to the Families

Idumi circumcision ritual is quite involved economically, and the Tiriki traditional faction is the most expensive as compared to the Tiriki Christian faction due to the processes involved. One of the respondents, a lay woman who had taken his son for initiation, remarked that the money required to circumcise a child traditionally could easily buy land for the family. There is plenty of food and alcohol involved, which requires money. Some poor families end up selling their land and livestock to sponsor their children for the *Idumi* circumcision ritual. *Idumi* circumcision ritual has increased the poverty rate among the average families in the region (Personal communication May 5, 2024).

Laziness and idling attitude

Laziness and idling are a common attitude during the *Idumi* circumcision season. The people are involved in merry-making, feasting, and beer-drinking. This behaviour affects the community significantly in terms of the economy. Most people do not engage in profitable work (Personal communication, May 10, 2024). The men and the young, initiated men have no time to spend on the farms or business ventures. Women's work is mainly about looking for food and preparing for the initiates. They have no time to engage in serious farming or any other business. This behaviour during the *Idumi* circumcision ritual is very disastrous, especially after the circumcision season, when some families will even lack the food to eat and the fees for their schooling children (A Catholic woman, personal communication, May 7, 2024).

Cultural Aspects of *Idumi*

The findings here concentrate on two contested aspects of the *Idumi* circumcision ritual, as explained below.

Fear of Witchcraft

Many respondents agreed that there is fear of witchcraft and sorcery at the centre of the Tiriki community consciousness. This fear is real, so the initiated boys are clothed with hides or animal skin with masks whenever they come out to dance (Personal communication, March 14, 2024). At this stage, they are very vulnerable and must be protected from people with bad eyes and evil spirits. Apart from the fear of being bewitched, the general population also believe that it is



during *Idumi* season that your enemy can bewitch you easily. Hence, people are very fearful of witchcraft. It is as if the powers of the witches are strongest and most effective during *Idumi* season (Personal communication, March 16, 2024). From interviews with some elderly members, the mystical powers possessed by those who conduct the actual circumcision are reported. They are believed to possess some mysterious powers during this time and are therefore revered by most people (Personal communication, March 14, 2024).

Anti-Christian taboos and Customs

In the interviews with some laypeople, they explained that some taboos and customs make it difficult for Christian activities to thrive. Those who are directly involved in the Tiriki circumcision ritual *Idumi* do not find time to join the church's celebrations. The ones charged with the responsibility of cooking for initiates cannot attend funerals and burial ceremonies (Personal communication, May 4, 2024). In addition, the parents of the initiates are not supposed to indulge themselves in sexual activities lest the child in the seclusion may be affected by slowing the process of wound healing. This also applies to the elders, counsellors and the youth intending to visit the seclusion huts (Personal communication, May 5, 2024).

Religious Aspects of *Idumi*

The findings in this section deal with the contested religious aspects of the *Idumi* circumcision ritual.

Reality of Religious Syncretism

There is the reality of religious syncretism in the Tiriki community. On the one hand, some have remained traditionalists concerning circumcision practices. On the other hand, some blend the two. The Tiriki-Christian ritual blends some Christian ideals into the cultural circumcision ritual, thus being half-Christian and half-Tiriki (Personal communication, March 7, 2024). For the Tiriki people, those who are traditionalists are also members of the same church, and the only difference is that, during circumcision, they opt for that elaborate *Idumi* circumcision ritual as opposed to the Tiriki-Christian faction (Personal communication, March 8, 2024).

Conflicting Roles of Ritual Leaders

The role of ritual leaders, shrines and sacred groves is also essential. Although homesteads and communal shrines have gradually disappeared, the shrines remain in the sacred groves where the circumcision takes place (Personal communication, May 4, 2024). At the homestead, each family had its shrine managed and presided over by the elders. He could offer sacrifices on behalf of the entire homestead or family. The ritual elders presided over the shrine in the community, especially during community distress and calamities. They could also offer sacrifices during harvest on behalf of the entire community. These community gatherings for sacrifices have disappeared, but the elders who conduct the rituals are still relevant during the circumcision ritual *Idumi* (Personal communication, March 13, 2024).

The Place the Sacred Groves in Tiriki Community

All the respondents, the elders, initiates, counsellors, and even lay people, agreed that circumcision takes place in specified woods or bushes set aside for this purpose (Personal communication, May 4, 2024). The sacred groves are primarily a place where the initiates are circumcised. It is also a site for rituals and cleansing ceremonies. Other functions of the sacred groves are that they serve as a site for sacred trees, special prayers, herbal medicines, food, a source of construction materials, cultural teachings and a sanctuary for sacred animals. The Tiriki people hold the sacred groves with esteem due to the practice of *Idumi*, which takes place there (Kassilly & Tsingalia, 2009). The union of the initiates and the ancestors is achieved by shedding their blood on this sacred ground. The forest has a religious significance among the Tiriki people. It is a place where the elders offer sacrifices and prayers to the living dead and their ancestors. This affects the faith of the people who are already Christians but still go back to the forests for prayer and sanctification. (Personal communication, March 9, 2024).



Pastoral Aspects

This section discusses some contented aspects that affect the church's pastoral activities.

Anti-Christian Taboos and Customs

The taboos and customs of *Idumi* make it very difficult for Christian activities to continue naturally. Those directly linked with the *Idumi* do not find time to join the rest of the Christians in the church's celebrations. Those who are charged with the responsibility to cook for initiates cannot be allowed to attend the funeral or burial ceremonies involving Christian faithful whose members have departed. They are restricted within the confines of their homes. In addition, the parents of the initiates are not supposed to indulge themselves in sexual activities lest the child in seclusion may be affected by slowing the process of wound healing (Personal communication, May 5, 2024).

Anti-Christian practices

Most of the respondents agree that there are anti-Christian practices related to *Idumi*, such as the death and burial of an initiate who dies during the ceremony. The initiate, whether he is a baptised Christian, the church will not be allowed to give a Christian burial, which is carried out by the elders at night without any Christian prayers offered. The same is true about a Tiriki Christian elder who dies. Elders prefer to bury their elders in a specific manner that may be contrary to the liturgical rite prescribed by the church. Sometimes, this has created a conflict between the traditional elders and the church members (Personal communication, April 10, 2024). This brings about a clash between the church and the Tiriki elders. The death of an uncircumcised man also poses a pastoral challenge to the church. Traditionally, the church cannot bury this person until the elders of the community have circumcised him. To the Christians, this does not make any sense since the person is dead already. It is like baptising a dead person before burial, which is not allowed by the church (Personal communication, April 10, 2024). In general, the participation in funerals by the Christians is totally limited due to the beliefs surrounding *Idumi* circumcision ritual. Any person directly involved in the care of the initiates is not allowed to attend burial ceremonies since this could affect the healing process of the initiates (Personal communication, March 15, 2024).

Disruption of the Sacramental Life of the Christians

During this ceremony, the sacramental life of the Christians is entirely disrupted, beginning with the Sunday obligation of the Christians, and the catechumenate process is interfered with (Personal communication, April 6, 2024). There is a total standstill all the activities of almost all movements in the church, including the Legion of Mary, the catholic men's Association, the catholic women's Association, the Youth Movement and even the normal parish office day is also interfered with (Personal communication, April 4, 2024). Those involved in the lay ministries can also not carry out their pastoral duties properly due to *Idumi* circumcision ritual (Personal communication, March 10, 2024). Two sacraments that suffer greatly are the anointing of the sick and confession for those dying. The belief is that anyone who dies during *Idumi* period is a bad omen to the entire Tiriki community. You are not supposed to die during *Idumi*, and therefore, the community distances itself from anyone who is very sick and likely to die during the season. This ailing person is only left to care for the close family members and not even to a small Christian community. It is worse if he dies since even the Christians will not take an active role in the funeral preparations (Personal communication, March 3, 2024).

Disruption of Church Activities

It is also observed that church activities are greatly affected by *Idumi*, such as church attendance, which is minimal, especially during the Sunday celebrations. Public dances affect the church meetings (Priest Y, personal communication, April 7, 2024). During *Idumi* circumcision period, the number of Christians who attend these daily masses is minimal. The memorial masses, common and celebrated in Christian families, are also limited during this time. Only the family members and a few Christians will attend if it must be celebrated. This also applies to other



church functions like weddings, but the situation is worse for funeral or burial masses (Personal communication April 8, 2024).

The small Christian communities' activities are also affected significantly since most active women are always occupied with taking care of and cooking for initiates during this moment. The usual weekly small Christian community meeting is also affected. Pastoral activities like small Christian community visitations are impossible during this season. Even the small Christian community masses normally organised in the families are impossible. The weekly small Christian community prayer meetings also suffer greatly because of this cultural heritage (Personal communication March 5, 2024). The low attendance reduces the offerings and affects the running of the church. The priests find it hard to run the parish activities without enough income since the Christians invest more in *Idumi* circumcision ceremonies than the church (Personal communication, April 3, 2024).

Conclusion

The study ascertained that there are Christian-contested socio-religious and cultural aspects of *Idumi* that are causing challenges to evangelisation in Hamisi Sub-County. While the church holds that circumcision as an act is good, the rituals that accompany it, in a traditional cultural interpretation, run contrary to the Christian teaching. For this reason, the study outlines the religious foundations of circumcision. The study further also revealed that most of the respondents interviewed, both from the original traditional faction and the Christian faction, agreed that circumcision as an act is a good cultural practice. Still, the Catholic Church contested some of the accompanying rituals.

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