



**THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMPACT OF CURSES AMONG THE PARISHIONERS OF
ST PETER'S PARISH, DURBAN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE JUDEO-
CHRISTIAN AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES**

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DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my grandmother, late Bidzogo Ngah Victorine, my aunt, late Mfegue Medza Julienne, my foster father, late Ownono Zang Lucien, and my brother, late Nneme Onana Antoine Roland and my late sister Nnomo Melanie Marlyse.

This work is also dedicated to my mother, Ava Bidzogo Marie Therese and my entire family.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

African Traditional Religions	ATRs
Democratic Republic of Congo	DRC
Deuteronomy	<i>Dt; Deut.</i>
Ecclesiasticus	<i>Eccles</i>
Exodus	<i>Exod; Ex</i>
First letter of St John	<i>I Jn</i>
First letter of St John	<i>I John</i>
First Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians	<i>I Cor</i>
Galatians	<i>Gal</i>
Genesis	<i>Gen</i>
Gospel of John	<i>Jn</i>
Gospel of Luke	<i>Lk</i>
Gospel of Mark	<i>Mk</i>
Gospel of Mathew	<i>Mt; Mtt</i>
Hebrews	<i>Heb</i>
In-depth Interviews	IDI
Indigenous African Churches	AICs
Isaiah	<i>Isa</i>
James	<i>Jas</i>
Jeremiah	<i>Jer</i>
Joshua	<i>Jos</i>
Judges	<i>Judg</i>
Key Informant Interviews	KIIS
King James Version	KJV
Lamentations	<i>Lam</i>
Letter of St Paul to the Ephesians	<i>Eph</i>
Leviticus	<i>Lev; Lv</i>
Lumen Gentium	LG
Malachi	<i>Mal</i>
Nehemiah	<i>Neh</i>

New Jerusalem Bible	NJB
New Testament	NT
Numbers	<i>Num; Nu.</i>
Old Testament's	OT
Parish Pastoral Council	PPC
Proverbs	<i>Prov</i>
Psalms	<i>Ps</i>
Revelations	<i>Rev</i>
Romans	<i>Rom</i>
Second book of Maccabees	<i>2 Macc</i>
Second book of Peter	<i>2 Peter</i>
Second book of Samuel	<i>2 Sam</i>
Second Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians	<i>2 Cor</i>
World Health Organization	WHO

ABSTRACT

Part of indigenous spirituality has always been to curse the enemy to succeed in one's own efforts towards achieving wellness, advancement, employment opportunities and a suitable marriage partner. The belief held, is that Africans live in an 'intentional world' where nothing occurs by chance; all occurrences have supernatural causes in the primal worldview. Imprecatory prayers and curses are used to prevent evil from happening. In consonance with anecdotal evidence and informal conversations with the African parishioners of St Peter's Catholic Church, indication was that many believed in ancestral or bloodline curses, based on the assumption that some of the repercussions of the sins committed by their ancestors were repeated in their families in various forms.

For this reason, this study interrogated the sociological impact of curses and cursing among the parishioners of St Peter's. It queried their perception of curses against their traditional African and Christian backgrounds, and sought to demystify the associations of this phenomenon with their social existence. The research attempted to problematise curses as a metaphor in both the biblical text and African Traditional Religions (ATRs). Using the qualitative research methodology, which aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of the world as seen through the eyes of the people being studied (Wilmot, 2010) the phenomenological research design was adopted to study the lived experiences of the parishioners and their phobia of curses. The phenomenology of religion provided the theoretical lens through which the goals and objectives of the study were viewed and achieved. The findings indicated that there existed an intense fear of cursing among the participants. Most participants implicitly believed in curses and their impact on human activities. They believed that when one had been placed under a curse, he/she could make less financial, social, or material progress. Sin or disobedience to God and the ancestors was viewed as the primary driving force for a curse. Likewise, participants were unanimous in their belief of the role of curses in their Christian belief system. The inculturation of the biblical answers to curses was recommended to assist African Christians in their response to the curse problem.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Background to the Study

A part of indigenous spirituality has always been to curse the enemy for succeeding in one's own efforts towards wellness, advancement, job opportunities, and a suitable marriage partner (Onyinah, 2002; Mbiti, 2002). African people believe they live in an 'intentional world' in which nothing occurs by chance; spiritual forces trigger all things, and feel that they live in inter-connected worlds. The visible realm relates to the invisible, the mystical, and the spiritual world. Imprecatory prayers and curses are used to prevent evil from happening. Secular and religious realities are intertwined (Nel, 2019). According to Walls (2006), everything is linked, and nothing happens by chance. This is a natural religious wisdom known as a 'primal worldview' according to Trevor Smith (2018:56-60) That is, a belief in the transcendent (the Supreme Being), divinities, angels, ancestors, good and evil, and acceptable forms of life; causes and effects are included in this religious description. According to Tylor in his work *Primitive Culture*, (1871) (in Abalogu & Okolo, 2020), religious belief arose from the primal error of ascribing spirit, soul or life to inanimate objects. The primitive inability to distinguish between waking consciousness and dreams is the source of the theory of animism¹.

According to Turner (1977) in Degbe (2014), using the term 'primal' instead of words such as 'tribal', 'paganism', 'animism', 'heathenism', 'fetishism' and other negative and evaluative terms to characterise non-Christian religions, have become socially appropriate and acceptable. In this investigation, the words 'traditional' and 'primal' will be used interchangeably. Turner also described the central characteristics of primal worldviews as "human vulnerability," "man as part of a group of physical and supernatural forces," "man's connection to transcendent entities," and "the physical as sacramental of the spiritual," among others (Degbe, 2014:247). The concept of curses, as portrayed in this study, illustrates the shape of the primal worldview in African Traditional Religions (ATRs) and Judeo-Christian worldviews.

¹ Tylor used the term 'animism' to conceptualise religion. According to Taylor (2005), animism refers to a religious theory, rather than a religion.

In comparison to western Christianity, which has largely abandoned the erstwhile belief in malevolent forces as having absolute power over their victims, African Traditional Religions reflect a primal worldview that encapsulates a certain culturally innate sense of the realm of transcendence.

In consonance with anecdotal evidence and informal conversations with African parishioners of St Peter's, this indicates that many believe in ancestral or bloodline curses, based on the assumption that some of the repercussions of the sins committed by their ancestors, are repeated in their families in various forms. Whilst other racial groups also form part of the congregation, the congregants of St Peter's consist mainly of Africans from different parts of the continent. This inquiry rests on the hypothesis that the congregants, in their personal relationship with the visible and invisible worlds (spiritual and physical), are the cause of the hardships they experience. To some of these African Christians, the assumption of bloodline curses originated in Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5: 9-10: 28, where God is depicted as a cruel Father, punishing children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren for the sins of the parents who despised Him. Nonetheless, many parishioners believe in the immediacy of the love of Christ and the transformative power of His grace to change their social existence. Thus, praying for deliverance from curses is part of the Catholic Charismatic movement for these believers.

For this reason, this study interrogated the sociological impact of curses and cursing among the parishioners of St Peter's. It queried their perception of curses against their traditional African and Christian backgrounds and sought to demystify the associations of this phenomenon with their social existence. The research attempts to problematise curses as a metaphor in both the biblical text and ATRs. An investigation into the nexus between curses and the social existence of the African population at St Peter's Parish will assist in extending our understanding of how curses function, and enhance our knowledge of curses, both from a Christian and African perspective, thereby achieving congruence. Furthermore, it is hoped the study will enrich the literature on curses concerning human existence and provide a source for further investigation into the phenomenon.

1.1 Problem Statement

African Indigenous Churches (AICs) have been maintaining traditional African beliefs in an 'enchanted universe' (as social scientists refer to the dominant worldview in the Global South) with forces of evil constantly interfering in human destinies for ill intent, since the turn of the twentieth century. This is because it viewed Christianity through the prism of African

Traditional Religion's (ATR), traditional worldviews, and traditional goals (Omenyo 2014). By concentrating on ATRs and believing that African religion is the authentic repository of the African personality, the AICs served as passive resistance to Western colonialism and vindicated Africanness (Bediako, 1995). This was not the case at most missionary churches, where conversion to Christianity indicated at best, a superficial acceptance of the traditions and moral principles of Western thinking. As explained by Williamson (1965):

The invitation to accept the Christian religion was also a call to participate in a western interpretation of reality. Thus, converts were not merely required to abandon the worship of many gods for the worship of One God but were taught to look upon traditional religion as the worship of nonentities. The missionary enterprise was seeking to implant its Christianity by the method of ... a European worldview. (In Nel, 2019: 2).

In Western terms, becoming a Christian meant becoming less 'African' and more 'civilized'

According to the primal worldview, all occurrences have supernatural causes. Imprecatory prayers and curses are thus used to combat harmful occurrences. According to traditional spirituality, the sacred is non-rational and can only be perceived, not wholly comprehended, nor contained in human language. However, the sacred and secular worlds are inextricably linked. Anecdotal evidence indicates that spirituality among the African Christians of St Peter's Parish shares in the orientation of traditional religions toward the empirical, the direct intervention of the supernatural in everyday activities, and the capacity of divine transformative effect on nature's activities, causing miracles and healings to be anticipated daily. It binds to ATRs concepts without reconciling their contents.

Cursing the enemy to achieve success in one's pursuits of a suitable marriage partner, employment opportunities, promotion and health, has always been a part of indigenous spirituality (Onyinah 2002). The curses are changed into biblical injunctions in the spirituality of these African Catholics, which is charismatic, much as the Pentecostals. Many parishioners of St Peter's believe in ancestral or bloodline curses, which assume that some of the repercussions of the progenitors' (or ancestors') sins are passed down through the generations in the form of chronic and inherited illnesses, mental challenges and allergies, recurrent miscarriages and premature deaths, suicidal impulses, and persistent poverty. Deliverance leads the way to happiness (Gaba, 1978), the realisation of divine destiny, and a smooth transition into eternal life after death (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013). From the above, aspects of the African worldview are evident also among African worshipers at St Peter's Catholic Church, even though the Catholic faith is markedly different from African Pentecostal churches in their

mode of worship and worldview. One may ask, whether the Judeo-Christian understanding of curses can be compared to that of ATRs, and what the dissimilarities are between the two approaches. It also begs the question whether curses have any bearing on the social existence among the parishioners of St. Peter's Catholic Church.

As a Catholic priest who has interacted and dealt with many social problems ascribed to the problem of curses among Catholics of African descent at St Peter's Catholic Parish, the researcher became interested in evaluating:

- a. The problem of curses in both the Judeo-Christian and African Traditional Religions
- b. The relevance of this concept to the social existence of the African parishioners of St Peter's
- c. How to deal with the problematic belief in the power of curses from a Judeo-Christian and ATR perspective.

The critical question of this research can thus be stated as follows: Do curses, be they generational or individual, and have any direct or indirect consequence on the lives of these African Catholics? This research aims to determine how the problem of curses in ATRs and Christianity pervades the various African ethnic groups at St Peter's Parish. It should be noted that, against this background, the research is not being viewed from a theologian's perspective, but rather, from that of a religious scholar, with an interest in the evolution of all religious phenomena. As Kirwen (1987) in Opong (2002:2) maintains, "... in Africa, traditional religions are legitimate interlocutors of Christianity; they can work to fulfil each other and bring sub-Saharan Africa to a fuller awareness of the magnitude and magnanimity of God".

1.2. Key Research Questions

To adequately address the research problem of this study, the following research questions are posed:

1. How do the parishioners of St Peter's Catholic Church understand curses in the context of their ATRs?
2. Do they provide biblical references for the phenomenon of curses to support their claims?
3. What do they allege as evidence of what they suspect to be a curse?

4. Do the parishioners of St Peter's Catholic Parish have ways to manage the curse phenomenon, both in their traditional religion and in their Judeo-Christian practices?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The following objectives are derived from the research questions above:

1. To evaluate the parishioners' understanding of curses within ATRs.
2. To understand the biblical foundation of curses.
3. To identify what constitutes a curse to parishioners.
4. To assess how parishioners manage the impact of curses.

1.4. Delimitations

This study focused only on one specific location that of the parishioners of St Peter's Catholic Church, while exploring the social impact of curses and cursing. The views of the parishioners of St Peter's Catholic Church, *per se*, may not necessarily apply to other parishes in the Archdiocese, due to their ethnic/racial compositions. In selecting the nationalities from sub-Saharan Africa that constitute population of the parish, the researcher considered that the ethnic nationalities selected intersected across the various regions of the Continent.

At St Peter's Catholic Church Parish, situated at 360 Mahatma Gandhi Road (formerly Point Road) in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, Nigerians, Congolese (Democratic Republic of Congo – DRC and Congo Brazzaville), Rwandans, and Zulu and Xhosa people of South Africa, are the largest ethnic nationalities, sharing certain beliefs and practices they have in common with other Africans of the parish – black South Africans, Zimbabweans, Liberians, Cameroonians, Kenyans, and Malawians, among others. The criterion for including the Zulu people derives from the fact that they share certain beliefs and practices with the Xhosa and the Sotho people. Similarly, the Igbos of Nigeria (who constitute the population of Nigerians in the parish) share certain beliefs with the Ewondo and Bulu people of Cameroon and the Ibibio of Nigeria. The Congolese and Rwandans are also another larger population group of the St Peter's parish, and their views on the research subject matter will be valuable to the study. Therefore, information collected from the Zulu people would represent two or more tribes in South Africa. As a result, the researcher's inability to interview every sub-Saharan African tribe found in the parish will not hinder the study conclusions, but will reflect what is attainable among African Catholics.

1.5. Limitations

Possible limitations of this research include insufficient sample size for statistical measurements and the lack of previous studies on curses. Methods, instruments, and techniques used to collect the data were also limited due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Movements were restricted, and a more extensive sampling could not be accessed. Collecting data from every group comprising the Black population of Saint Peter's Catholic Parish would have been onerous. Time constraints could be considered as part of the limitations, as being a full-time parish priest, the researcher could only conduct this study after hours and during his free time. At any given moment, he was required to travel for missions abroad, and these times were not without their difficulties. As a parish priest, he was responsible for meeting the spiritual needs of his parishioners daily. It is hoped that the selected open areas provided for the case study will adequately represent the Black population at St Peter's, which forms the nexus of this research. In addition, several challenges hampered the progress of the research. These included:

- The scarcity of comparative studies on the Christian/ATR world views on curses. This created a considerable lacuna in the availability of literature on the curse phenomenon.
- The risk of subjectivity on the part of the participants who may have responded with half-truths to questions, since the researcher was a leader in the parish where the investigation took place.
- It is also worth remembering that there has been much colonial influence on African religion and culture since the arrival of missionaries and European administrative officials in Africa during the 15th century, followed by the Partition of Africa at the Berlin Conference in the 19th century. Such influence could be observed in the lives and belief systems of these Christian converts of African origin, who were eager to impress the researcher, a Catholic priest. This could be a limitation because some truths may have been subjected to colonial interference, especially from missionaries.

1.6. Rationale of the Study

Many scholars, both Europeans and Africans, have developed numerous research findings on African religious beliefs and practices since becoming interested in the African way of life regarding their sociocultural and religious practices. There has also been a significant increase in studying the thinking patterns, symbols, traditions, and curses and cursing of different African ethnic groups, being part of their existence. Nevertheless, there is a paucity of findings

in religious research on comparative studies of different ethnic beliefs and traditions in various African regions that recognise similarities and differences. The researcher believes such a study is essential to provide future generations with adequate knowledge of African religious beliefs and practices on the phenomenon of curses and cursing. Regarding religious beliefs and traditions, it is also important to examine where and how African thought patterns differ from those of other worldviews, particularly Christianity, with regards to curses and cursing in Judeo-Christianity.

It is argued that, while variations in the values and traditions of different religions and cultures distinguish them from one another, there are also similarities that bind them together – a microcosm within the macrocosms of Africanness. Persons are individual, unique human beings that belong to communities, a village or an ethnic group. These contrasts and similarities exist to ensure an effectively balanced world. The intention of this study, which examines the belief in curses and its impact on the social existence of the African Catholics, is not to denigrate any group or religion, but rather, to recognise the natural progression of values and behaviours that should be admired and valued. This comparative study could instead assist in finding a holistic solution concerning the social impact of curses among the parishioners in the parish of St Peter's in Durban.

1.7. Location of the Study

Africa is a vast continent, divided into five distinct regions, these being East, North, South, West, and Central Africa. This investigation into curses focuses on the African Christians who make up the congregants of St Peter's parish in Durban. The church itself was completed and erected in 1939 to serve the ministry of the Apostleship of the Sea. The passage of time has changed the erstwhile landscape and its inhabitants, and today the area can be described as cosmopolitan, owing to the multiple ethnic nationalities that make up the congregation of this parish.

Most of the members of the current population that make up the Africans of St Peter's are migrants searching for economic stability in South Africa, or migrants fleeing wars, conflicts, and strife in their home countries. However, many of these migrants face economic and social challenges such as poverty, crime, rape, unemployment, ill-health, and covert xenophobic discrimination, which drive most of them to ascribe their socio-economic situation to malevolent forces such as curses. As a result of fleeing their home countries and still not finding the peace and prosperity they so deeply yearn for, most of them now consider themselves as

people under a curse, a people whose lands are cursed politically and economically, and a people whose salvation and /or their economic redemption can only come from above. They believe in the physical manifestation of the spiritual impact of bloodline curses or consequences of actions or inactions against a fellow creature. Hence, this study seeks to establish the correlation between their existential problems and spiritual redemption.

1.8 Research Design

This study employed the qualitative research method, which aimed to provide “an in-depth understanding of the world as seen through the eyes of the people being studied” (Wilmot 2011:1). The emphasis of qualitative research is on detailed descriptions, comprehension, and explanations of complicated phenomena. The qualitative study allows for different perspectives on the research subject to be addressed (Creswell, 2009). A phenomenological research design may be most suited for studying people’s lived experiences on life issues within their communities. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that investigates a person’s lived experiences in the world. According to Edmund Husserl (in Bailey, 2013), phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological occurrences from the perspectives of those involved. The research derived the perceptions of parishioners of St Peter’s parish on the impact of curses from their social existence.

1.9. Chapters Overview:

The dissertation comprised seven chapters.

Chapter One introduced the background of the study and provided the socio-political and economic context of the study location. The chapter also defined the research objectives and problems and provided a sound platform for the study.

Chapter Two provided the literature review on works related to the study. Essentially, the chapter provided an in-depth clarification of common concepts in ATRs and Christianity to give the reader a clear perspective on the nature of the study. This literature study identified certain gaps in the understanding of curses in the African Traditional beliefs system *vis-à-vis* the Judeo-Christian tradition. Hence, it also identified gaps in existing works, thus providing a basis for this research.

Chapter Three discoursed on the conceptual and theoretical framework that assisted in the collation of the data. The research methodology and methods of inquiry were further elaborated on in **Chapter Four**.

Chapter Five and Six presented the analyses gathered from the fieldwork and the research questions were discussed. This chapter also alluded to the findings and the implications thereof for further research.

Chapter Seven concluded the dissertation and presented a summary of the findings. The conclusion was derived from the findings and the recommendations on how to manage the curse phenomenon, and included suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

The fear of curses and cursing is endemic in many African communities; it is often alleged to be the enemy of success, wellness, employment opportunities and selecting suitable partners (Onyinah, 2002; Mbiti, 2002). Morris, (1966: 456) indicated that “the possibility of a curse is present whenever man stands in any relation whatever to the Absolute and the Transcendent. Cursing presupposes this reality, at least in principle”. This assisted in understanding why this phobia was so deeply ingrained in the lives of many Africans, one that neither Western nor Eastern mainstream world religions have been able to eradicate. Wachege (2003) (in Hachalinga, 2017:3) described the influence of the curse as follows:

A curse is a disturbing anguish in life and living. It does not matter whether one is a leader; educated or uneducated; restless youth or an elder; medicine man or a soothsayer; sorcerer or witch; polygamist or monogamist; celibate churchmen and women, or laity; man endowed with virility and fecundity; or woman blessed with femininity-cum-fruitfulness; pauper or billionaire; a peace maker or a peace breaker. The underlying factor is that of curse and cursing panic. It is a fright which is so indispensable among many Africans’ life and living that even the Western or Eastern mainstream world religions have not managed to annihilate. It is such an incredible phenomenon whose anxiety and wonder remains.

In the Judeo-Christian worldview, the curse is alluded to in the very first page of the Bible, where God curses the serpent. The man and his wife are condemned to perpetual suffering throughout their earthly lives. (*Gen 3:16-17*). Following on the cursing of Cain (*Gen 4:11*), the Book of Deuteronomy describes curses in a realistic manner (*Deut 8:16-68*). This demonstrates how the notion of curses and cursing infiltrated into the Judeo-Christian and ATRs worldviews; the Black community of St. Peters Catholic Church being no exception.

This chapter discoursed on relevant works and contributions from scholars related to the study. The aim was to highlight essential areas already discussed and to locate the existing knowledge gaps in the literature, which this research intended to address. The works of scholars in the following areas will constitute the literature review: clarification and the use of familiar concepts like religion, culture, African traditional religion, Judeo-Christian religion, and the Creed. The chapter also reviews existing literature on the problem of curses, as it constitutes one of the most contentious issues in both religions.

2.1. Clarification of common concepts in the study

In this dissertation, several terms appeared regularly, and the context of their usage required to be conceptually clarified to provide the reader with a proper perspective of their application in the study. These concepts include African Traditional Religions, curses, Judeo-Christian religion and the Creed, which are discussed below.

2.1.1. African Traditional Religions

The African traditional religions is the African continent's original religion. It is the religion that the forefathers of the current generation of Africans have passed down from generation to generation. It is not considered as a relic from the past as Africans have always practiced this. This is a religion devoid of any written material, yet it is 'written' everywhere for anyone who chooses to search for it. It is primarily inscribed in the proverbs and pithy sayings of the people, liturgies and shrines, in their songs and dances, as well as in their myths and folktales. It is a religion whose founder is unknown. One needs no enthusiasm for membership recruitment, yet it continues to fascinate Africans of all ages (Awolalu, 1976).

In this study, ATRs were addressed in terms of beliefs and traditions, without creating a unique space for addressing religion and culture as different conceptual phenomena. This was because religion pervaded every part of African life and culture. According to Mbiti (1991a), ATRs were evident in (a) rites, ceremonies, and festivals; (b) shrines, holy places, and religious objects; (c) art and symbols; (d) music and dance; (e) proverbs, riddles and truisms; (f) names of people and places; (g) myths and legends; (h) beliefs and customs.

According to Stamer (1995), ATRs were a global, living framework that encompassed all human situations and governed the entire community. It was inextricably related to ancestral soil and situated each African in the lineage of their ancestors, their interaction with their fellow beings, and his productive actions. Hence, curses and cursing were understood as an essential element and daily life was underpinned by religion. The direct relationship with God was rarely stated, but all else was based on believing in one God, the Creator. God was uninvolved in the day-to-day operations of life. These were governed by other unseen powers, both good and malevolent, from whence it was possible to gain favour through the ancestors' ritualised experience. The optimal guarantee of group survival and the transfer of life to many generations was the strict observance of rites and taboos and total solidarity within the group. Externally, traditional African religion was dominated by fear and constraints, but this overlooked the fact

that it provided an overall framework of security in an often hostile environment where group survival was primary.

Five interrelated elements were proposed by Mbiti (1991a, 144-164):

- a. Beliefs – were an essential part of ATRs since they expressed how Africans thought about the world and their attitude toward life. They were related to beliefs in God, spirits, human life, sorcery, and life after death. Curses or cursing could apply to interactions with ancestors, the spirits, and God.
- b. Practices, festivals, and ceremonies were evident in how people demonstrated their beliefs, including the observance of various customs, rituals, ceremonies, offerings, sacrifices, and prayers. Faithfulness or unfaithfulness towards customs could also involve the notion of curses.
- c. Religious objects and places – were sacred objects and places that were rarely used other than for religious purposes. Although some places and objects might have been artificial, others, such as trees, were taken from nature. The way one connected with religious objects could invite blessings or curses.
- d. Values and morals – were religious concepts that guided people on how to live and interact with one another. Love, decency, crime and retribution, justice, character, honesty, and good and evil were among these. One’s behaviour could also invite curses into one’s life.
- e. Religious officials or leaders – were usually trained individuals who presided over religious matters such as divination, formal prayers, rituals, sacrifices, and ceremonies.

Ikenga-Metuh (1987:17) defined ATRs as “institutionalized patterns of beliefs and worship practiced by various African societies from time immemorial in response to the ‘Supernatural’ as manifested in their environment and practice”. It is important to note that these meanings described ATRs as encompassing African beliefs and traditions that had been in existence since the beginning of recorded history in Africa. However, the arrival of European settlers and missionaries and the advent of Christianity did not herald the history of religion in Africa (Sindima 1990:206). Africans had been following their religion since the dawn of time, until Europeans arrived in Southern Africa. Africans and their way of life had been preserved by religion, and they had been able to create communities and governmental structures (Masondo, 2018a). This understanding assisted in arguing that Africans understood curses and their impact on their lives, which would undoubtedly have differed to that of the Judeo-Christians.

Despite differences in African societies, peoples, linguistic classes and traditions, the above concepts revealed certain commonalities in the ontological and cosmological perspectives of Africans. According to Ashanti (1997:12), these commonalities manifested in two ways: “first within the form of the rites and rituals practiced, and second – but not always – within the content of these same rituals and rites”. On this basis, many authors were endorsing the concept of ATRs as a single religion with basic characteristics that underpinned a broad range of African religious practices. These characteristics included the notion of one supreme God angels, spirit powers, and human spirits or ancestors, known as the living dead.

Since these were the fundamental characteristics of ATRs, it was worth reiterating Mbiti's (1969) observation that Africans had a distinct ‘anthropocentric’ religious ontology, one in the sense that their world was viewed in terms of their relationship with people. For example, God was the Creator and the One who sustained humanity; spirits explained the fate of humanity; animals, plants and other natural phenomena provided the conditions that maintained human life, and with whom humanity formed a spiritual relationship. For Africans, therefore:

this anthropocentric ontology is a complete unity which nothing can break up or destroy. To destroy or remove one of [the above structures] is to destroy the whole [of] existence including the destruction of the creator, which is impossible. One mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart from one another nor get too close to one another (Mbiti, 1969:16).

Although God was the creator and controller of a spiritual force, energy, or power that pervaded the universe, the spirits were believed to have access to His power and the capacity to use it. Other humans, such as medicine men and women, witches, priests, and priestesses, were believed to have a limited understanding of this spiritual force, which they could tap into and exploit for their own purposes, good or bad. Animals and plants also had supernatural forces, but their power was thought to be less than that of humans (Parrinder, 1962).

People were born into ATRs, rather than being converted or proselytized (Mbiti, 1991). Opoku (1993), a religious historian, argued that ATRs were open and pluralistic systems. It did not have a closed canon. Other views of reality were welcomed, and individuals who believed and supported them were respected. Other perspectives on reality were appreciated and permitted, and people who held different views were never discouraged. There was no need to

convert anyone because ATRs did not participate in proselytization or actively seeking converts. Masondo (2018b) argued that this viewpoint contained elements that could be quite beneficial in our efforts to solve African challenges.

2.1.2. Some Key Notions in African Traditional Religions

Understanding some key concepts in the ATRs will assist in appreciating the fear of curses in the life of these parishioners. These are the traditional African concepts of God, the world of the spirits, sin, evil spirits, sorcerers and witches.

2.1.3. God

Chirevo Kwenda (1997:5) cautioned against the concept ‘God’ when referring to African supreme deities. This was because their meaningful roles had been obscured by Western understanding. This suggested that the concept had been a source of great debate among scholars (p’Bitek, 1988; Owen, 1971, Mbiti, 1991, Mutwa, 1998). African religion believed in an omnipotent God, the creator of all life. Mutwa (1998:561) described Him as The Most Ultimate God, the God of Gods. He is Everything in Everything. Everything is part of Him

Mende and the Kono people of Sierra Leone and a small part of Liberia, believed the Supreme deity was the Creator of all life forms, was absolute, limitless, dwelled in the sky but also in all generations of man. (Parrinder, 1974: 33). As a result, God was referred to as ‘the Watcher of Everything’ (Barundi), ‘God who Creates’ (Igbo), ‘the Great Eye’ (Baganda), and ‘the One with Long Ears’ (Baganda) (Ila). God is omnipresent in the same way.

Mbiti appeared to support the notion that God in ATRs is a Supreme Being, omnipresent among the people, even though they knew exactly where He lived. The Kenyan Gikuyu and the Lango associated his presence with the hills and mountains, while the Banyarwanda believed that God was present everywhere, though His presence was mainly associated with every terrifying place, such as a desolate and deserted place (Mbiti, 1970). He was the King of all nations, and all things were submitted under Him, who controls all nations. (Mbiti, 1969; Tutu, 1973; Meiring, 2005; Alolo and Connell, 2013). This could explain why God also had the power to curse man. Some African researchers regarded ATR's Supreme Being as monotheistic, like God as revealed in the Bible (Burnett, 2000), and ATRs as *praeparatio*

*evangelica*² being on a par with the Old Testament (Han and Beyers 2017; Mbiti, 1980; Mbiti: 282; Bediako):1995:82,83).

The researcher argues that such interpretation has been rejected. as they are simply a generalisation that fails to reflect the diversity of ATRs or the concept of the Old Testament's (OT) fulfilment in the New Testament (NT). ATRs provided their original religiosity as stated by Bosch (1991:485): “religions are worlds in themselves, with their axes and structures.” (Nyamiti, 1977) and (Ferndinando, 2007) defended this notion. The concept of God as omnipotent, omnipresent and eternal is African, because Africans knew their deity before encountering Western Christianity (p’Bitek, 1990; Liyong, 1988). By first attempting the de-Hellenisation of the African’s Supreme deity, one could objectively comprehend the similarities and the dissimilarities between the understanding of curses in the Judeo-Christian and the African traditional worldviews. This understanding of the concept of God in African Traditional Religions assists the researcher to avoid subjectivity and preconceptions deriving from Christian theology. The deities in authentic ATRs were familiar to them, as people knew their deities' names, abodes, and attributes. They were recognised by the calamities, illnesses, or curses they inflicted upon people, either by themselves or through mediums and the spirits.

2.2 World of the Spirits

The spirit world occupies a prominent place in both African and Judeo-Christian traditions. Spirits may be defined as intermediaries between God and man. The Catechism of the Catholic faith is not merely a collection of catholic doctrines, but a scholarly, recognised manifesto containing the foundation for what Catholics stand for, defining and clarifying every Catholic belief and ritual. Paragraph 328 from the Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of the existence of non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually refers to as ‘angels’ carrying out missions and conveying messages. For example, an angel announced the births of John the Baptist and of Jesus to Zachariah and the Blessed Virgin Mary (Luke 1:19; 1:26-38). However, in the same way angels are able to convey good news, they are equally able to pronounce punishment and curses on human beings. In the Book of Luke, Gabriel ordered Zacharia into silence until John the Baptist was born (cf. Luke 1:20).

² In preparation for the Gospel in societies where Christ's word has yet to be heard.

In the African worldview, according to the scholars cited, there were various spirit intermediaries between God and humans (Mbiti, 1990; Ikenga-Metuh, 1987). Spirits created by the Supreme Deity were called nature spirits, and divided into sky and earth spirits. The rain, rainbow, thunder, lightning, sun, moon, stars, storm, and wind were all examples of sky spirits that could turn into destructive powers as soon as people angered them (Parrinder, 1974; Mbiti (1991). Trees, rivers, hills and mountains were considered earth spirits. Diviners used them to apply curses and ailments by exploiting, *inter alia*, diseases, insects, creatures, metals, woods, trees, boulders, the earth, hills, and mountains, as well as water in various forms – rivers, ponds, the sea, lakes, and so on. These forces could bring curses or fortunes, unless a proper relationship was maintained (Ray, 1976; Parrinder, 1974; Alolo and Connell, 2013).

The other category of spirits were those who were once human beings. They were known as human spirits or ancestors, or referred to as the living dead. Scholars divided them into four categories, namely the divinities, God's associates, ordinary spirits, and ancestors (Mbiti, 1969; Alolo, 2007). Most savants concluded that these spirits could inflict curses, immense harm, suffering, madness or epilepsy and other terrible illnesses, and that human prosperity depended on their relationship with the spirit world (Ellis and Ter Haar (2004), (Emeka C. Ekeke and Chike Ekeopara, 2010). There was a firm understanding that people were in contact with the invisible world. (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004: 52). The spirits of the living dead were highly respected. They were known as eternal, watchful entities with powers beneficial to humans, necessitating seeking their blessings or averting their wrath by appropriate offerings, and people could communicate with them. (Parrinder, Ashanti, 1997; Mbiti, 1991).

The spirits of the deceased were said to have abilities that could either withdraw their protection, or support surviving relatives. Rites and sacrifices were performed in honour of the ancestors, who were respected and revered as divinities. Ancestors were considered the most suitable intermediaries between humans and God, because they were still people in a sense. Hence, the Mende of Sierra Leone prayed:

O good and innocent dead, hear us: Hear us, you are guiding, all-knowing ancestors, you are neither blind nor deaf to this life we live you did yourselves once share it. Help us for the sake of your devotion, and our good (Tutu, 1996:126).

Their main role was to bring blessings to human beings, but could invoke curses upon individuals or the community when disobeyed. (Crafford, 1996; Mbiti, 1969; Thorpe, 1991). However, people could disagree with them to a certain extent (Crafford, 1996).

2.2.3 Evil Spirits and Witches

The belief in evil spirits, witches and sorcerers is one of ATR's core beliefs, in the same way African traditional religion was concerned with seeking good as well as avoiding wrong-doing in daily relationships. For Africans, evil encompassed both physical and spiritual aspects, and supernatural forces, mystical agencies, evil spirits and sorcerers existed only to cause evil and harm. Evil in ATRs was defined as "any voluntary antisocial behaviour or any infringement of the decrees of God, the deities, or the ancestors" (Ikenga-Metuh, 1987:161). These were the two types of evil in the ATR's belief structure: those that inflicted physical harm and those that incited people to harm others, namely mystical agencies, sorcerers, witches, evil spirits, oaths, broken taboos, the evil eye, or even God (Ikenga-Metuh, 1987). God, deities, ancestors, and good and just spirits could inflict curses and harm as a warning, as a corrective, or a punitive measure (Ikenga-Metuh (1987). For example, Meek (1937) claimed that when an Igbo individual was struck by lightning, they were not mourned because the death was viewed as a punishment by the Igbo god of thunder, *Amadioha*, for a sin committed.

According to Ikenga Metuh (1987), the Igbo divided evil spirits of the dead into three categories, namely, evil spirits of children (*Umu Aro*), evil spirits of dead young men (*Ogbonuke*), and evil spirits of adults who died without offspring (*Akalogeli*). Young mothers were most fearful of evil spirits of young children, according to Mosicke, 2017:138), because the spirits of these children formed "a confraternity of spirits who visit the world in incarnate form for short periods, the length of each being pre-arranged. The spirits are born into babies who will die in infancy or boyhood". Idowu (1962:80), on the other hand, described these evil spirits as "wandering spirits who specialize in the sadistic mischief of finding their way into wombs to be born to die."

Mbiti (2002:202) defines witchcraft as:

Witchcraft is a term used more popularly and broadly, to describe all sorts of evil employment of mystical power, generally in a secret fashion. African societies do not often draw the rather academic distinction between witchcraft, sorcery, evil magic, evil eye, and other ways of employing mystical power to do harm to someone or his belonging (Mbiti, 2002:202).

Following the above quote, Evil spirits influenced humans by inflicting illnesses, demon possession, or affecting their emotions, as well as social and political institutions, according to Erickson (2013). Spirit possession was a means of communicating with a realm beyond ordinary human existence, and could be viewed as either good or bad, "possession by a

desirable spirit accommodated through mediumship, and possession by spirits that cause harm and have to be expelled by exorcisers” (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004:58). Changes in people's relationships with the spirit world were detected by Ellis and Ter Haar. They pointed out that in the past, ATRs:

ascribed to the spiritual powers of the invisible world a morally neutral character, instead of considering them intrinsically good or evil. Rather, the moral nature of spirits traditionally depends on the relationship between human beings and the spirit world with which they interact... whereas people once considered spirits to be morally neutral forces that could be used for purposes ... many have come to see traditional spirits as being harmful by nature (2004: 56).

They also viewed evil as ubiquitous, necessitating the creation of new engagement and propitiation strategies.

2.3 Sin

Sin is a religious notion that is fundamental to all world religions. Every religion has a code of moral behaviour that forbids sin. “Sin is a notion that indicates most emphatically a disruption of what is religiously sanctioned or required” (Bolle, 1966: 234). It referred a power that was beyond human potential. That is why special care was needed to avoid or to be free from sin through purification or expiation, according to one’s religious tradition. (Bolle, 1966). In the Old Testament, sin had to do with human relations. For instance in the Book of Exodus God said to human beings:

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. “You shall not murder. “You shall not commit adultery. “You shall not steal. “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:12-17)

The above quote shows that sin bad relations with God and human beings. The root word for sin was ‘*hatta*’, meaning to miss the mark, to be deceived, or to fall short of the goal (Lachowski, 1967). Sin denoted disobedience, transgression, violation of the rights of others, and personal offense against God (Lachowski, 1967). In the New Testament, the word for sin was ‘*amartia*’ meaning deviation from the good. This could express a wrong done to another human being and God. Refusal to accept God and his kingdom was considered a sin.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church categorises individual sinfulness into venial sin, which is a minor sin, and mortal sins, which are grave sins. These two kinds of sins each injure the core human component: the ability to love God and others (CCC No. 1850). Researchers of

African Traditional Religions did not study sin as a religious concept, since for Africans, every breaking or negligence of the spiritual or established rule was deemed as such and this inevitably required reparation. The concept was not always understood in the same manner. For some scholars, Africans had no or minimal understanding thereof. Parratt (1969: 118), writing about the Yoruba of Southern Nigeria, declared, "the sense of sin among the Yoruba, if any, is nothing comparable with the developed ethical conception of sin which is to be found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament." However, it is believed that scholars such as Parratt should have first overcome their prejudices in their research. These would have assisted them to discover that Africans had a deeper awareness of sin than the Jews of the Old Testament, with whom Parratt was attempting to compare the Yoruba of Nigeria.

Contrary to Parratt, who denied the Yoruba of Nigeria and other African ethnic groups the notion of sin, this study argued that Africans in fact had a deep sense of sin. They,

know the distinction between ritual errors which are calculated to be offences against the divinities, derelictions of filial duties which may arouse the anger of the aggrieved ancestors and the breach of Deity's behests which is purely a moral issue. Sometimes, it is not easy to draw the line between the merely ritual and the purely ethical, as they are often involved one in the other (Idowu, 1962:148).

Although Basden, (1966) while discussing the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, maintained that sin was not taken with much compunction, Arinze, a well-read Ibo man who had studied the religion of his people, maintained that "an Ibo man believes that when he sins, he makes the high-power frown" (Arinze, 1970:34).

Therefore, it may be argued that sin is a well-known notion in ATRs and Christianity, only that the way of conceptualising it might differ. Kwasi Wiredu (2002) argued strongly that the African sense of morality did not attribute being moral or ethical to the will of God, but to what was good for the community. The idea of violation, in this case, went against the community's interest. As a result, man was held accountable for his actions (Odeleye, 2020).

There were sanctions in African societies that were regarded as the accepted norm of social and religious behaviour on the part of individuals and the community. A breach of the sanctions, or a refusal to follow them, was sin, and earned the wrath of the Deity and His servants. This included immoral activity, ritual errors, transgressions against God or man,

violation of the covenant, taboo-breaking and doing anything considered vile and polluted. Sin could not be discussed in isolation; it needed to be connected to God and man (Awolalu, 1976).

Africans did not make a clear distinction between a crime against a person or community and an offence against God, divinities, or the spirits. In this sense, there was no distinct division between the holy and the secular, as the Western culture assumed. God was revered as the creator and protector of morals. Ignoring God, the divinities, and the ancestral spirits was a sin. Disregarding societal standards and taboos, on the other hand, was also a sin. Moral foundations were required for human interactions; they could not be premised on anything else. Evans-Pritchard (1956: 18), writing about the Nuer, stated:

if a man wishes to be in the right with God, he must be in the right with men, that is, he must subordinate his interests as an individual to the moral order of society. A man must honour his father and his father's age-mates, a wife must obey her husband, and a man must respect his wife's kin, and so on. If an individual fails to observe the rules he is, the Nuer say, young, crazy, because he not only loses the support of kith and kin, but also the favour of God.

What traditional Christianity referred to as 'sin' or 'evil' was best expressed in African religion as the 'destruction of life,' 'badness' or 'wrongdoing.' Although more abstract notions of sin existed within African religious consciousness, the moral viewpoint of African religion was concrete and pragmatic. As a result, the African definition of sin was conditional. Sin did not occur in a vacuum, but was still present in culture and development. Not only did sin depend on the community and context, but it also depended on otherworldly norms (Ndwandwe, 2000).

2.4 Christianity and the Creed

The Christian religion is marked by heterogeneity, as various members view these core values differently (Deneulin, 2013). There is no generic approach to Christian theology. This section therefore offers a Christian viewpoint from within the Catholic tradition. The Christian religion is based on the profession of faith (The Creed) in Jesus as the Messiah, which is repeated every Sunday. Through the community of faith, people come to believe and profess the Christian faith. This implies that faith and discipleship, or following Jesus through words and deeds, are inextricably linked. Christianity is a collection of values and a way of life, including prayer and worship, and exposing God's face in economic, social and political systems.

2.4.1 The Creed

The term ‘creed’ derives from the Latin word ‘credo’ which translates to ‘I believe’. The creed is a commitment to a specific belief, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church identifies a creed as a symbol of faith. In 324 pages, Luke Timothy Johnson (2003) explains and develops the significance of the Catholic Creed, discoursing on its development from the early Church to the present age. The Catholic Church identifies three professions of faith or creeds: the Apostles’ Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Nicene-Constantinople Creed. The Apostles’ Creed and Nicene Creed are the most well-known in the Church. The Athanasian Creed is rare within the Church or not even used (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2015).

This section focuses on the Apostles’ Creed, divided into three separate, yet interconnected sections. The first section discusses God, the Father; the second focuses on God the Son; the third section discourses on the Holy Spirit as the origin and source of sanctification. These sections are known as Articles, according to an analogy often used by the Church Fathers. In the same way some articulations differentiate and divide our bodily members, the word ‘articles’ has been given to the truths Christians must believe, specifically and distinctly, in this profession of faith. It is also customary to count the articles of the Creed as twelve, following an ancient practice attested to by St. Ambrose, thus symbolising the fullness of the apostolic faith by the number of apostles. From the twelve Articles of Faith, three are selected for discussion, namely, ‘I believe in the God the Father’, ‘I believe in God the Son’ and ‘I believe in the Holy Spirit.’

The Belief in God the Father

Article I of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) reads:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth. God is the Creator of all things visible and invisible and deserves honour, adoration, and reverence from human beings. God created all things, including humanity, out of his infinite love. Man should remain as a steward of God’s creation. Disobedience to God’s creation plan could lead man to curse and destroy. The fall of man in Genesis 3 is illustrative of such misfortunes or curses.

The Belief in God the Son

The second Article of Faith asserts that ‘I believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God’. Refusal to believe in the Son of God is considered as being accursed. “The Lord will send upon you

curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me.” (*Mt* 28:20). Christians should profess their faith in Jesus of Nazareth, a carpenter by trade, who was crucified in Jerusalem under the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. For Christians of all times, Jesus is the one who ‘came from God’ (*Jn* 13:3) and ‘descended from heaven,’ (*Jn* 3:13; 6:33) according to the Bible, and ‘came in the flesh’ (*1 Jn* 4:2). In Him there is the fullness of grace and truth (*Jn* 1:14, 16). Created in the image and likeness of God (*Gen*1:27), we are fully human when we accept Jesus and live in communion with others and serve one another. If one does not follow this way or listen to these instructions, and if one does not take it to heart to give honour to the name of the Lord of hosts, God will send the curse upon them and he will curse their blessings. (*Mal* 2:2). The Gospel of St Mark reads: “Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (*Mark* 16:16) Not believing in Jesus and not striving to become like him exposes one to condemnation. Jesus is a True God and True Man. As the Son of God, Jesus identifies himself with us; as the Son of God, Jesus wants us to become like Him. Hence, he restores the right relationship, the human communion, and re-adjusts life to its original intent through his death and resurrection (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2015: No.620-631).

Christians are called to believe in Jesus without reservation, for He will come again to judge both the living and the dead. This is clearly stated in Article 7 of the Creed. Christ is the Lord of all things. According to *Rom* 14:9, “Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living.” He now has dominion over all things in heaven and on earth. He is "far above all rule and authority, and power and dominion," for the Father "has put all things under his feet" (*Eph* 1:20-22). Our attitude toward our neighbour can show acceptance or rejection of grace and divine love, and all are accountable before Him. Jesus would say on the Last Day, "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (*Mt* 25:40). Jesus will judge the actions of all, the living, and the dead. A Christian who did not follow him on his way of love is considered accursed. St Paul says: “If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord!” (*1Cor* 16:22)

The Belief in the Holy Spirit

Before leaving this world to his Father, Jesus said to his disciples: “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (*Jn* 14:18); then he continued: “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of

everything I have told you.” (*Jn* 15:26). The Christian, therefore, believes in the Holy Spirit. He is the guide, the giver of life, and proceeds from the Father and the Son. ‘With the Father and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified’ (Nicene Creed in Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2015: No. 465). From the beginning to the end of the Christian’s salvation history, the Holy Spirit works with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the agent of unity and communion. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Christians believe in ‘the Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting’ (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2015: No. 686). Christians trust the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit and even avoid sinning against Him. Jesus speaks of it very harshly: “Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven, but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man shall have forgiveness; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.” (Matthew 12:31-32) To believe in the Holy Spirit is also to believe in the forgiveness of sins and the forgiveness of one another. It is through the Holy Spirit that the Church receives the mandate to bring reconciliation and to forgive sins. Jesus says to them: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (*Jn* 20:22-23). Forgiveness allows the Christian to have hope for a better and everlasting life. Hence, Article 11 of the Creed states, ‘I believe in the resurrection of the body’. There is everlasting life for both body and soul for those who die in God’s grace and friendship after undergoing purification in Purgatory (Council of Florence (1439): DS 1304; Council of Trent (1563): DS 1820; (1547):1580). The purgatory teaching is based on some Scripture passages such as (*1Cor*3:15; *1Pet* 1:7).

The Christian Creed - the declaration of faith in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as well as God's imaginative, saving, and sanctifying intervention, culminates in the announcement of the resurrection of the Dead on the last day and eternal life. The resurrection of the body ascribes Christian importance to human dignity. It can be understood why sins such as murder, abortion, and any direct attempt on a life, are taken seriously by the Church.

This section assists in understanding that the Creed is first about believing in God as the Creator of all things. Hence, for man to live well, he must be a moral steward and act according to the Creator's intent. Jesus is the Saviour of the world whom God sent to humanity. To have eternal happiness, one must give full assent to Him and live and love like Him. Finally, in the Creed, Christians profess their faith in the Holy Spirit as their guide and the anchor of faith. Adhering

to and following his inspirations could create a sound relationship within the community, but also create an indefectible hope for eternal salvation. Africans who have become Christians access the notion of a curse in various ways today. The following section provides an overview of curses as understood in the African context.

2.5.0. Curses

According to the English Oxford Living Dictionary, the word 'curse' refers to "a solemn utterance intended to invoke a supernatural power to inflict harm or punishment on someone or something" (2016). Anne Marie Kitz (2007:1), a scholar of the Ancient Near East who became intrigued by the topic of curses, stated: "All people curse. This assumption is valid for both today and the ancient past". This implied that the notion of curses was widespread in all cultures. "The ancient East Israelites originally understood the curse to possess an infallible and magical efficacy in bringing evil on the cursed" (Morris, 1966: 547). Since the earliest days, this magical power was associated with the efficacy of the spoken word as a medium for either a blessing or a curse (Morris, 1966).

2.5.1. ATRs' Worldview on Curses

Asante and Mazama (2009), leading figures in African-American studies, provided useful insight into the effects of curses among Africans. They described a curse as any attempt to use an invocation or utterance to hurt others. Okpara (2016:5) further maintained, "such negative declarations have supernatural powers to produce destructive effects in someone's life, or cause harm and pain to people in health, business, and relationship." According to Kalu (2008) and Mbiti (2002), curses could be aimed at individuals and families by evil or envious people, witches, and wizards. Curses often had the power to impose imperceptible restrictions on somebody's life to such an extent, that the victim tried hard, but achieved minimal results. Corroborating the view on the motivation for cursing others, Edmiston (2010) averred that because of hate, envy, greed, jealousy, sorcery, supernatural strife, or the urge for vengeance, curses could be pronounced on the chosen targets. On the power of words, Mbiti (2002:197) explained:

There is mystical power in words, especially those of a senior person to a junior one, in terms of age, social status, or office. For example, the words of parents carry 'power' when spoken to children: they cause' good fortune, curse, success, peace, sorrows, or blessings, especially when spoken in moments of crisis.

The assumption that a curse “is not a mere wish for misfortune on a person or thing but a power that produces tangible results, for in cursing it is believed that a power is released that is effective in determining the destiny of the recipient of the curse” (Donkor 2011:92) increased this belief in the power of words.

On the enigma of curses in Africa, Kombo (2003:75–76), elaborated further:

In African tradition, cursing involves the use of words or actions against an individual or group. Words indicating the misfortune one will suffer for engaging in a particular action or saying certain words may be uttered. Certain actions, for instance, a mother exposing her nakedness to her son for something the son did, constitutes a curse which negatively affect the person cursed.

As powerful as curses are thought to be, they operated according to a set of rules:

The operative principle is that only a person of higher status can effectively curse one of lower status, but not vice versa. The most feared curses are those pronounced by parents, uncles, aunts or other close relatives against their ‘juniors’ in the family. The worst is the curse uttered at the deathbed, for once the pronouncer of the curse has died, it is practically impossible to revoke it (Mbiti 2002:211).

In Africa, Kombo (2003:76) emphasised the family or village setting as the sole functioning realm of curses:

Parents, grandparents, and other close relatives are known to curse persons within their families who may have done or said hurtful things against them, their families or the community in general. In most instances, the power of the curse is efficacious only in those persons who may be guilty of the offence.

Furthermore, in their study of the Nyakyusa tribe of Tanzania, Godfrey and Monica Wilson confirmed that “supernatural sanctions were believed to be effective only against kinsmen, neighbours and those with whom people had personal contact with. No one feared witchcraft from outside the chiefdom. Historically, it was those who were near who was feared” (Wilson and Wilson, 2010:36). Nonetheless, every culture had a fear of curses because “a powerful curse is believed to bring death to the person concerned” (Mbiti 2002:155). Wachege (2003) (in Hachalinga, 2017:3) elaborated on how a curse could strike its target in an unbiased manner:

African societies have always regarded medicine men (People endowed with natural giftedness of healing or who have been initiated to gain supernatural power of detecting evil harm and healing them) as the greatest blessing and the most valuable source of aid in their quest to discover who sent the curse, why, and how to overcome the crippling harm of these magical powers (Mbiti 2002:166). Further, Mbiti explains how “the medicine men symbolize the hopes of society – hopes of good health, protection and security from evil forces, prosperity and good fortune, and ritual cleansing when harm or impurities have been contracted... It is the duty of medicine men to purge witches, detect sorcery, remove curses and

control the spirits and living-dead. . . So long as people see sickness and misfortunes as ‘religious’ experiences the traditional medicine-man will continue to exist and thrive. (2002:170)

To lift a curse, elaborate rituals may have been needed, however, this discussion is outside the ambit of this review. The following section discussed the various types of curses among Africans.

2.5.2 Types of Curses in ATRs

In his study of curses and cursing among the Agĩkũyũ people of Kenya, Wachege (2012:3) noted that there were categories of curses and cursing that were similar across the African belief systems. This section focused on types of curses, especially those in the interviews. Among these, were:

i. Generational/Inherited curses: ATR’s worldview

In the African worldview, the consequences of ancestral/generational curses could be attributed to “the prevalence of chronic and hereditary diseases, emotional excesses and allergies, and frequent miscarriages and deaths, suicidal tendencies, and persistent poverty within one’s family,” according to Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:405).

According to (Wachege, 2012), inherited curses were passed down through the centuries from forefathers and mothers who were said to have done something heinous or disobeyed cultural or conventional taboos, morals, family ethics, or ancestral unity. Arguably, the victims had no recourse. Neither could the curses mentioned above be eradicated. The logic used was that such curses were inborn rather than acquired. Perhaps the curse victims were predestined to be cursed and innocently bore the repercussions. While the victims may not have been individually or financially responsible, they were forced to live with and die under such curses. Wachege (2012), considered the following two examples of hereditary curses among the Agĩkũyũ:

a. Women cursed with ‘Red Thighs’ (*Ciero Ndune*)

Women cursed with this affliction were referred to as *ciero ndune*, which referred to women with red thighs. These were women whose husbands passed away slowly, one after the other, after having cohabitated with them for short periods. Such women were considered a source of misery and therefore, a curse to men, thus whoever married her, was cursed. Men fled when they saw women with red thighs, even though they may have had children with them. Some

men avoided them in order to avoid the graveyard (*mbĩrĩra*). The treatment meted out to such women was ‘anathematised’, meaning, denounced or cursed, and the same held for their children, who were afraid of genetically inheriting the heinous trait and therefore being exposed to the same misfortunes (Wachege, 2012).

b. Man cursed with Abomination: Carriers of bad Omens

This was a curse for men who had been denounced by society for being the bearers of evil omens. The traits and qualities of these men manifested themselves early in their lives. These traits could manifest in being evil-eyed to the point that, for example, simply looking at someone's baby caused the baby to become ill or led to its death. The abomination of a cursed man could make his penis to become trapped in the private parts of a woman during heterosexual intercourse, like that of mating dogs, causing excruciating pain and humiliation. It sometimes happened when people made an ill-informed joke (*itherũ ihunyũku*), as people became enraged by their words. Curses were seen as stumbling blocks in life. The idea that they were pre-destined to die from the misfortune made it even more critical.

Before discussing the Judeo-Christian types of curses, more types of curses were recorded by Wachege, (2012).

i. Refusal to forgive Curses

This was an occultic mode of cursing among secret societies. One cursed, and then remained stubborn about rescinding it from one's mind and heart. These individuals were unconcerned whether the world rebuked them or not, to persuade them to limit their range of indignation. This ill-will was directed at the victim who, willingly or unwillingly, caused the curse agent to suffer a wound or injustice.

ii. African Mother's Curse

To understand the depth, severity of an African mother's curse, one must first comprehend the essence of an African mother's unconditional love for her children, including respecting husbands who were merely overgrown children in relation to mothers. Untold loving care from mothers necessitated much reciprocity, and mothers were aware of this. It is no surprise that they did all they could to stop committing abomination, because of the severe consequences that could arise. The above profound insights into African mothers' motherliness and motherhood philosophy are sufficient justifications and, indeed, form the rationale for this

claim: mothers' curses were most feared and had the most severe consequences. It did not matter if they were Ameru mothers, Taita mothers, Maasai mothers, Aembu mothers, Kuria mothers, Lyhya mothers, Akamba mothers, Agĩkũyũ mothers, or any other mother for that matter. In terms of mothers, the basic theory appeared to be almost cross-culturally identical.

Furthermore, Wachege (2012) noted that the African mother's curse was the greatest, most feared, and most frightening. A mother's curse was overwhelming, deeply humbling, uncomfortably humiliating and often shameful. Making mention of the mothers' anatomy, a severe taboo among Africans, was an ill-willed language that carried a bad omen. The mere mention of words like a mother's private parts, breasts, womb, pubic hairs by the mothers themselves and the very act of sexual intercourse was shameful among Africans. Among the most dreaded curses by mothers included:

- 1) Mother's curse using her private parts;
- 2) Mother's curse using her pubic hairs;
- 3) Mother's curse using her breasts;
- 4) Mother's curse breaking a pot full of food (Wachege, 2012:4-5).

iii. A Father's Curse Using his Penis and Urine

This was a curse that carried much weight. Incredibly, a father would expose his penis (*guthita*), an act that was unacceptable and unthinkable to do to others. It was deemed a heinous act, especially among the Agĩkũyũ, who had no idea that their parents could have or enjoy sex. A curse like this was pronounced and carried out in response to grave matters of extreme disrespect. Overwhelming outrageous problems would be incurred as a result, such as a son raping his father's wife or wives. Highly shameful acts, such as an adult daughter grabbing or deliberately touching her father's penis (*mũcuthi*) during a confrontation, could also initiate retribution. (Wachege, 2012).

iv. Proverbial Insights into Curses

Proverbs were highly significant to Africans. They were thought to be very pedagogical, particularly regarding blessing and cursing:

The proverbs are the quintessence of Gĩkũyũ eloquence and represented for centuries the code of tribal laws used for the lack of written books. They are full

of wisdom and embody the maxims of natural law ‘written by God in the heart of all...they are ... a precious inheritance, which must not be lost in the changes now taking place’ (Barra, 1960: iii).

Similarly, (Njūrūri, N.1983: iv), opined, “the handing down of proverbs from one generation to another orally is a tribal custom closely linked to the education of the youth and the social interchange of conversation....”

Accordingly,

children are traditionally brought up on proverbs which are significantly directed to them for their instruction, and which are casually around them in daily conversation...proverbs form a comprehensive code of law and morals which has not been obliterated or changed by the impact of Western culture. Anyone who learns the lessons they give will acquire the wisdom they contain (Njūrūri, 1983: iv).

Thus, Wachege (2012:5) submitted that ‘*kwīgigima maũndũ me magigi*,’ (‘to fear and be wary of evil’) proverbs are the first and foremost control measure. As a result, the proverb: *Mũndũ ũtarĩ kĩndũ etigĩrite ti mũndũ* (one who fears nothing is not a person) is relevant. Not being afraid of anything is a curse for an African. African proverbs carved out of curses and swearing are written in this context. Among them are the following:

‘An uncalled for or unprovoked malicious curse is ineffective’ (*Kĩrumi gĩa Ũtũrika Gĩtinyitaga Mũndũ*). This proverb cautions that a far-fetched and an unmerited “curse” imbued with vendetta motive is null and void. As a result, a true curse should not be spoken out of spite, uncalled for emotional outbursts, or jealous anger. This proverb serves as a deterrent to curses uttered because of unjust grudges or cruel mischievous attitudes (Wachege, 2012:6).

2.6.0. Christian Worldview on Curses and Cursing

This section expounds on biblical perspective on curses. The *Tyndale’s Bible Dictionary* referred to curses as an “invocation of evil or injury against one’s enemies. As practiced in the Bible times, cursing was the opposite of blessing and should not be confused with profanity in the modern sense” (Comfort & Elwell, 2001:340). Blessings and curses were often mentioned in relation to one another in the Bible, and both were considered necessary biblical concepts. The covenant blessings and curses were presented in materialistic terms in *Deut. 27* and *28*. But “not the mechanistic application of rewards and punishments” is at the core of these

chapters (Evans, 2000:399). Instead, being in a relationship with God was deemed a blessing, while not being in a relationship with God was a curse.

For the above reason, a proper understanding of biblical curses is as critical as the foundation for obtaining blessings. Divine curses played a vital role in the divine-human relationships in the Bible, according to Comfort and Elwell (2001:340):

In the OT the curse was an integral part of a covenant relationship between God and the community, between God and an individual, or among members of the community. To break the terms of a covenant was to merit the covenant curse or curses. A curse invoked under other conditions was powerless.

On the other hand, cursing was commonly forbidden by God's covenant people. Though individuals may curse themselves to show their honesty (*Ps* 137:5–6; *Job* 31:7–10, 16–22; *Num* 5:19–22), the Mosaic Law prohibited the cursing of parents (*Matt* 15:4; *Prov* 20:20; *Ex* 21:17), the deaf (*Lev* 19:14), and rulers (*Ex* 22:28). Cursing God was a capital offense, as it could provoke other serious issues such as disrespect, lack of reverence toward God and authority and leading to unbelief (cf. *Ex* 22:28; *Isa* 8:21–22; *Lev* 24:10–16). Evans (2000:400) explained the foundation for these prohibitions as: “When action is taken against children who curse their parents or citizens who curse leaders, it relates to the dishonor involved in the curses rather than any fear of their consequences. (*Ex*. 21:17; 22:28; *2 Sam.* 16:9; *Eccles.* 10:20).”

God's curses on the serpent, Adam and Eve (*Gen* 3:14–19), Cain (4:11–12), and those who may curse Abraham and his descendants (12:3), as well as those who put their faith in human power, are all documented in the Bible (*Jer* 17:5). More divine curses can also be found in the New Testament: “When God pronounces a curse, it is: [1] a denunciation of sin (*Nu.* 5:21, 23; *Dt.* 29:19–20), [2] his judgment on sin (*Nu.* 5:22, 24, 27; *Isa.* 24:6), [3] the person who is suffering the consequences of sin by the judgment of God who is called a curse (*Nu.* 5:21, 27; *Je.* 29:18)”

According to Motyer. (1996:248), all the above quotations from the New and Old Testaments convey the message that curses in the Judeo-Christian faith is a matter of sowing and reaping. “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” (*Gal* 6:7). God does not curse; however, obeying or disobeying his commandments and ordinances has consequences. It is common throughout the First Testament, that being cursed is synonymous with losing everything important and being reduced to a significantly lower status. The serpent must crawl on his belly, and its head shall be crushed (Cf. *Gen* 3:14-15). Cain is cursed and chased away from his habitual activity and becomes a vagabond (*Gen* 4:11).

Furthermore, Motyer suggested, “The word of God’s grace and the word of God’s wrath is the same: the word which promises life is but a savour of death and judgment to the rebel, and therefore a curse. When God’s curse falls on his disobedient people, it is not the abrogation but rather the implementation of his covenant (*Lv. 25:14-45*)” (Motyer 1996:248). Idolatry, dishonoring parents, treachery against neighbors, injustice, incest, adultery, bestiality, bribery, perjury and disobedience to God are all mentioned in *Deut 27:14-26*, as human practices that predispose people to divine curses. However, these curses (and blessings) did not work without exception. (Evans, 2000). God remains Sovereign. He judges according to His holy will as it reads:

When anyone wrongs their neighbor and is required to take an oath, and they come and swear the oath before your altar in this temple, then hear from heaven and act. Judge between your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing down on their heads what they have done, and vindicating the innocent by treating them in accordance with their innocence (*1Kings 8:31-32*).

Life in the ancient Near East, as in Africa, was dominated by the need to deal with the frightening risks of curses and omens. However, as Evans (2000:398) advocated, “Attention should rather be directed to the single and significant blessing of being in relationship with God and the single curse of being outside God’s sphere, no longer in relationship with him.” The only certain way to transform a curse into a blessing was to renew one's covenant relationship with God.

2.6. 1. Types of Curses in the Judeo-Christian Worldview.

The Judeo-Christian tradition identified various curses as read in Deuteronomy 27 and 28. Those curses were often uttered concerning persons or objects, in contrast to blessings (Dupre, 1966: 546). These curses could be inherited or caused by personal sins. From the curse/sin of Adam and Eve, of Ham, Ahab and Jezebel, there were dreadful consequences, including the fear of rejection, dread, bitterness, restlessness, rebellion, sorrow, suffering, barrenness, degradation, and death. They all culminated in a major curse referred to as the generational or even original sin. This generational curse in the Judeo-Christian view is discussed below.

2.6.2. Generational/Inherited Curses: Christian Worldview

Asante and Mazama (2009) asserted that the belief that humans had curses placed on them was rampant among Africans. Although scholars such as Martin, Rische, and Van Golden (2008),

rejected the concept of generational curses, arguing that it did not have a biblical foundation, the notion was widespread among African Christians. Those against the notion of generational curses contended that the supposed verses in Jeremiah 32:18–19, referring to these curses, did not extend to Christians, since Christ made the ultimate sacrifice with his death. However, in his work, *Breaking Generational Curses and Bringing Down Strongholds*, Rallo (2000: xi) recognised human or family inherited bondages and described them as "dangerous snares, traps, and pitfalls that threaten millions of people around the world."

Numerous examples can be found in the Old Testament narratives to support this. When Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father, Noah, naked, he was cursed, but the curse was passed on to Noah's grandson (rather than his son, *Gen 9:18*). In addition, the Lord cautioned the Israelites of the consequences of disobedience (*Lev 26:38–39*):

You will perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies will swallow you up. Those of you who survive will pine away in their guilt in the countries of their enemies and, bearing the guilt of their ancestors too, will pine away like them (NJB)³.

According to the wilderness myth, Achan's sin of covetousness brought calamity upon Israel's entire country (*Jos 7:21*).

Duncan-Williams: '*Dealing with the Traces of Generational Curses*' (in Degbe, 2014), cites Exodus 20.4-5 to demonstrate his understanding of generational curses:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, of any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord they God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the father upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me (KJV).

He contended that being born again did not guarantee a Christian's freedom from illness, calamity, and limits in life. Moreover, before such generational curses were addressed, Christians would face physical and spiritual challenges and failures as they strive for material prosperity and freedom. He believed that existence is a historical continuity rather than an occurrence. As a result, he emphasised the section of the above text that reads, 'visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.' As a result, Duncan-Williams became convinced that curses, which typically appeared as illnesses,

³ New Jerusalem Bible.

premature death, hunger, and infertility, were generational rather than instantaneous and accidental.

Duncan-Williams' interpretation of the text revealed two things. He used these theories in his exegesis and interpretation of the text. His theories about time and history, as well as how they applied to ontological experiences, were presented here. Duncan-Williams showed a grasp of time in which the 'present,' or the 'now,' and its associated interactions and events belonged together (Mbiti, 1990). In essence, the 'now' is a vast experience that had ramifications for the future while being firmly embedded in the infinite past. Duncan-Williams' concept of curses as 'generational' implied an adequate overlap of the past, present, and future – a belief in time's inseparability (Mbiti, 1910).

Given the above, Mbiti seemed to be preaching a doctrine of how today's curses would manifest themselves in the future, unless something was done to interrupt or modify the nature of the consequences. In this doctrine, the relationship between time and history and ontological experience could be defined as a byproduct of time and history. The person's or community's experience of the 'now,' in this time and history, was affected and pre-determined by the time and life of the individual or community that came before him or her. He further demonstrated this by citing the following Old Testament passage (*Prov. 26:2 KJV*) on hereditary curses: 'As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying; so, the curse causeless shall not come' (Degbe, 2014).

It implied that curses were to blame for illnesses, hardship, natural disasters, and life's difficulties. These curses were both hereditary and spiritual. To demonstrate how these ancestral deeds brought generational curses on Israel, Degbe cited Adam's sin, Abraham's lies in Egypt, and Judah's sexual intercourse with his daughter-in-law. He argued that curses were destructive, supernatural forces released from the spirit world through words, deeds, and behaviours, and that one can inherit them from one's ancestors through one's father or mother or the culture into which one was born (Fisher, 1998). As a result, according to Duncan-Williams, being 'born again' did not free a person from the dangers of curses, unless he or she made a deliberate effort to address them by applying Christ's blood to one's family bloodline (Degbe, 2014).

What Duncan-Williams' thoughts on the subject did clarify, might be the continuous influence of one's ancestors on one's life, for good or ill, and the need for rituals for celestial and spiritual peace. However, it was clear that he was implying that any 'born again' Christian was obligated

to make amends with his or her history. His 'Pentecostal born again' thinking may have suppressed the ancestral notion and the need for ritual in his discourse. However, his references to Abraham, Jacob, Judah, and David, among others, revealed his primitive and ancestral consciousness and the religious structure required to keep their effects on subsequent generations in check. Spiritual causation, words as spirit, and parents as godly figures, are only a few of the primal religious ideas implicit in Duncan-Williams' writing.

The New Testament is less clear on generational curses. In John 9, the disciples asked Jesus if the blind man they had met was blind because of his or his parent's sins. Jesus responded, that it was not because of his parents or his sins, but rather to show God's glory. This implied that by healing the blindness from birth, God manifests his power to the whole world. God is the only and true God. This Scripture, according to Asamoah-Gyadu (2013), refuted the notion of hereditary curses in the new dispensation, as it does in Ezekiel 18:1- 4. A closer look at the meaning of this verse, however, revealed no proof that Jesus did indeed overrule the concept of generation curses. He was only referring to a specific situation in which the parents' sins had not caused the blindness

The concept of generational curses was critical to this investigation. Anecdotal evidence and informal conversations with the parishioners of St Peter's Catholic Church revealed that the African congregants held strong views on the potency of a curse, and associated their social existence with the consequences of this phenomenon. Reviews from related literature indicated that there was no comparative analysis on this subject matter from the Judeo-Christian/ATR's perspectives on the lives of these Christians. Hence, this study intended to fill this gap. More so, there appeared to be a dearth on curses in recent literature, as many of the citations and references were dated (above ten years). This is another limitation that the study hopes to address.

Kakwata (2017:173) summed up the debate thus, "The theme of generational curses [and cursing as a whole] has become important and requires continual research among scholars in theology. This should involve studying this phenomenon in its full complexity." From this quote, it was evident that investigating the sociological impact of curses in the lives of the Christians in Durban had become a practical necessity; to discover how a fear of the unknown impacted on the social existence of these people, considering their traditional inclinations. This study intended to enrich the literature on curses and their sociological impact on the lives of African Christians who belonged to the Catholic faith.

No study has addressed this phenomenon of a curse among this category of Catholics to date, thus necessitating this investigation.

Throughout the world, according to Kitz, every society had a fear of curses (Kitz, 2007). The fear of witchcraft governed and characterised the practices of people's daily lives in traditional African societies. The need to know what caused any human misfortune and what could be done about it, prolonged rather than resolved human conflicts. However, when the questions of how to obtain blessings and combat curses were examined from a theological perspective, a new comprehension of life's issues emerged. God, who wants a covenant relationship with his people, becomes a provider of blessing and a protector. In contrast to the conventional horizontal relationship marked by enmity, a Christian's covenant relationship with God gives blessings and curses a new vertical dimension. This section concludes with the words of Evans (2000:4001):

NT teaching echoes the OT view of blessing and cursing as relational. The ultimate and only important blessing is that of belonging to God, being part of his family. The only real curse is being out of relationship with God, outside of the community of blessing. In temporal contexts both blessings and curses can be described in material terms, but their material dimension is secondary. Although bad things can and do happen to those who belong to the kingdom, those who are part of God's people cannot be under the curse; rather they are blessed.

With the above motivations from these reviews, everyone is called upon to assist others in avoiding curses, by minimising the causes of curses, learning from curses, and always bearing in mind that all curses, including, for example, the dreaded African mother's curse, are reversible, if one is properly disposed towards conversion, repentance, reparation, and restoration into the group.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter dealt with scholarly works written on the concept of curses in both ATRs and Judeo-Christian traditions. With their insight, the understanding of curses in ATRs and the Judeo-Christian worldview were examined. It also considered the types of curses within both traditions. Although comprehended differently, the curse almost had a similar objective: to destroy and impede the victim. In the ATRs, the accent was placed on the community. Any breach of rules or misbehaviour toward the community can attract curses, which must be dealt with timeously. In Christianity, a curse signifies the breaking of the relationship with the Divine and the non-acceptance of His will.

The observation is that the curse phenomenon remains a contentious issue among scholars, and a source of anxiety and phobias to various religious adherents. It is essential to know whether a correlation exists between the African's perspective on curses and his/her Christian faith; one may ask whether faith in the Christian religion has diluted the African worldview on curses, or reinforced it. It also begs the question, how do these Christians, whose ancestors were adherents of ATRs, dealt with the problem of curses, and whether their faith in Christianity perhaps assisted in mitigating the impact of curses on their lives. None of the literature reviewed in this study has dealt with the said issues, and even when there was an attempt to address these, it was done partially, necessitating a study of this nature in the future.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.0. Introduction

A theoretical framework assists in assessing existing theories that present suitable argumentations for a research paper. This study favoured the phenomenological framework, as phenomenology in religion assists in reducing the risk of religious reductionism. The phenomenology of religion is closely derived from philosophical phenomenology. (Cox (2010:26) defined this as “...a method of adapting the procedures of *epoch* and eidetic intuition to the study of varied symbolic expressions of that which people appropriately respond to as being of unrestricted value for them”. The responsibility of the phenomenologist of religion is to remain methodologically neutral, adopting an agnostic impartial position when practitioners make such claims. Thus, this chapter examines the phenomenological approach in studying curses, their constitution, the understanding thereof, their impact on the lives of the parishioners of St Peters’ parish, and how this phenomenon is managed.

3.1. Phenomenological Approach and the Study of African Traditional Religions

Religion is a personal and subjective experience. It resonates with the followers' most profound emotions, sentiments, and spiritual needs. Curses as a religious phenomenon often can be comprehended differently from one religion to another. Religion falls into the category of metaphysical reality, which implies that, while its statements cannot be proven objectively, its influence on the believers' social and spiritual lives is genuine. The approach is determined by the goals and objectives that need to be met.

For decades, the methodological approach in religion studies has perplexed many religious scholars. This prompted the development of various sociological, psychological, philosophical, historical and phenomenological frameworks to resolve the dilemma. Various theories of religious studies have been used to analyse and evaluate the meaning, impact, and categories of curses in African Traditional Religions. These include the personal construct theory (George Kelly, 1950), the functionalism theory (William James (842 -1910), the inculturation biblical hermeneutics by Ukpong, and Adamo’s African cultural hermeneutics. While these theories address aspects on the question of curses, they tend to undermine the value of African Traditional Religions (Lugira, 2001; Stolz, 2020). For this investigation, the researcher

employed phenomenology as the lens to view the analysis of the study. Much scholarly attention has been given to religious phenomenology (Segal, 2006), and although there is controversy as to its general character, its core tenets can be separated. These include the bracketing principle, where the researcher must refrain from judging religion, foster empathy, name and explain religious phenomena correctly, and avoid all types of reductionism (Gschwandtner, 2019).

The reductive explanation for religion or making predictions, is not the focus of phenomenology, however, its descriptions may assist with reductions and forecasts. Many of the nineteenth-century phenomenologists were the forerunners of empirical science, as Segal (2006: 97) avers:

Phenomenology is a method of pure description concerned not with *material* causation but with the logic of parts and wholes, logical dependence, and independence. Its interest is in establishing necessary and sufficient conditions *relative to the religious theoretical frame*. It looks for the essential structures that lie behind religious phenomena not because it wants to explain them in terms of simpler causes or in terms of a scientific theory but because it wants to understand how the worldview of the believer logically coheres.

The phenomenological study of religion entails scholarly involvement in the religion researched, to comprehend the meaning, essence and manifestations of the religious phenomena in question. This is achieved by categorising the phenomena, suspending previously held value judgments on that religion, and adopting a neutral stance to comprehend that which is under investigation.

Within the academic study of religion in Western Europe and North America, the phenomenology of religion has received growing criticism. According to Wiebe (1999: 4), the phenomenological approach to the study of religion is theology disguised. Fitzgerald boldly asserted that “[p]henomenology of religion is conceptually and institutionally dominated by ecumenical theology” (2000: 20). Likewise, Whaling (1995: 20) agreed that the phenomenology of religion’s essential concepts was under attack. The limits and potential of religious phenomenology have been scrutinised extensively (Dupre, 1992). While some advocates of the phenomenology of religion emphasised the method’s beneficial contributions to religious studies (Sharma 2001: 275-279), it lost favour in religious studies in North America and Western Europe.

However, in the scholarly study of African Traditional Religions, the phenomenology of religion remained popular. Many African researchers advocated for and the use of phenomenological notions in their studies of Africa's traditional religions. Ikenga-Metuh (1984: 151) reasoned that the phenomenological method "may, after all, prove to be the solution to the problem of the methodology of African Religions." In an African context, Aguwa (1995: 7) maintained that the phenomenological method was most suitable, since it "calls for a new approach to the concretely experienced phenomenon." The rise in popularity of religious phenomenology in studying African traditional religions and its decline in Western religious studies posed a severe methodological problem. It begs the question regarding the significance of the phenomenological method in studying indigenous African religions. When Western colonial administrators, military personnel, missionaries, traders, slavers, explorers, and others wrote reports on the customs and traditions of African cultures, they did so often in a biased manner (Platvoet 1996). Foreign writers, according to Mbiti, transmitted information on African traditional religions to their home nations. Regrettably, a lack of education, racial prejudice, arrogance and other circumstances conspired to distort the truth (Mbiti 1996: 170). Even though these early narratives were often sensational and promoted the 'Dark Continent' attitude, discarding them would be erroneous, as some of these reports contained a wealth of helpful information about African traditional religions. Unlike pleasure-seekers and explorers, missionaries tended to live among Africans for lengthy periods, allowing them to gain valuable insight into African religious beliefs and customs.

It should be mentioned that unflattering representations of Africa's indigenous religions by certain foreign writers, motivated African scholars to become involved in research in this field of enquiry.

Most Western scholars were not always objectively interested in African traditional religions. Ulterior motives and goals such as evangelising, finding natural resources, and expanding their authority inspired them as missionaries, anthropologists and colonialists (p'Bitek, 1971). By the early 1960s, African researchers had begun to publish regularly on African traditional religions. They were essentially interested in 'recovering the lost African identity,' and reacted vehemently to all derogatory and laden terms applied to African Traditional Religions, *inter alia*, 'religion of non-literate people,' 'animism,' 'tribal religion,' 'primitive religion,' 'fetishism,' 'Kaffir(ism),' and other labels were used (Lugira 2001: 53).

The phenomenological approach was deemed appropriate for the study because it encouraged practitioners to use accurate and non-evaluative labels when describing religious events (Cox, 1996a: 33). To avoid terminology that disparaged African traditional religions, African researchers used phenomenological concepts such as self-actualisation, authenticity, meaning and spirituality. They also aspired to avoid theological reductionism, which occurs when African traditional religions are evaluated through the lens of Christianity. A phenomenological approach to the study of African traditional religions, according to its proponents, will liberate indigenous religions from theological reductionism (Chitando, 2005). In an African context, phenomenology emphasises the integrity of unique religions, as its cultivation of empathy, and respect for the believer's point of view is appealing.

African postcolonial researchers believe that the phenomenological method allows ATRs to be recognised as authentic religions worthy of reasonable human devotion. The inclusion of ATRs in most current publications on global religions exemplifies this tendency, despite ongoing controversy regarding the subject's peripheral treatment.

In addition to the challenge presented by African Christian theologians, the phenomenology of religion is seen as defusing social scientific methodologies in the study of ATRs. ATRs are considered to be protected against sociological and psychological reductionism by phenomenological stress on the *sui generis* [unique and irreducible] nature of religious occurrences. Westerlund (1993:44) noted, "Attempts by anthropologists and others to explain African religions in terms of Western, secular theories have thus been criticized by phenomenologists." They attempted to solve the methodological issues by considering the basic phenomenological approach (McKenzie, 1989; Stolz, 2020; Hackett 1993: 67).

3.2. Basic principles of the phenomenological approach and the application to the study

The principles of phenomenology enabled scholars to research the world's religions in their heterogeneity, without ignoring the questions of truth. The principle was to describe a religious phenomenon without prejudices (Bornemark & Ruin, 2010). Empathetic interpolation was also recommended as a strategy that equipped the researcher to enter the believer's life experiences and approach truth (Cox, 1996a:3).

Pobee (1979:21) recommended the phenomenological approach as "the method for collecting the basic data of African religion." Corroborating this view, Cox (1996b:162) argued that, it assisted in acquiring the ability to perceive truth as a crucial phenomenological technique

from the participant's perspective. "I seek understanding from the point of view of believers, according to him, so that I can eventually decide on the basic characteristics of the religion under study in terms that the adherents can confirm." Thus, this theory was a suitable framework for investigating the problem of curses among the parishioners of St Peter's Catholic Church.

To avoid terminology that denigrates conventional African religions, advocates of a phenomenological approach to studying African traditional religions, claimed that it would free indigenous religions from philosophical reductionism (Chitando, 2005; Gschwandtner, 2019). Such a multidisciplinary approach would suit the research on curses as one of the global social phenomena, but specifically in African religious beliefs, including witchcraft, sorcery, the occult, voodoo, black magic, the evil eye divination, incantations and ancestors.

Van der Leeuw (1963) proposed six essential stages in applying the phenomenological approach to African traditional religions adopted in this study. First, he contended that researchers in religious studies must categorise religious phenomena into separate categories such as myths, festivals, sacred words, sacred time, holy space, curses, sacrament, and sacrifice. In this way, the scholar would then comprehend the significance of these events in terms of religious experience. Second, scholars should include the phenomenon into their own lives. This implied that students should gain a personal understanding of the religion. By doing so, Van der Leeuw (1963) asserted that a religion researcher should be an academic who engaged in the religion he was studying. Thus, he explained, the life studied by a religious studies scholar should find a place in the student's life, who then could comprehend it from his inner self. The researcher acknowledged the above scholarly views and accordingly, studied each study participant's culture, so as to appreciate the various cultural perspectives on the impact of curses on human life.

Third, drawing on Husserl's fundamental principles of phenomenology, Van der Leeuw explained that these principles were essential for any scholar in the phenomenology of religion, who sought to produce admissible data. These principles are *epoche*, the suspension of value judgments, adopting a neutral stance, and eidetic vision. For this study, therefore, the researcher eschewed any bias against any cultural practice of the participants pertaining to their belief systems on curses. Furthermore, the researcher was empathetic towards the participants throughout this study. Fourth, researchers must clarify any structural linkages and make sense of the data acquired (Marton & Pang, 2008). This gave the researcher a more holistic

knowledge of how religion's diverse parts interacted and functioned. Van der Leeuw (1963) stated that in the fifth stage, this approach naturally led to storage, where all these activities were carried out simultaneously and collectively resulted in a genuine understanding: the recalcitrant and chaotic 'reality' therefore became a revelation or a discovery.

The phenomenologist should not work in isolation; his findings should be consistent with other disciplines such as philosophy, history, archaeology, and others. According to Van der Leeuw, this strategy would aid the phenomenologist in maintaining intellectual objectivity. This principle was extrapolated to this study by relating the study's findings with other existing studies conducted in the field. For phenomenology to avoid dissolving into imagination, it must be nurtured with facts. The phenomenological scholar would be much closer to understanding the essence or meaning of any religious phenomenon researched, if these six phases were rigorously followed. He would also be in a better position to transmit his knowledge to others.

3.3. Application of Phenomenology to the Problem of Curses

Using phenomenology of religion as a technique for researching religion aided in achieving the study's goals and objectives. This technique of researching religion provided the researcher with the necessary skill to suspend all preconceived notions about curses, ATRs and Christianity, thus instilling appropriate attitudes in the investigator toward studying faiths other than his own (Cox, 1992). Religious phenomenology emphasises the need to study religion as precisely as possible, through studying religious events that must be allowed to speak for themselves. It starts with a basic but accurate description of such facts, then progresses to infer meaning from patterns of the adherents' beliefs, religious experiences, and expressions, by relying on first-hand knowledge and being directed by the believers (Stolz, 2020).

Avoiding prejudice towards a particular religion is one of the principles of the phenomenological methodology. This might be implied or explicit, and expressed via words or deeds. This is particularly crucial here, given the multi-cultural and multi-faith composition of this study (Marton & Pang, 2008). This research emphasised the need to promote religious awareness in all its forms.

Furthermore, the problem of curses can be grasped in ways close to the adherent's religion, by using the instruments of religious scholarship such as empathy and avoiding making value judgments. In religious inquiries, this promotes and underscores objectivity. Although religious experience can be subjective, Ter Haar (1990) and Giorgi (2008) contended that human beings

may be objective, as not all humans are enslaved by their prejudices. They are able to comprehend the thoughts of others, due to their intrinsic ability to imagine. Ter Haar (1990:22) stated:

This capacity of self-transcending awareness is the basis for all objective scholarship. It is not the main function of the scholar to express his own beliefs and feelings. His task is chiefly to expound and interpret the beliefs and commitments of other people...

The phenomenology adopted in this study began with a subjective and descriptive perspective; however, it eventually strived for an objective explanation and interpretation of curses. Participants in this study described their understanding of the problem of curses in ATR and the biblical perspectives. These steps were performed to prevent prejudice and attain eidetic intuition while participants were in a state of bracketed consciousness. Using *epoche*⁴ does not make the observer less active; rather, it permits the phenomenon to yield raw material for observation.

This is significant in phenomenology, as the outcomes of observation are directly linked to the events, and not the observer, who is the source of knowledge. These notions from philosophical phenomenology, as discussed earlier, significantly impacted on the development of religious phenomenology and deserve recognition.

Smart (1973:54) favours the term “empathetic interpolation” to explain how an observer might see “a framework of intents” among religious adherents. The researcher attempted to bring together the various experiences of the religious group studied. Empathy, defined as “the cultivation of a feeling for the religious life of the community he (that is, the observer) is seeking to understand” (Cox, 2010:29), is one of the prerequisites for empathic interpolation. This necessitates the phenomenologist sharing their anxieties, thoughts, feelings, attitudes and even delight, with the adherents, to see into and through their minds. This is not to say that the observer should convert to a devotee. Through sympathetic interpolation, the observer must

⁴ Epoche is a Greek term that implies ‘to stop’ or ‘to hold back’ all the observer's ideas concerning the phenomenon being observed. Not only does it include the suspension of preconceived notions, but it also entails confronting one's own previously held beliefs and prejudices, including one's theory of knowing. As a result, the observer enters the area ‘empty-headed,’ allowing the occurrences to fill his mind. Thus, the observer “...perceives the world as it comes fresh from the phenomena and is able thereby to intuit new realities or ...achieve a more complete understanding of reality than has been previously attained” (Cox, 2010:19). This entails suspending all preconceived notions in order to allow the phenomenon to speak for itself, resulting in eidetic intuition.

understand what the believers intend by their religious behaviours, narratives and symbols. This is referred to as intentionality, and occurs due to sympathetic interpolation. During the field study, the researcher paid close attention to the participant's emotions, body language, facial expressions, choice of words, and feelings on the questions asked. This assisted to reassure them, knowing that they were not judged and that the researcher shared their concerns on the issues raised. This allowed the researcher to see into and through their minds.

In Giorgi's (2008) opinion, empathic interpolation may not always lead to comprehension, until and unless the observer interpolates the unknown into something meaningful to him. The observer's religious experience and culture may sometimes make it susceptible to distortion, and could make it difficult for the researcher to understand precisely what the believer is going through. However, to navigate this challenge in this study, the researcher compared the themes created through existing literature on cursing in ATR and Christianity.

As Cox points out, empathetic interpolation is not a scientific or historical procedure with measurable findings, but rather an attitude that renders the conclusions subjective. However, (Van Der Leeuw, 1963; Petterson & Akerberg, 1981; Marton & Pang, 2008) circumvents this dilemma by claiming that interpolation is necessary even in science; they therefore make hermeneutics, or the art of interpretation, inescapable. The phenomenologist should consider the proper description and comprehension of what believers think to be true. This is because, to sustain *epoche*, one must concur with the believer's convictions, while still being asked to defer judgment regarding the believer's assertions.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter discoursed on the theoretical framework upon which this study was predicated. The phenomenological approach was the theoretical framework best suited for this study. The chapter began by analysing how the phenomenological approach was applied to the study of African traditional religions. The basic principles of the phenomenological approach and its application to the study was explained. Lastly, the chapter discussed the application of the phenomenological approach to the problem of curses as it related to the study. It concluded that while phenomenology of religion has lost favour in the academic study of religion in the West, it remained popular in studying African traditional religions. The next chapter presents and analyses data from the fieldwork.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.0. Introduction

This chapter discussed the research methodology used in the study. It assisted the researcher in determining an understanding of curses among the parishioners at St. Peter's Catholic Church. The focus was on aspects of the research that would assist in identifying what constituted curses, the biblical references the participants used to justify their claim, and how they managed them. This required specific data sets and the sample frame as recommended by Moser & Korstjens, (2018). Philosophical viewpoints and assumptions underpin methodology, which informs the researcher on the gathering of data, its collation, and the analysis. The phenomenological framework which focused on the participants' subjective experiences and logic was employed in this study. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was prioritised for qualitative data. This assisted in describing and explaining systematically what constituted curses amongst people and the responses on the sociological impact of curses on the parishioners of St Peter's Catholic Church. To efficiently collect data for this investigation, In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were used (Struwig & Stead, 2001). This formed the corpus of the data collection procedure, the sampling design, and the data collection methods, which were discussed in this chapter.

The qualitative methodology allowed the participants to express their experiences of the problem of curses freely. During the conversations, they were asked follow-up questions for clarifications on grey areas. In the process, inferences were made on the meaning of the information shared by the participants. There was always the possibility of participants wanting to impress the researcher, who also happened to be a priest at St Peter's. The participants were ensured that their responses were not an 'assessment' of the depth of their Catholic faith, but an academic enquiry with no moral consequence. Thus, a congenial atmosphere was created for the discussion.

This allowed the researcher and participants in this study to interact with the events without being impacted by preconceptions and bias. This is because "human beings change and constitute a special type of phenomena ... Any eidetic intuition ... must be tested and revised in the light of the phenomena" (Cox, 2010:21). The results of the observations were not considered as

final. After the interview sessions, the recordings were carefully transcribed before codes were generated and themes were then developed from the codes.

4.1. Research Methodology

The structure, strategy and thorough overall planning researchers utilise while examining a research problem for the study in question, are referred to as the research design (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Kumar and Kamalanabhan (2014) observe that this could include details on the subjects to be chosen, how data will be collected and processed, and the methodologies and procedures used during the research process. A phenomenological research design may be most suited for studying people's lived experiences on life issues within their communities, as it assists the researcher to remove the distance from the known and what is described and reported. The knowledge gleaned through the phenomenology theory assisted the researcher to enter into the various worldviews of the Black communities of St Peter's parish, which included their Judeo-Christian and their African traditional religious background on the notion of curses.

Using Wilmot's (2011) approach to qualitative research, the phenomenology theory enabled a detailed description, comprehension and explanation of the complex phenomenon of curses in the lived experiences of the parishioners of St Peter's Catholic Church. This study intends to add some contributions to the understanding and management of the phenomenon of curses, as social sciences should bring new meaning to human existence. (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007).

4.2. Sampling techniques

The purposive sampling method was employed in this study. (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). Purposive sampling was used because the Chairlady of the Parish Council was best positioned to assist in the selection of the participants. The target was to select fifteen participants amenable to participating and sharing their experiences on curses. An announcement was made during Mass for anyone willing to share his or her experiences of curses. Anyone who had experienced or had undergone counselling on curses was invited to approach the Chairlady of the parish. At the same time, the announcement was also allowing the Chairlady to approach specific individuals who could represent the different ethnic groups of the Africans of St. Peter's. It was also noted that guiding questions would be provided for the interviews.

The interview candidates were approached individually while others also willingly approached the Chairlady. They could express their readiness or not to participate during these interviews.

This was done based on their perceived knowledge and interest in the research area. Prior to their selection, the participants were briefed on the nature and purpose of the study. In the process, the researcher determined their knowledge and interest in the research area, and their informed consent was secured for the study. Also, considering the multi-ethnic, multi-national, and multi-cultural nature of the parish, care was taken to ensure that the participants were not all selected from one ethnic group only, so that the men, women, and the youth would be equitably represented and heard in the study. Hence, the population was distributed proportionally to reflect the plural nature of the population (Refer to the next section for participant demographics).

4.3. Population of the study and sample size

According to Dworkin (2012), a qualitative study should have between five and fifty participants. Hence, the researcher could determine the number for the dataset based on the number of parishioners to contact. Due to time constraints, the technicality of the area of inquiry, and the confidentiality required to conduct such a sensitive investigation, the sample population of the African parishioners of St Peter's was capped at fifteen participants.

A sample is a small portion of a larger group or population from which data, facts, or ideas about the whole are derived (Olofinbiyi & Steyn, 2018). In this research, the distribution of the participants were as follows: Two local Zulus and two local Xhosas; two Igbos from Nigeria (the Igbo is the only Nigerian tribe represented at the St Peter's parish); one Tutsi and one Hutu, since they are both from Rwanda and share very similar religious beliefs; one Luba, one Mongo, one Bakongo from DRC; two Swahilis from Kenya; and two Zimbabweans (one each from the largest ethnic groups of the country, that is, Shona and Ndebele). A total of fifteen participants were carefully selected among these black communities.

The population was further categorised based on their sex and age distributions: six men from ages thirty-five to seventy, six women from ages thirty-five to sixty-five, and three young people (two males and one female) from the age category twenty-one to thirty, participated in the study. Their selection was based on the hypothesis that from experience, they could best contribute to the notion of curses.

Hence, through the purposive sampling method, "the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by knowledge or experience" (Tongco, 2007:147). This sampling method allows investigations to

produce an inductive result regarding the generalisations of the African community of St Peter's Catholic parish on the curse. Therefore, keen attention was paid to the participant's responses, which allowed the researcher to identify new areas of inquiry directly connected to the phenomenon of curses and misfortunes under investigation. Scholars on Research Methodology (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe & Young, 2018, Sandelowski, 1996) would concur with the sample size chosen for this research, as it allowed for a fresh and fully nuanced understanding of the perceptions of curses among the parishioners of St. Peter's Catholic Church.

4.4. Method of Data Collection

The purpose of data collection in qualitative research is to provide evidence for the research topic. Pursuing this objective, the researcher obtained proof gleaned from the personal accounts of the parishioners of St Peter's. Primary data was obtained from the one-on-one and focus group interviews in contexts where groups were possible, due to the Covid-19 protocols. According to Rallis and Rossman (2012), interviewing was the hallmark of qualitative research. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), an interview was a means of generating dialogues with people on a given topic.

4.5. Individual One-on-one Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were recommended because they allow participants to speak freely without being influenced by other participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The In-depth Interviews (IDIs), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) (Struwig & Stead, 2001) were conducted with the selected parishioners. Using IDIs, the researcher engaged with the respondents in a one-on-one setting to stimulate their responses or experiences with curses. Concerning the KIIs, the researcher held in-depths interviews with the fifteen people carefully selected by the Parish Council Chairlady, according to their willingness and ability to express their direct or indirect experience of curses.

The interviews were conducted in the parish hall, bearing in mind the necessary Covid-19 protocols as stipulated by the World Health Organization (WHO). The participants were allowed to schedule their sessions based on their availability (after work or during weekends) and were assured that their responses would not be used to assess their character or person, but to unravel the phobia of curses among African Catholics. This created a relaxed atmosphere for the discussion to proceed.

As a result, in this study, it was desirable to interview participants separately from other parish members, to ensure that they provided information based on their own unique experiences. All interviews were conducted in the parish hall of St Peters for a duration of forty minutes to one hour for each participant, as adequate time and space were required for subjective and profound experiences to be gathered. The time allocated for each interview allowed the investigator to ask follow-up questions as and when required.

The face-to-face interviews were semi-structured, which means that the questions posed were prepared ahead of time with the option of further restructuring and probing during the interview. Semi-structured interviews, according to Roulston and Choi (2018), are an essential tool in the interview process because they can provide depth to issues that the investigator may not have recognised before the interview, allowing the researcher to probe deeper and discern various aspects of the curse investigated in this research.

The key informant interview is akin to a conversation among acquaintances, allowing for a free flow of ideas and information. This assisted the researcher to arrive at an optimal level of precision in terms of the gathered, detailed information on the parishioner's understanding and perceptions of curses.

4.6. Method of Data Analysis

Central to credible qualitative research is the data analysis. The researcher favoured the data analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) to systematically describe the sociological impact of curses among the parishioners of St Peter's. Thematic analysis is a process for examining qualitative data that requires searching through a data set to detect, discover, scrutinise, and determine recurrent patterns to address the topic (Braun and Clarke, 2006, Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Braun and Clarke distinguished six thematic analysis steps: Familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report or manuscript.

In the first phase, the researcher immersed himself in the data to become more familiar with the information that had been collected (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Making notes and jotting down early impressions was helpful at this point. To do this, the researcher engaged with the data analytically, critically, and inquisitively. Hence, immediately after each interview session, a data transcription was done. The researcher listened to the recordings, paying careful attention to minor details before transcribing them (Asif & Rodrigues 2015: 281). While

listening to and analysing the recordings, the researcher deduced specific questions, such as why participants held certain beliefs or how their lives had been structured in a certain way (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Having transcribed the data, this procedure was followed by accurate coding.

These essential data points were subsequently examined singly and with other clusters as advised by Braun and Clark, (2006) and Joffe, (2012). Through coding, much data were reduced into small chunks of meaning. The research questions in this investigation were realistic, as the study was interested in the African parishioners' views and experiences of the phenomenon of curses in their Christian and traditional belief systems. The investigator attempted to provide answers for the research question: Do curses have an impact on the lives of the Africans of St Peter's Catholic Church. To deepen the sub-questions on what constituted the curse and how it was managed, a theoretical thematic analysis⁵ was used to analyse the data.

For this reason, segments of data related to the study topic or areas that captured intriguing information on the subject of this investigation were coded. Not every line of text was coded. Open coding was used instead of pre-programmed codes. The objective was that, codes would be created and updated as the coding process in the analysis chapter proceeded.

After the coding, themes were formulated. A theme is a trend that highlights something noteworthy or intriguing about the data and research question. There are no rigid and specific guidelines on what constitutes a theme, as Braun and Clarke (2006) illustrate. A theme is determined by its importance. In this situation, the researcher scrutinised the codes and found that some matched the same pattern. For example, similar patterns related to how the participants perceived the problem of curses, both as Christians and from their cultural backgrounds. These were grouped under the headings 'the fear of the curse,' and 'the impact of curses'

According to Braun and Clark (2006), reviewing themes is a crucial step in research. Data from each theme need to be common and understandable. This will enable the data of each theme to

⁵ Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguished between theoretical thematic analysis, or a top-down approach, which is guided by research question(s), and/or the analyst's emphasis, and a bottom-up or inductive analysis, which is guided more by the data itself. The research question guided the analysis in this study, which was more top-down than bottom-up.

be distinct enough and to deserve separation. For this, the researcher interrogated themes within the collected data. Hennink et al., (2020) noted that this level examined whether the respective themes made sense within the data set and if the thematic map adequately and accurately captured the questions or construct of interest.

4.7. Secondary Data

Furthermore, the investigation also relied on secondary data sources. Secondary data sources include works by other scholars, which are frequently retrieved from archives and contain survey findings, records, and codebooks (Ikeagwu, 1998; Asika, 2006). According to Asif and Rodrigues (2015), the importance of secondary data sources rests in the fact that they are inexpensive to access. Moreover, because the data they provide is collected regularly, it aids in establishing trends throughout time. More crucially, gathering data from secondary sources does not necessitate the agreement and participation of the sample population from which the data is needed. Archival materials ranging from academic journals, newspapers, magazines, textbooks, conference papers, survey results, and reliable and verifiable internet materials were used in this research. The study also conducted a comprehensive review of existing literature from credible sources. These materials provided additional insight into and validated the core data gathered during the study.

4.8. Ethical Considerations

Research ethics describes a complex combination of values, concepts, norms, and institutional frameworks that help define and control scientific activity (Asif & Rodrigues, 2015). According to Sanjari et al., (2014), anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent are three significant ethical problems to address when conducting qualitative research. As a result, informed consent has been acknowledged as an important aspect of research ethics in various study areas. Respect for autonomy, beneficence, justice, and nonmaleficence, according to Dhari and Mason (2011), are the four criteria for addressing ethical concerns. These guidelines were followed throughout the research.

Participation in research should be entirely voluntary, with no coercion or dishonesty. The researcher had no legal authority to compel participants to participate in the study. Participants aid the researcher in achieving the desired truth of the results; thus, any force may influence the outcome of the actual reality of the participants. Similarly, regarding anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, names and other vital personal information were not revealed

and were represented with pseudonyms. For the protection and security of the participants, the researcher used pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity.

Gatekeeper letters granting permission to research this study were obtained and gatekeeper's letter was requested from St Peter's Catholic Church's Parish Pastoral Council (PPC). Before the commencement of data gathering, the interviewees were briefed on the study's goal, with assurances of utmost confidentiality and autonomy. They were duly informed that there would be no implication for whatever choices they make or information they gave. A letter explaining the research rationale and informed consent was handed to participants before commencing the research (Refer to Appendix 2). Also, there was a preliminary intervention to ensure that the participants were willing to participate in the study. All participants were assured that the information collected was purely for academic purposes. The participants' privacy and voluntary participation were further guaranteed by allowing for voluntary withdrawal during the research.

After a period of five years, all the raw data collected would be destroyed by shredding and incineration. Meanwhile, the data would be stored in a secure and locked cabinet at the researcher's residence. The researcher, supervisors, and transcribers would be the only persons with access to the information collected from the one-on-one interviews because they signed a confidentiality agreement. Masic (2014) identified integrity, objectivity, non-discrimination, respect, confidentiality, and honesty as important research principles regarding the collation and storage of data.

4.9 Ensuring Trustworthiness

This component of the research process entailed ensuring that the data supplied did not deviate too far from the participants' reality. It was the researcher's responsibility to produce credible results. The participants themselves were the best judges of whether the research findings truly reflected the participants their ideas and feelings.

4.9.1 Validity

The accuracy with which the findings reflect the data is referred to as validity. Validity settles issues of usefulness, meaningfulness, and appropriateness of the measuring instrument being used (Cohen et al., 2013; Noble and Smith, 2015). Possible issues threatening the study's validity must be avoided, that is, any form of subjectivity, manipulation of data, and using the

information for personal use. Specifically, to ensure that the research findings accurately addressed the research questions, the face validity was achieved by selecting participants from St Peter's Catholic Parish congregants. The content validity was maintained by ensuring that the interview questions addressed the research objectives (addressing the sociological impact of curses among the Parishioners of St Peters of Durban in juxtaposition with their Judeo-Christian Tradition). Furthermore, research reliability concerns consistency, stability, and replicability for the instruments and the research participants. Reliability plays a significant role in the credibility of the qualitative findings (Seale and Silverman, 1997; Anney, 2014).

Similarly, there are several approaches that a researcher can utilise to ensure the creditability of the study. The investigator employed triangulation, peer reviewing, member checks, and persistent observation for this study. The use of peer debriefing is defined as an external person not involved in the study, but having a necessary understanding of the study (Babbie, Mouton & Strydom, 2011). The peer-review assessed the transcripts, notes, and themes that emerged from the transcript to ensure that there were no misrepresentations. In ensuring credibility, the study also made use of triangulation as an approach to achieving creditability. Triangulation uses "multiple and different methods, investigators, sources, and theories to obtain corroborating evidence" (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007: 239). The study spread the sample population to include the various African nationalities that comprise the parish congregants. Each of the selected nationalities had at least two representatives to enable the researcher to compare and assess the information collected. The phenomenological theory was used to study the motivation and roles of curses in people's social existence.

During the interview, the researcher constantly enquired from the participants whether they had correctly understood what was being said. Moreover, gestures from the participant were also discussed with them in order to ensure that the interpretation was accurate. Member check is a process of taking transcripts and analysing texts back to the participants to check if what had been constructed from the data is a true reflection of what they had said (Babbie, Mouton & Strydom, 2011). A member check is commonly known as the participant's verification. To ensure credibility, the researcher returned to the sample population chosen for the study – the fifteen participants – to ensure that the researcher in his transcripts did not misrepresent their views and opinions. This was conducted at the end of the data collection phase.

Additionally, during the semi-structured interview, non-verbal gestures, such as changing the position of their hands from the folded position to their cheeks, or the forehead and others, like

frowning, or a long silence, were observed. These were written down as field notes after the end of each interview session to avoid disturbing the interview flow. The participant was also kindly requested to explain the gesture. Persistent observation refers to researchers paying close attention to multiple influencers and making different interpretations by continually engaging in tentative analysis (Babbie, Mouton & Strydom, 2011). For instance, the observation of the changed hand position helped the investigator understand that the respondent was feeling anxious. The silence, in most cases, has been understood as a connection between the question and the actual situation they have passed through or are still going through as the conversation continued. By linking the verbal and the observation notes, the interviewer could more adequately transcribe what the participants had said during the semi-structured interview.

4.10. Dependability

Dependability refers to the researcher's ability to account for the constantly changing conditions of the topic being examined, the interaction with study participants, and the overall emergent research process. This ensures that any other researcher who conducts a similar study will arrive at similar conclusions. (Shenton, 2004). The researcher took personal observatory notes for this study, which documented any differences encountered while completing the investigation. During the fieldwork, the researcher observed some reluctance among the parishioners to participate in the study, since they found the phenomenon of curses, especially at the family level, a very sensitive topic to discuss. To navigate this challenge, the researcher took time to re-assure participants of the objectives of the investigation, namely, for academic purposes. Likewise, he remained objective in his approach and relationship with the participants to avoid sentimental reporting.

4.11. Conclusion

This chapter presented the research methodology and method of data analysis. The qualitative research method was chosen for the study to help the researcher reach an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The phenomenological research design was adopted for the study to further the investigation into the lived experiences of the participants. Purposive sampling was used in this study to assist in the careful selection of the participants for the study, based on their perceived knowledge and interest in the research area. A total of fifteen participants were interviewed for the study. One-on-one interviews were used as the method of primary data collection. This investigation applied the six-phase thematic content analysis methodology proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Secondary data sources

used in the study included works by other scholars, which are frequently retrieved from archives and contain survey findings, records, and codebooks. The next chapter analysed and discussed the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.0. Introduction

The analysis methodology proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), and which has been expounded on by other scholars (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020) was used in this study. The thematic content analysis enabled the investigator to examine patterns and arrangements concerning the data obtained from the participants. Thematic analysis also led to interpretations covering a wide range of topics (Boyatzis, 1998). “A thematic analysis is an appropriate method of analysis for seeking to understand experiences, thoughts, or behaviours of a data set.” (Braun and Clarke (2006: 2). The six-phase methodology was used to undertake a fundamental data analysis of this project.

Table 5.1: The Braun and Clarke six-step process for thematic analysis

Phase 1: Familiarise yourself with the data	Phase 4: Reviewing themes
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	Phase 5: Defining and naming themes
Phase 3: Searching for themes	Phase 6: Producing the report / manuscript

The above Table 5.1 illustrates the six steps suggested by Braun and Clarke for thematic analysis of the data in this study. The researcher had to familiarise himself with the data collected from the fifteen participants to uncover the key objectives of the research. These were to identify what constitutes a curse to parishioners, how they understand it within their Judeo-Christian and ATR worldviews, identifying the impact of curses in their daily lives and assessing how they manage the curses. The 240 responses from the participants were analysed through the thematic analysis, which appeared to be the most appropriate method for a study aiming to learn through interpretations, and added a methodical aspect to the data analysis (Boyatzis 1998). In this investigation, the theme ‘the fear of a curse’ linked the entire content. Sidi et al., (2012) confirm that thematic analysis permits the researcher to access recurrent themes that link to the entire content from the moment the researcher receives data information until the data analysis is carried out (Babbie, 2015). Throughout this chapter, content analysis, textual and descriptive-historical criticism of the data collected were analysed regarding the impact of curses on the daily lives of the parishioners of St Peter’s Catholic Church. During

the post data collection, the researcher familiarised himself with data, generated codes, developed themes based on acquired data, and established a “patterned response or meaning” (Braun & Clark, p. 82) compared with the data that had already been collected via secondary sources.

Phase 1: Familiarising oneself with the data – the researcher applied this phase by exhaustively listening to the recording before making the transcription. To obtain a deeper understanding of the data, the researcher read over the transcripts numerous times to complete the first stage of qualitative analysis. Before proceeding with the analysis, the researcher familiarised himself with the complete body of data. Codes could now be generated from the research data corpus, that is, all the interviews and other data utilised in the study.

Phase 2: Generating codes – coding involved gathering relevant data chunks under a coding header to categorise the data under a common topic. In this research, familiarising oneself with the data generated initial ideas on developing codes. Manually, through hard copy transcripts, with pens and highlighters, the following coding headers were developed:

- the terrifying notion of curses
- the fear of curses within families
- the anxiety of the curse among parishioners
- the supernatural power of curses
- an incantation or a negative wish against somebody
- curse suffering in ATRs and Christianity
- curses as the cause of loss and death
- disobedience, wrongdoing, and transgression as the main reasons for being cursed
- the reversal of curses
- suffering and loss of positions and status
- barrenness and the like, as constitutive elements of curses
- awareness of the existence of curses in the lives of the parishioners
- the management of curses in ATRs and Judeo-Christianity.

These codes represent the repetitive issues during the interviews and are relevant to the research questions. The researcher could enter into the third step of the thematic analysis, which is developing themes.

Phase 3: Developing themes – according to Braun, Clarke, and Weate (2016), this is a critical phase, as the grouping of codes is used to uncover higher-level patterns. In this way, one can refer to broader meanings that encompass specific and elaborate ideas. This stage enabled the researcher to generate a layered impact within the themes already created. Theme development entails grouping codes and coded data into potential themes. The researcher reviewed and revised the potential themes to build a rich analysis of the data represented by the completed themes (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). This ensured that the information acquired was thorough, detailed, and nuanced. Some significant themes could now be identified, such as -

- the belief in the terrible and devastating power of curses (The fear of curses);
- The breaking of established rules and disobedience (Causes of curses);
- Loss, suffering, failure and death as the consequences of curses (Impact of curses);
- Various curses, ways of attracting and perceiving curses (Similarities and dissimilarities of curses in ATRs and Christianity);
- Rituals and prayers as solutions to revert the curses (Management of curses).

It was observed that these variables were primarily descriptive, in the sense that they represented patterns in the data pertinent to the research question: how do curses influence the lives of the parishioners of St. Peter's Catholic Parish.

The following step consisted of reviewing the above themes by examining the coded data associated with the theme for validity and accuracy. This enabled the researcher to create sub-themes in phase 4.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes – To be consistent with Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, the researcher followed two steps in this phase of reviewing all the above themes. First, the associated coded data was examined. For instance, all the codes related to anxiety, fear, depression, and separation related to theme, fear of curses. Codes such as breaking the rules, established order, and desacralisation of places or things could lead to the theme of disobedience as the cause of curses. Codes related to the names of curses in ATRs and the Judeo-Christian assisted the researcher to extract and place data under the similarities and dissimilarities theme. Second, all relevant data codes and extracted data were re-examined to see if the theme had sufficient supporting data, whether the included data supported the themes, and whether the themes were too large or diverse (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020). In Table

5.1 below, the investigator is re-examining and recoding the entire data set to re-assess the themes developed or updated during this phase, and revise the thematic map.

Table 5. 2: Main themes and sub-themes created in step 4

Main Themes	Sub –Themes
❖ Fear of curses among the parishioners at St Peter’s Catholic Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Curse is terrible ❖ Depression and anxiety caused by the experience of curses within the family and community ❖ Exclusion and separation from family
Disobedience and unruly behaviours are the main causes of curses in ATRs and biblical contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Disrespect of parents, trespassing rules and authority in ATRs and biblical context ❖ Similarities between ATRs and biblical context of curses ❖ Desacralisations of objects and places ❖ Disobeying the Commandments ❖ Seeing the nakedness of parents or elders ❖ Hardship and suffering as consequences of sin
Loss, failure, and death as the impact of curses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Loss of position and relations with Supreme Deity and others ❖ Pandemics and illness as the result of curses in the Christian belief ❖ The implication of curses in the life of a Christian ❖ The correlation between cultural beliefs and the Christian worldview of the participants
Similarities and dissimilarities on the perception of curses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Views on ways of attracting a curse or being cursed in African tradition. ❖ The various ways that curses are perceived in ATRs and biblical context ❖ Names of curses in the ATRs ❖ Names of curses in the Judeo-Christianity ❖ Types of curses in ATRs
Rituals and prayers as ways to manage curses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The awareness of the existence of curses in one’s life ❖ Rites of cleansing as a process of eliminating a curse ❖ Repentance, prayers, and sacraments as ways of eliminating a curse ❖

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes – Here the goal is to “... identify the ‘essence’ of what each theme is about” in this final refining of the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 92). One could consider the message of the theme. The phase also takes into account subthemes and how

they relate to the primary topic, if any, that is, the sociological impact of curses among the parishioners at St Peter's parish, and the relationship between the themes.

In this research, the 'fear of the curse' refers to the horror aspect, the suffering and pain, and atrocities caused by the curses to individuals and communities. The message of this theme is that a phobia of curses exists in both the Judeo-Christianity and the ATR traditions. Therefore, there is a link between this theme to disobedience or the breaking of established norms in life and with authorities. The essence of the message is that one must remain faithful to the Supreme Deity and the established norms, so that one can live in harmony within the community.

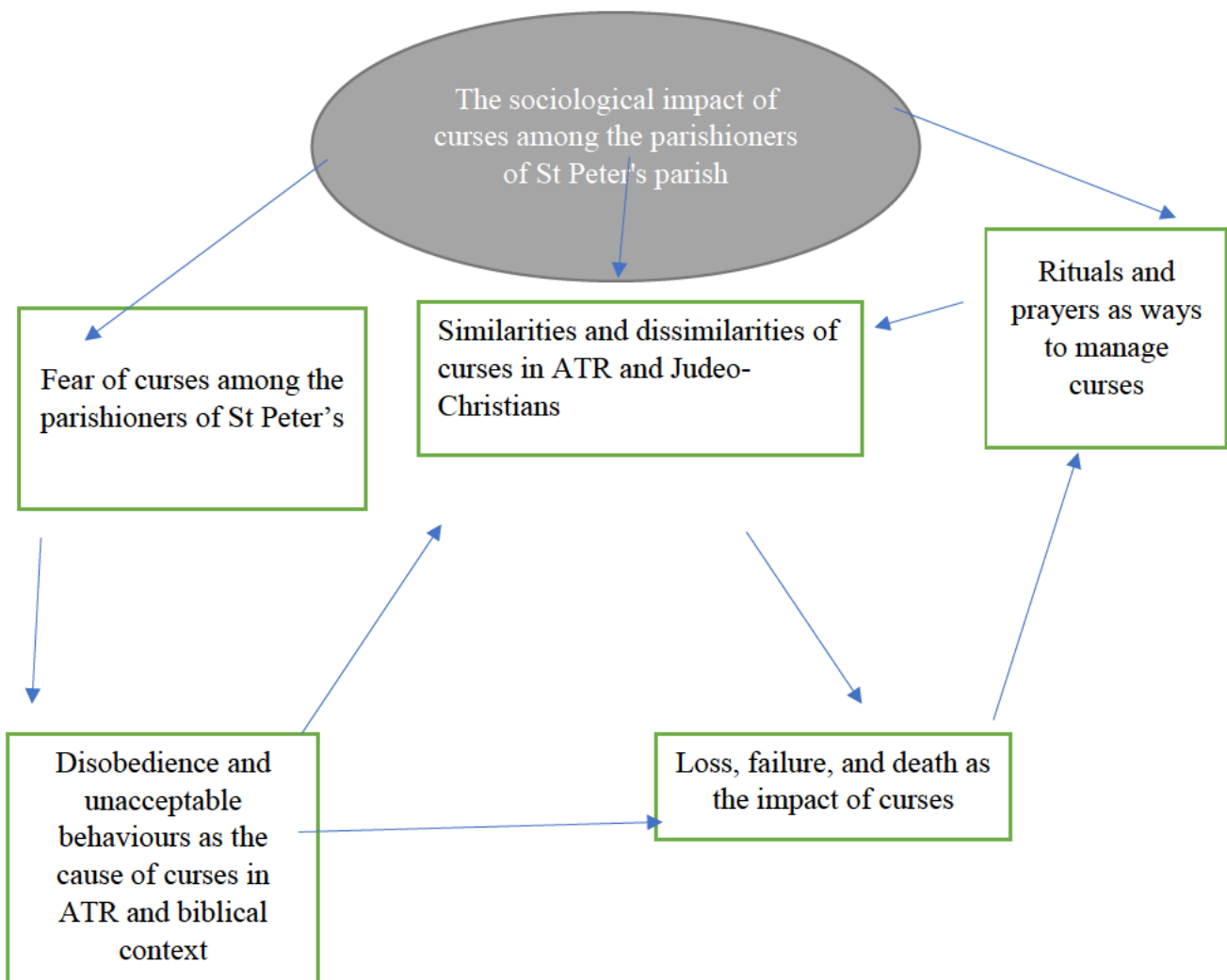
The theme of 'loss, failure, and death as the impact of curses' reveals a link between disobedience and curses, as the latter are considered as alleged visible elements and signs that a person is under a curse. These curses might take various forms and different names. 'The types of curses' theme alludes directly to the curses in ATRs and in the Judeo-Christian beliefs, the names they take, and how they are perceived.

The theme 'Rituals and prayers as ways to manage curses' relates directly to the sub-themes 'awareness of curses', 'the rites of cleansing and prayers, and repentance', and 'the sacraments as the ways of managing curses', and form the essence of this theme.

Having decided on what aspect of the data each theme represents, and that which makes them interesting and vital to this study, the researcher provided a detailed analysis by identifying the narrative of each theme. (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017).

Figure 5.1 below is thematic map illustrating the relationships between themes aimed at unravelling the curse phenomenon among the parishioners of St Peters' Catholic Parish.

Figure 5.1: Thematic map



Phase six: Producing the report – by employing vivid and captivating examples that link to the themes, the key research question and literature, the analysis was transformed into an interpretable written work. The topic was enriched by delving into the study's findings based on the themes and subthemes created from the transcript. Chapter six will elaborate on the findings from the perspective of the researcher

5.2. Analysis and Findings

The first task this investigation set out to resolve was the parishioners' understanding of curses in the context of ATRs and the Judeo-Christian belief. From the transcript, the researcher identified four main themes resulting from the participants' conception of curses. As discussed earlier, these were the fear of curses among the parishioners of St Peter; disobedience and wrongful behaviours as the leading cause of curses in ATRs and Christianity; Loss, failure,

suffering, and death as the results and impact of curses, and the parishioners' awareness of objects that attracted curses; and the different ways to manage curses in both ATRs and the biblical tradition. The section equally discussed sub-themes that were generated from the main themes, such as the curse as a horrific spell, its effects on anxiety and depression on individuals, family and society, the hardships and suffering as its immediate consequences, exclusion, or destruction of the relationship with God, repentance, prayers and sacraments and traditional rites as a way of managing the curse.

5.2.1. Theme 1: The fear of curses

The fear of curses infiltrates all cultures and all areas of life, spiritual, emotional, social, and psychological. According to Kitz (2007), curses controlled almost every feature of life, from simple business affairs to complex relations. Most participants expressed their belief in curses and their impact on human activities. When the question, 'what do people believe about curses in your family', was posed, Mayekiso Damien,⁶ (Pseudonym) said:

In my family we believe that curses are destructive, and they are destiny destroyers, which can operate in shorter or longer time. They can go from fathers to children. Children can even inherit the curses of their parents. Even the Bible says that in Leviticus 12: 29

The fear of curses was shared by all the participants. The idea of a curse appeared to be obsessive. They believed that curses can affect their lives most negatively. Judas Okechukwu (pseudonym), along with many other participants concerning the above question, declared that:

Yes, people believe in curses in my family. But there is a distinction that we make between a spell and a curse. In my family we are afraid of curses.

They believe that when one is under a curse, he/she cannot make much financial, social, or material progress. Persons under a curse may find it difficult or impossible to find suitable employment, marry, have children, or enjoy physical well-being. Extreme poverty in a family was often ascribed to the problem of curses. They also believed that the effects of a curse can last for a lengthy period of time and its impact can be disastrous if nothing was done to manage it. When the question 'what is your understanding of a curse' was posed, Kudzera Madeleine (pseudonym), described her own experience and stated:

A curse is something like a harsh word spoken in anger wishing people bad luck, death and destruction of their livestock, crops, and families. We

⁶⁶ The researcher used pseudonyms for each of the participants.

believe that curses are destructive from one generation to another. There is a problem of girls not getting married in my family. It started since our grandmother from our father's line. We are seven and not even one of us is married

Curses can be the consequences of destructive behaviours committed by a person's parents, confirming the notion of generational curses. Participants also agreed that curses needed to be broken. Otherwise, this could lead to generational curses that can continue to damage the wholeness of a family. This also helped to perceive the curse as a horrific entity which must be avoided at all cost. Kudzera Madeleine, with tears in her eyes, further asserted:

Even if I am a Christian today, in my culture, the curse is always linked with mysterious death; I remember the mysterious and sudden death of my Father and thereafter, his young brother. This was caused by curse.

Curses cause fear and impact severely on the Judeo-Christians and ATRs. Anxiety and loss, failure, degradation, and death have been considered significant findings in this research (Mbiti 2002:155). "A powerful curse is believed to bring death to the person concerned."

5.2.1a Sub-theme: long-suffering and failure as corollaries of curses

The negative impact of curses accentuates the fear of curses. During their interviews, the participants held curses responsible for hardships, long-suffering, extreme poverty, barrenness, long-lasting and inexplicable diseases and failures. Christian and traditional belief systems underscored this position. When the question of 'what constitutes the curse' was posed, Mebele Feg Zamba (pseudonym) responded as follows:

Curses are manifested with so many struggles in individuals and family life; In my family, I can say that we are trying hard. We no breakthrough; nothing, no plans come to success. I don't know what we did to deserve that.

Some people get curse because of what they did or what they say. In our village, there people who can pronounce words against the person and a woman can mystically become sick, stop bearing children; failure in studies and business begins as the result of those words. Beating the parents or elderly, disobeying, or humiliating the parents, despising the established authority could attract curses to people.

Kitz (2017:616) supports the above description: "A curse's ultimate purpose was to inspire heavenly rage by soliciting supernatural powers to intercede in situations that were believed to be beyond mortal control such as injustices, disease, injury, or just plain bad luck." Junior Ologo (pseudonym), observed that looking closely at the life of Christians, curses are constituted by the visibility of sufferings and blockages in all aspects of life. According to

them, whenever matters are not prospering, it signals that someone is under the pressure of curses. Ayabonga Malusi (pseudonym) acknowledged this when he responded that:

As parishioners, when our daily life is all about struggles in personal and family life. Most people are not progressing. It looks like there are blockages. It looks like something is blocking the light, and the blessing on us because there is a kind of curse. Curse is like kind of witchcraft that does not allow one to progress.

5.2.1. b. Sub-theme: Impact of curses on the lives of the parishioners

Despite their faith in Christ and the Gospel, most African parishioners of St Peter's still believe that curses are powerful and can impact on their lives. Their past and present continue to clash because of the reality of curses when dealing with hardships. Most participants agreed on the implications of curses in the life of a Christian. Mayekiso Damien (pseudonym), when the question of what the manifestation of curses in ATRs and Judeo-Christianity was posed, insisted that:

The manifestations [of curse] are many and they vary. Some impacts are deprivation of salvation; Can bring untimely death; can also attract incurable diseases; can bring violence; madness; stagnation in life depending on the channel of the curses. Curses can afflict parishioners in various manner.

Mayekiso Damien (pseudonym) rebuts the above submission thus:

Yes, it does. In different dimensions depending on the involvement of the curse in the life of the parishioner. In my opinion, curses do impact all, individual, families and community. Some families and some individuals are impacted from my experience as results of curses. For instance, you see no progress in life. No issues. Short life span... untimely death, sudden accidents like poor harvest can all be traced to curses.

Some important points made in the above submission have to do with the curse depriving one of salvation, a happy life, good health, a sound mind, and stability, and creating an unbalanced persona. While there is experiential evidence to support this claim in ATR, it correlates with the scriptural passage “they are doomed to die like sheep, and Death will be their shepherd. The righteous will triumph over them, as their bodies quickly decay in the world” (Ps 49:14).

Curses can cause individuals and families to struggle and even hinder them from earning their daily living. This alludes to the curse inherited from Adam in Genesis. 3. Maranatha Bienvenue (pseudonym) explains the manifestations of curses in the family in these terms:

We do observe that such person or families struggle and try extremely but they do not succeed in business, relationship: girls and boys do not get married; failures in studies, sudden death, bareness caused by words such as: "you will never hear the cry of a baby.

While some of the above may be true, the problem lies in the fallacy of the participant's hasty generalisation. Further studies need to be conducted on the discerning curse and natural phenomena in the lives of Christians. It may not be wise to waive all these beliefs as superstitions; therefore, there is a need to investigate how to distinguish the two situations further. Curses in general is alleged to have a negative impact and influence on Christians although, when the question, 'do curses affect Christian life' was posed, Katrina Harelimana (pseudonym), nuanced her statement, saying:

A curse is not supposed to have a manifestation or impacts on Christians if they are faithful to Christ. Curses can only affect believers when Christians stop believing in Christ and his power and start consulting other sources of powers. The consequences of such consultations could be manifested while praying over some Christians.

The above submission resonates with the biblical reasons why God let the children of Israel be enslaved by their neighbours. The Babylonians invaded Jerusalem in 587 BC, and many Israelites were sent into exile for seventy years. The simple reason for this exile was sin, which manifested mainly in apostasy⁷ (Bronkhorst, 2022). A Christian who consults with witch doctors, soothsayers, false prophets or practices necromancy, has profaned against God and must be punished. Some Christians believe that curses can only have a psychological impact as Christ has become a curse for us as it stated in *Galatians 3: -13-14*, yet (*Romans 8:1*), the discovery is that most Christians live under the fear of curses.

5.2.2. Theme 2: Anxiety caused by curses in ATRs and biblical contexts

The fear of curses may be because of its devastating corollaries, which create constant stress in the mind and places the person who believes under the pressure of curses. Thoughts of a generational curse, being under punishment because of a transgression, or having

⁷ Apostasy is described as a separation from God, a retreat, or a defection. Apostasy is defined in Christianity as a loss of faith and confidence in God.

subconsciously or consciously desacralised a sacred place, could create anxiety, unrest, distress, and dread. Participants were unanimous on what constitutes a curse in both ATRs and the biblical context. Some went as far as giving examples to reinforce their position. Responding to the question, ‘what do people believe about curses in your family’, Peter Burra (pseudonym), states that a curse is:

A spell inflicted upon individuals or a family by a supernatural power or by the spirits. ... Some people can suffer from curses because of their own actions, bad behaviours: “Doing what is forbidden” or “Not doing what is prescribed by the tradition”. For example, after the wedding ceremonies, the newly wedded should not turn in the bed unless she is helped by the husband before her first menstruation. In case she does it, she will be cursed. It is said that a newly wedded is not supposed to wee close by the house. She should avoid being seen by her sisters-in-law. This could cause a curse upon her life and her marriage.

The participant in the above response provided a new dimension to the discussion by equating curses with spells. However, according to Stollznaw (2014), spells and incantations are words and formulae that are thought to have magical powers and are written or recited. A spell is not necessarily good or bad, yet certain types of spells do have good or evil meanings. Blessings, cures and charms are designed to be beneficial or to counteract negative spells. Jinxes, hexes, and curses are always motivated by ill intentions, such as wishing someone to die or gain weight. Kudarwara Mathew (pseudonym) illustrated this. While answering the question, ‘what are the manifestations and impacts of curses on the life of a person’, the response was:

According to me, as an African, some people who are under a curse, lose their mind; they lose sometimes everything; There is a total chaos in his or her life. For women, usually, they are barren due the bad words pronounced against them. For instance, my own mother told me that when she got married to my father, they were supposed to give a goat to my aunty, and this did not happen. My aunty was angry, and my mother suffered for years and years until my mother and my father bought a goat and brought it to my aunty and she spoke over them. Before that time, my mother did not have miscarriage anymore.

This view shows a strong consideration for the impact of curses. In most African cultures, people live in anxiety and fear of the consequences of curses if they have committed adultery, infidelity, or theft.

Participants had divergent views on the impact of curses. While some subscribed to the notion that there is empirical evidence to support this, others believed that as Christians redeemed by Christ, curses have no power over them. The latter group believed that they can only be cursed when they sinned against God or profaned against his realm. Most participants, however,

believed that the impact of curses is seen in the parishioners' daily lives in the form of hardships, recurrent failures, and barrenness, which are all linked to some dark powers. Some participants believed that curses can visibly impact on the lives of the Christian parishioners of St Peter's. They maintain that some parishioners suffer from barrenness, unsuccessful applications, unprofitable employment, unfulfilled hopes and dreams, repetitive illness and hardships. They believe that curses have a personal impact on individuals, families, and communities.

5.2.3. Theme 3: Loss, failure, and death caused by curses

A large majority of the participants believed that a direct impact of curses in ATRs and Judeo-Christian religions were loss, failure, and death. When the question 'what is your understanding of a curse' was posed: Mayekiso Damien (pseudonym), replied:

*It is the consequences of evil doing in both the personal and the collective.
It can cause death and loss of many things that is good.*

Equally, Mbela Mvondo (pseudonym) responded similarly to the same question, stating that:

*For me the curse is a penalty because of a wrongdoing toward the society
or another person. It brings a lot of bad things like madness, loss of
stability, failure in all activities*

It is believed that living with a curse causes a loss of financial opportunities and can even cause spiritual damage, such as madness and physical death. In the ATR context, for instance, families believe that when someone strays from the laws of the land, they are cursed. When asked about the impact of curses, Thembekaza (pseudonym), provided an example saying that if it should happen that a young man consorts with an elderly woman, or has an affair with a married person, the young man can die. The notion of loss permeates Africa Traditional Religions and the Judeo-Christian religion. Mayekiso Damien (pseudonym), acknowledges that as an African and a Christian Catholic, he believes that curses can destroy people's lives. According to him, wrongdoing always has repercussions for the offender and, sometimes may include the offender's family or community. The parishioners of St Peter's take the notion of loss, failure, suffering and death seriously.

The deadly impact of the curse in Judeo-Christianity is supported by most of the participants. McBrien (1981: 162) argued that the Book of Genesis, Chapter 3 "serves as an opening [chapter] to a series of stories designed to demonstrate how sin, once accepted in the world, spreads across the universe, bringing disaster and death in its trail." Usually equated to sin, a curse is a hindrance to heaven. It is believed that the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, the murderers, the sexually

immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars will have their share in hellfire, which is the second death (Rev 21:8).

This confirms the discussion of St Paul in the New Testament concerning the consequences of Adam's transgression. (Romans 5:12–21; I Corinthians 15:21–23). He notes that Adam's sin has impacted on all humans. St Paul bases his argument on death's universality. All of mankind is entangled in sin because all men die, as death results from sin. This sense of man's collective responsibility in sin is inextricably linked to the biblical belief in human communal solidarity and the concept of corporate identity. Following the above line of thought, Kumalo Zuma (pseudonym) stated during his interview that:

As a Christian, I am also a black person who believes that, when things are not successful, when there are failures everywhere; there should be a curse somewhere from the ancestors and from God. Usually this happens when you are a troublemaker and doing wrong to others. In our Church, when we do not live according to word and the commandments of God. Also, when we disobey our parents and the elders. We can observe that someone is always misusing the money and making wrong choices. No success. Always a dark cloud around the person. When babies are dying without any serious reasons, there is a curse.

The participants acknowledged the negative impact of the curse through loss, failures, and sufferings by returning to the Book of Genesis, Chapter 3. According to their Christian belief, the historical curse is linked to death. This reality has its effects in daily life, which is sometimes used to explain an inexplicable death or inexplicable circumstances. ‘You must not eat or touch it; if you do, you will die.’ (Gen. 3: 3). The Judeo-Christian tradition links death to sin or to the curse. Disobedience has also occupied a significant niche in the description of a curse by the participants

5.2.4. Theme 4: Disobedience and wrongful behaviours as the cause of the curse in ATRs and in Christianity

The perception of curses is strongly linked to disobedience, wrongful behaviour, or breaking the community's rules and order. The notion of disobedience is understood throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition and the ATRs. From the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation, the concept of disobedience to the will of God, the commandments, the refusal to love, indifference to the suffering of others, especially the poor, and the lack of charity constitutes a severe offense to the order of God. Most participants also recognised that a break of order, lack of respect toward the established order or to the Divine, mediums, ancestors, and spirits also

created a break in the flow of life within the community. To the question what are the causes of the curses in your culture, Kumalo Zuma (pseudonym) declared:

In my culture or in the ATRs, curses are more generational from parents to children. Disobedience to things that are forbidden by the community. In the biblical context, a curse is linked with disobedience and transgression of the laws and the commandments or to God as the Supreme Judge

In the biblical context, the curse is caused by a person who does evil or commits a sin, a transgression of God's laws. Satan can then use our destinies and our lives, an example being of the son who saw the nakedness of his father, and a curse was placed on his children. Curses are God's punishment, hence when the question 'what is your understanding of the curse within the ATRs and the Judeo-Christian worldview,' Ntolo Louisa (pseudonym), replied:

As a parishioner, I believe some people call upon God to avenge by punishing those who wronged them badly. In ATR it is disobedience to our parents and ancestors or the spirits. In the biblical context, it is a harm or punishment caused by the disobedience to God and his instructions

The participants were more consistent in describing a curse's power and supernatural power. This includes the adverse effects caused by trespassing laws and the community's regulations, but also by disobeying the Ditties. According to Peter Burra (pseudonym):

Curse or "umvumo" in Kinyarwanda is a supernatural power; an incantation or a negative wish against somebody, to cause tribulations, bad luck, calamities, sufferings, and sickness, confusion in life or even death. Some imprecations are said consciously and others unconsciously, especially when a person speak out of anger...for instance parents when children show total lack of respect, or diviners against people who transgress the rules of the community.

There is, therefore, a belief that if one breaks the rules or disobeys the established divine or traditional authority, the supernatural negative power will befall them as individuals or their family. This usually happens through the power of the words which are used as a medium of cursing. Harelimana (pseudonym) substantiates the above assertion

From that perspective, a curse is usually caused by "Umupfumu", "diviner or a fortune teller" who can cause troubles. He has power to remove evil and to cause evil. They speak things and they become a reality. People who usually consult them are mixed: non-Christians and Christians. Usually people trust this "Umupfumu" more than God Almighty because through people can directly get straightforward answers. Most people consult them to curse the enemy.

The participant maintains that among the Hutus of Rwanda, the power of a curse is greatly revered among the people. The participant makes a sterling revelation on how the people fear the *Umupfumu* "more than God Almighty" because answers to their supplications are received spontaneously, compared to the Christian God who is described as a merciful God whose mercy knows no bounds. Perhaps because of the spontaneity in answering prayers, some Africans now suggest that oaths of office by public officials should be done before a shrine and not with a Bible or a Quran.

Furthermore, participants believe that curses in ATRs and in the Judeo-Christian tradition are characterised by extreme long-suffering; this could look like a kind of punishment that a person is going through due to disobedience or defilement of traditions, laws, and customs established by the community. Junior Alogo (pseudonym), responding to the question 'what can attract curses' states:

Among these transgressions, we name: the beating of a parent, seeing the nakedness of one's parents, sleeping with a sibling. For us, among, the curse is a kind of safeguard or canon that protect the traditions and helps to comply with the established order. It is usually caused by the spoken words from elders or despising the law of the land.

Curses are placed on people due to their disobedience to God's commands. Deuteronomy 27:13-16, 28:15-68 contain detailed instructions given to the Israelites in their relationship with God and their neighbours.

5.2.5. Incest in the ATRs and Judeo-Christianity

Another element causing and attracting curses in ATRs, among which, for instance, is the issue of incest, which is an abomination across the religious spectrum. Having carnal knowledge of a blood relative among most African traditions attracts curses. For instance, among the Igbo people of Nigeria, when such an abomination occurs, the culprits are expected to perform the *i'kwa ala*, a cleansing ceremony to wipe away the transgression because they have *meruola ala*, meaning, 'they have defiled the land'. Failure to do this may lead to the perpetrators going mad, becoming barren, or remain single for the rest of their lives. Also, families with mentally challenged members are sometimes seen as cursed (as explained by Eluma Ngah (pseudonym),

one of the participants). Although incest⁸ was not as strictly forbidden in the Judeo-Christian religion as it was in the ATRs, it was not allowed in the Bible. Relationships between certain close families were prohibited. Some of these interdicts are found in Leviticus 18:7-18; Leviticus 20:11-21. There are also some equally prohibitive rules in the Book of Deuteronomy.

5.2.6. Taboos the ATRs and Judeo-Christianity

Taboos were established in most African cultures to ensure that the people were well-governed. These prohibitions were established to ensure the orderly handling of human affairs. There must always be a leader in any organisation, especially in a human organisation. To lead, one must be a disciplined individual who follows the rules of society. Violations of these taboos have a wide range of consequences. It causes regression in the community, creates division among citizens, and makes it impossible for anyone from the affected areas to run for and win any political office. Under this sub-theme, the people's perception of curses within the Biblical context were investigated. When the question of what attracts curses in the Bible was posed, Bidzebe Charles (pseudonym) notes that:

Curses in the Bible were invoked when people had sinned against God or there were nations or people who had oppressed God's people. For example (Gen. 9:25-27) Noah cursed his grandchild because his son had seen his nakedness.

J. M. Powis Smith, in his book *The American Bible* (editor's preface 1927), occasionally refers to the word 'taboo' in conjunction with the holies ceremonies and the holy of holies ceremonies, known as the tabernacle. The law regarding the tabernacle and its ceremonials can be found in Exodus 30:36, Exodus 29:37; Numbers 16:37–38; Deuteronomy 22:9, Isaiah 65:5, Ezekiel 44:19, and Ezekiel 46:20.

God not only provided the children of Israel with precise instructions on what they should and should not do, as they were preparing to enter the Promised Land, but He also warned them about the benefits they would receive if they obeyed and the penalties they would incur if they were disobedient. The purpose of articulating the curses and blessings was to ensure obedience

⁸ The Jewish preferred endogamous marriage. It is an ancient practice, to marry within a specific ethnic, religious denomination, or caste while rejecting others for some reasons that they considered unsuitable for forming a family or even having a friendship with.

to God. God also forewarned them about the dangers of disobedience. This was intended to be a deterrent for sin. God did not only want the children of Israel to act in a conscionable manner; He wanted them to love Him unconditionally.

5.2.7. Murder and adultery

p'Bitek, O. (1975) while quoting *Bantu Philosophy* of Father Placide Franz Tempels (1945, 56-66), acknowledged that every misfortune was seen as a 'diminution of force'. For Placide Tempels, such diminution of force is totally against the philosophy of abundant life. Everything that infringes on life in ATRs should be banished. If a person commits murder or adultery, he can be banished from the community. In Judeo-Christianity, the final ten curses generally reflect the final five commandments against murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, and coveting your neighbour's property. They are types of taboos, and are pronounced as follows:

Cursed is he who moves his neighbor's boundary mark'. And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' Cursed is he who misleads a blind person on the road.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who lies with his father's wife because he has uncovered his father's skirt.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who lies with any animal.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or of his mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who lies with his mother-in-law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who strikes his neighbour in secret.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' (Deut. 27:17-26).

These vices are considered inimical to human relations. In the biblical context, parishioners believe these curses are the opposite of blessings. The curse refers to the revocation of a blessing from a person because of his or her deeds or because of disobedience. The Bible emphasises obedience as a prerequisite to enjoying God's favours and blessings, while disobedience incurs His wrath. In the Bible and in the ATRs, obedience and love are given the same importance. Jesus said: "if you love me, keep my commands" (*John* 14:15). The greatest commandment that Jesus gave was: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and

with all your soul and with all your mind” (*Matt. 22:37–38*). This ‘circle of love’ was created by God himself for man, to make obedience easily attainable.

Disobedience in its various forms, and infringing on the flow of life as far as the understanding of life is concerned in the ATRs, can be the cause of curses. The latter can have a dire impact on the lives of individuals and families. The participants confirmed this viewpoint from both perspectives, including Christianity. In line with many others, Ayabonga Malusi (pseudonym), concluded that:

Even as Christians, our daily life is all struggle in personal life maybe because of our sins. Most people are not progressing. It looks like there are blockages. It looks like something is blocking the light, and the blessing on us because there is a kind of curse. Curse is like kind of witchcraft that does not allow one to progress.

5.2.8. Words as a medium of cursing

Whether in ATRs or in the Judeo-Christian tradition the spoken word has an incredible power to perform what it denotes. For instance, the Bible teaches that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (*Acts 4:12*). Most participants agreed that curses pass to people through spoken words.

To concur with this view, participant Charlotte Sharon (pseudonym) opines:

To my understanding, a curse is a supernatural invocation with intent to harm. this can be done through words or other rituals. It is most of the time due to disobedience to the established rules or by not respecting the holy places and deities including their instructions or the power in place”.

Similarly, Julianne Bamboo, (pseudonym) is of the opinion that:

“Curse is a personal belief in something negative sent by someone else through word. Sometimes it occurs because of bad behaviors and disobedience.

People curse through words of mouth or other rituals. Curse words invoke suffering, sickness, bad luck, death, droughts, financial losses and other calamities on the victim. Curses are ill-intentioned, and are the opposite of blessings.

5.2.9. Why people curse others

There are many motives behind the act of cursing. Many participants responding to the question of how they understood the curse revealed various motives behind the cursing. People cursed. According to Peter Burra (pseudonym),

In order to cause tribulations, bad luck, calamities, sufferings, and sickness, confusion in life or even death.

Lumumba Heritier (pseudonym), maintains that,

Curse is a supernatural power inflicted or pronounced to harm someone, a family, or a group of people.

Corroborating these views, Katerine Harelima (pseudonym) opines that,

Curse is an invocation or a wish to harm somebody. It can be a spoken word in front of the person or evil actions without the knowledge of the person.

This study reveals that many people, perhaps out of anger, hostility, animosity, envy, jealousy, fear, a need for control, a sense of inadequacy, vulnerability and the need for power, can build up a destructive power that is harmful when uttering a curse. According to Kalu (2008) and Mbiti (2002), curses can result from envy. Edmiston (2010) underscores this view that curses can be the result of hatred, envy, greed, jealousy, sorcery, supernatural strife, or the urge for vengeance. Participants believe that when a person is cursed, this can bring bad luck, suffering, sickness, and other forms of tribulations. This explains why the phobia of curses runs deep in the Christian and African religious belief systems. Both religions believe that curses aim to harm, annihilate, and render the victim useless, impotent, and incapable of adding value to any aspect of his life.

5.3. Theme 5: Potency and management of curses in ATRs and Judeo-Christianity

The notion of curses has power and potency. It is believed that when curses come from the most powerful mediums, these include diviners and those in authority, namely parents, teachers, pastors, priests and coaches, they are more harmful. The participants revealed that words intended to curse can be pronounced intentionally, out of anger, or because of jealousy. This can affect individuals as well as families. The participant Ayabonga (Pseudonym)

Yes, we believe on curses in my family. It is expected not to say things out of anger. You are not supposed to give a child a bad name, which might affect him unknowingly. The name that the child is given is going to affect

the child. While people speak out of anger; blockages and bad things occur. Many words in Zulu express that kind of curses: “Hamba bayochutha pambili” ie “Go, they will stripe you there”; “Hamba bayokubona abanamehlo”; “You go those who have eyes will see you. [Ayabonga, when asked if they believe on curses in their family]

This section sought to deal with the potency of curses and revealed how the parishioners of St Peter’s deal with curses daily. Chapter 6 will discourse on this topic at length. It is, however, worth noticing that prayers and rituals are the best ways to avert a curse.

5.2.5a. The Potency of Curses

Deepening the theme of the potency of curses, Harelimana (Pseudonym) asserts that:

Among the Hutus,’ curses are manifested by serious suffering and hardship, barrenness, lack of prosperity and too many failures. [He told a story of a girl who got pregnant and killed her child after birth]. The community cursed her for 10 years. The bottom line is that every child that she conceived died before birth. At the same time, every man who attempted to marry her died before the marriage ceremonies. There are various ways to curse and to get curse. One may get cursed by disrespecting the established order or disobeying the words of the ancestors. By eating meat sacrificed during certain traditional rituals. When elderly people, especially, mothers, fathers, uncles show their nakedness with the intention to curse. Another way of cursing is through the diviner who pronounces curses to harm the person

This resonates with the opinions of scholars such as Kalu (2008), Mbiti (2002), and Edmiston (2010). According to the Bandundu, a tribe of DRC Congo, when asked how people perceive curses in her their culture, Lumumba Heritier (pseudonym) responds:

When I speak of curse or “bilakeli mabe” in lingala, I am speaking of a power affecting individual health, progress, and most activities. For instance, in my culture, the Luba in DRC, when a woman goes with someone else’s husband, she is cursed. If you steal or quarrel with an elderly person or when you see the nakedness of your parents or any elderly person you are bringing curses upon oneself. You need to seek for a solution quickly

Most participants feel that there is a strong belief in the efficacy and potency in the phenomenon of a curse in their families and search for solutions in their everyday life, both as Christians and as traditional believers. Repeatedly, the participants re-asserted the efficacy and the power of curses. Again, Lumumba Heritier notes, [*in my family*],

We believe that such a power exists, but we think that we have not yet been affected or we don’t yet have a direct experience of it.

Through the narrative of Adam and Eve and the curse of Ham evoked by most participants, the Judeo-Christian worldview strongly affirms the potency of the curse. For instance, seeing the nudity of a parent is a curse. Such was the case of Ham, as mentioned above. He laughed at the nakedness of his father, Noah. The curse was pronounced upon him and his children; this narrative is found in the Book of Genesis

Seeing the nudity of a parent can bring a terrible curse on the recipient in ATRs, as affirmed by most participants. Most Africans also believe that younger people should avoid seeing the nakedness of an elderly woman or sleeping with people wives, as these may lead to serious repercussions. As recorded by Katerina Harelina (pseudonym):

in my family where I grew up, people believed that one should avoid seeing the nakedness of their aunties. This could lead to a very strong curse. As far as I know, I have no fact of anyone being under the impact of curse in my direct family. But we take the notion of curse very seriously. We may equally observe that, the fact of not having a direct experience of curse in the family does not imply that the curse does not exist, as the family's firm belief in the phenomenon persists.

This exposes the potency of curses on individuals and society, and in some cultures in Nigeria, like the Yorubas, the Igalas, and the Idomas. Among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, a jealous husband can cast a spell (*magun*) on his wife so that if she sleeps with another man, they will get conjoined while having sexual intercourse and then this brings disgrace to them. Only the man who casts a spell on the woman can break it. The Igala and Idoma people of the Middle Belt region believe that an unfaithful wife can cause the husband or the child to become ill and even die, unless the woman confesses her transgression and repents. In the African/Christian worldviews, the phenomenon of ancestral/generational curses, is, according to Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:405)

the prevalence of chronic and hereditary diseases, emotional excesses and allergies,
" the prevalence of chronic and hereditary diseases, emotional excesses and frequent miscarriages and deaths, suicidal tendencies, and persistent poverty within one's family.

It indeed calls for intervention and ways of instilling serenity among the people. The management of curses will be dealt with in the next chapter.

5.4. Theme 6: Similarities and dissimilarities on the perception of curses in ATRs and biblical context of curses

The value of respect for the elderly is treasured in most African societies and Christianity. This echoes the dictates of the Christian Bible: 'Honour your father and your mother' (Exodus 20:12), and 'Every person must respect his mother and his father' (Leviticus 19:3). This shows a correlation between the two belief systems.

5.5. Destructive intention of Curses

In most African and Christian societies and belief systems, the phobia for cursing is factual, and as such is part of the Judeo-Christian worldview. This is probably because curses, according to Assmann (1992), target utter annihilation and destruction. The 'erection of a shrine' and the creation of a 'cult for the divine' was a motive for a blessing and a national economic boom begun by a Supreme Being in the ancient Near Eastern civilization. People's relationships with the cult were used to explain a nation's socio-economic stability. Failure to do so would result in curses (Rugwiji, 2013). So is the failure of a proper relationship with God, which will lead to spiritual dryness, failures, and death. 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing' (Jn 15:5). Failure to abide in Christ, to love and to serve him, will exclude one from being successful.

Christianity and the African Traditional religions agree that curses can damage, annihilate, destroy, cripple or kill the victim.

Participant Harelimana (pseudonym) opined: *To me the curse is an invocation or a wish to harm or destroy somebody. It can be a spoken word in front of the person or evil actions without the knowledge of the person.*

5.6. Disobedience as a Cause of the Curse

According to participant Peter Burra (pseudonym):

Both ATR and biblical context agree on the fact that disobeying some rules or not acting according to the commandments or the way of life established by the divine or the traditional settings. In the Judaism context, people used prophets, or men of God to perform rituals in the same way, in the ATR it is the diviner or the traditional healer who perform the rituals and discover the curses. Another similarity is that curse is caused by a power that is

beyond the visible world. Finally, the similarity found on the pronounced word.

Disobeying the rules or laws of the Divine or Supreme Being often leads to curses in both religions. In the biblical context, the prophets and angels played a mediatory role between mankind and the Divine Being, while in ATRs, the diviner/chief priest assumed the role of mediator between the people and the gods. In both religions, the prophets or diviners offered sacrifices or oblations to avert any consequence that the actions or inactions of the people may have incurred.

The finding according to which there are similarities in the approach of the notion of curses in ATRs and in the Judeo-Christian worldview, is supported through this research. Most participants believe that disrespect or disobedience to the commandments, spirits, the Supreme Being, or God is the cause of curses in both religions.

Several biblical verses indicate that individuals will be condemned if they are rebellious or disobedient (Chase, 2013). The examples that follow will assist in clarifying this concept. According to Berry (2011), humanity is cursed because of Adam's transgression, from whom all mankind is thought to have descended (*Gen. 3:15-19*). All human beings have inherited Adam's curses, such as death and toil in order to exist, as a result of his transgression. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, their penalties wreaked havoc on manhood and womanhood (Chase, 2013). Murder is frequently shown as a cause of curses. Cain is cursed in Genesis 4:11 for murdering Abel, his brother. Participant, Ayene Ateba (pseudonym), sums up the debate as follows:

Among the similarities, it good to mentioning that both religions condemn wrongdoing [sin]. Curse is considered and understood as a regulator of behaviour; a way of deterring those who commit evil and wrongdoing, robbery and harm caused to others and the community. Pardon is granted in both religions for those who confess their sins.

5.7. The Performative power of the Word

Another similarity found in both religions concerning curses is that it is sometimes inflicted through words of mouth. As discussed earlier, this suggests that the two religions do not take the power of the spoken word lightly. In Isaiah 55:11, the Bible states, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

Similarly, an African proverb says, “curses are like chickens; they come home to roost.” This means that people should not use curses as a whim, because if the intended target is innocent of the accusation, the curse will return to its sender.

Participant Maranatha Bienvenue (pseudonym) concurs with the above submission, *in both religions, curses come through spoken words. It also believed that Curses can be transmitted from one generation to the other.*

Participant Harelimana (pseudonym) believes that,

The word is the source of curses and blessings in both my culture and Christian.

5.8. Generational Curses

Another similarity identified is that wrongdoings or telling untruths cause curses, even generational curses. Africans hold a strong belief in the concept of generational curses. This explains why, for example, in most Nigerian cultures, when a young man wishes to take a wife, a diligent investigation is carried out to ensure that there is no recurring condition in the family that can be related to curses. For example, whether there a history of madness in the family; Whether their daughters remain in the marriage; whether the family is dedicated to any god/shrine. Similarly, in the biblical context, it is recorded in specific passages that God punished children for the transgressions of their fathers (Jeremiah 31:29-30; Lam. 5:7), prompting both Ezekiel (18:2) and Jeremiah (31:29) to write, "... the parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Waldman, 1989). Haggai 1:4-11 also implies that the Judeans' failure to restore the Temple resulted in Yahweh cursing them with malnourished crops, insufficient food and drink, and a shortage of warm clothing (Rugwiji, 2013).

5.9. Dissimilarities between ATRs and the biblical context of Curses

While the notion of a curse is closely related in both religions, it was found that both still maintain their uniqueness and dissimilarities. Some participants established the distinction from various aspects.

5.9. a. Sub-theme: Curses and the process of being cursed

The puzzling phenomenon of curses has shown that while there is a genuine fear of curses and cursing, these practices are preserved as essential aspects of the African people's tangible historical reality. Regardless of the discipline to which one belongs or the religious affiliation

to which one adheres, one finds oneself posing – and in some cases questioning – the following questions: What can be considered as a curse, and how can one be cursed?

Peter Burra (pseudonym), assists in understanding the dynamics of curses and the ways used in ATRs to curse stating the following:

the most powerful curses are believed to come from the traditional healer or the diviner. Someone or a family can contact the diviner so that he or she can pronounce curses against the victim. One can also be curse through some specific rituals such as “The rite of Kuraguza or kubandwa” if one eats whatever meats or food that was used during the sacrifices. One can also curse by giving water to the victim to wash hand. It is one powerful way of poisoning a person without giving them food. In Rwanda mothers can curse their daughters by taking their first menstruation and hide them so that they may not give birth before they get married. In case the mother fails to it take out before she dies, the daughter can remain barren throughout her life. This is an involuntary curse.

Harelimana (pseudonym) notes:

Among the Hutus,’ curses are manifested by serious suffering and hardship, barrenness, lack of prosperity and too many failures. [He told a story of a girl who got pregnant and killed her child after birth]. The community cursed her for 10 years. The bottom line is that every child that she conceived died before birth. At the same time, every man who attempted to marry her died before the marriage ceremonies. There are various ways to curse and to get curse. One may get cursed by disrespecting the established order or disobeying the words of the ancestors. By eating meat sacrificed during certain traditional rituals. When elderly people, especially, mothers, fathers, uncles show their nakedness with the intention to curse. Another way of cursing is through the diviner who pronounces curses to harm the person

Facing the psychological pressure of ancestral curses, witchcraft, evil spirits, bondages, various illnesses, ailments, and aberrant behaviour, as well as the activity of Satan and his demons, it is judicious to assist the African Christians of St. Peter’s parish in finding a way to managing curses. This section aims at discussing the awareness of the existence of the curse in the lives of the Black Christians of St. Peter’s. Possible cultural and Christian ways of eliminating curses and the means people could use to apply curses on their victims, will also be discussed.

5.9.b. Reasons for cursing

In ATRs, one can be cursed by an evil power, a wizard, or the enemy without any sufficient reason. However, in Christianity, it is believed that curses are always the result of one’s deeds – we reap what we sow. Participant Lumumba Heritier (pseudonym), emphasises that curses

in Christianity are often the consequence of one's action or inaction and not merely a willful act, whereas, in ATRs, it can be the result of one's vindictiveness or some evil forces. Validating this view, Harelimana (pseudonym) opines:

the dissimilarity is that in ATR, some curses are attributed to ones' wrongdoing against the neighbour and the community, but also to the wickedness of the evil spirits, wizards and witchcraft. Mainly in Judeo-Christianity curses are the results of not observing the commandment or not being faithful to God.

This submission affirms that curses in ATRs can be placed on people, not because through any fault of their own, but out of evil motives. In Christianity, curses are often the consequence of one's sins, inactions or inherited. This finding on the dissimilarities is confirmed by Bidzebe Charles (pseudonym) who says:

There are dissimilarities because in the biblical context curses came about as a punishment for ill-behaviour or going against God's laws unlike in ATR where curses could be out of jealousy and anger in most cases.

5.9. c. Managing Curses

Another dissimilarity in the findings is how both traditions deal with curses. The way to manage curses in ATRs seems lengthy and complex, depending on the diviners or those entitled to perform the rituals. In Christianity, matters seem to be more accessible, and much responsibility is placed on the victim's head. According to participant Mbela Mvondo (pseudonym),

The dissimilarities are scarce however, in ATR, there are very long procedures to deal with curses and a lot has to do with appeasing the spirits, but the Judeo-Christian traditions insist on individual repentance, confession, and prayers to God who is Almighty.

This highlights the dissimilarities between the concepts of the curse in the two religions. While Christianity provides a simplistic way to deal with the phenomenon of curses – confessing one's sins, restitution, and prayers – ATRs sometimes require the victim to appease the gods through various forms of sacrifice and even making a public confession of sins. In ATRs, blood sacrifices are commonplace in dealing with the problem of curses, but in Christianity, Christ has paid the price for all sins by dying on the cross, hence all an offender needs is to confess his/her sins (*Rom. 5:10*) “for on him lies the punishment that brings freedom” (*Isaiah 53:5*). Mbela Mvondo (pseudonym) also believes that in Christianity, one can find a lasting solution

to the problem of curses than in ATRs. This assertion may be shrouded in Western thinking, where everything African is considered inferior to Western products. So far, no empirical evidence has been found to support the repudiation of that assertion.

Moreover, another critical area where the African system of thought differs from Christianity, is in the retribution of sin. Most African cultures and religions believe God punishes them in their present existence. For this reason, God (the Supreme Being) is interested in mankind's moral existence and thus defends the moral code. With a few exceptions, the belief that a person will be punished for the misdeeds committed in the present life, the hereafter is not tenable in most ATRs. Therefore, misfortunes may be understood as signaling that the victim has committed some ritual or moral transgression against the Supreme Being, the spirits, deities, the ancestors, the elders, or other members of his community. The idea appears to imply that a person will neither suffer consequences nor enjoy benefits in the hereafter for their actions in this life. Few exceptions may exist in some parts of Africa, but this appears to be the general pattern (Magesa, 1987: 98).

In Africa, communities directly sanction other forms of evil. Each culture or community has its own set of punishment and restitution for different moral and legal offences. In traditional systems of justice and judgment, monarchs, chiefs, communities, families, or individuals may punish a misdeed brutally, harshly, or even unfairly, in some situations. These can vary from death penalties for crimes such as murder, witchcraft and incest, to monetary fines, goats, sheep, or cattle fines for minor offences such as fights, quarrels, and adultery. Infractions and disputes stemming from different sorts of moral injury or transgressions against ritual and tradition are usually handled by the area's elders. Traditional rulers and chiefs, such as the Igbo in Nigeria, are responsible for maintaining law and order and administering justice in their domains. In the community and family, the offender is usually given a chance to repent, rehabilitate, prevent a repeat, reintegrate, and live an everyday life. However, Mbiti (1969) notes that under certain circumstances, repeated acts of immorality isolate the perpetrator from the community, forcing him/her to leave or be expelled by the village. Thus, this is effectively his death.

Cursing is another way to administer justice among the Igbo of Nigeria. It is known as 'igo *ofo*.' The main idea is that if a person is guilty, s/he will suffer following the words used in cursing him/her. A person is said to be able to curse an unknown offender or thief. For instance, it entails sacrificing a dog, decapitating it, and placing the head on an ant-hill while death curses

are uttered. It is expected that the perpetrator, his family, or the animals would become ill and finally die. It is also employed to settle a disagreement between two people or families.

In the African world of divinities, ancestors, witchcraft, and spirits, Christian theologians struggle to discover means to enculturate the Gospel. If theologians seek to make Christianity comprehensible in the African setting, they must confront these aspects of African traditional religions (ATRs). While this has been achieved in varying degrees of success, African believers continue to struggle to integrate ATRs' vibrant spirit realm with the Christianity it received from western missionaries.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the analysis and findings of the data were discussed. This chapter focussed on some of the findings, which revealed various understandings, perspectives, and responses to the phenomenon of curses among the parishioners of St. Peter's.

6.1. The power of the Word.

The researcher has observed that curses can be placed through the spoken word. The word has a unique place and power in African cosmology and belief systems. All African traditional religions and cultural system value the spoken word and emphasise the ability to utilise words appropriately, in the form of ritual discourse (Idowu, 2014). This is referred to as oral traditions. Words may have a universal impact as they are timeless weapons endowed with enormous power and unfathomable significance. The power of the word, whether written or spoken, is the true ruler of the universe. It is the strength of salesmen and advertisers; words anchor politicians, the crown of great leaders, the defense of lawyers, the fort of preachers, the glue that binds lovers, and the tool of teachers and instructors. It is imperative that the word is being re-appropriated and utilised to heal, bless, deliver to comfort, and not to cause harm and death. The Book of Proverbs affirms that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue and they who indulge in it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Proverbs 18:21). This undisputedly expresses the creative power of the word.

It is remarkable that in the plethora of Creation myths, or cosmogonic myths⁹, the Creator's words, that this world was created through the power of the Word by a Supreme Being, have survived in most all African religious traditions. This notion, which is inherent in the African worldview, and present in various religious cosmologies and traditions, is supported by the Judeo-Christian worldview, as described in the Bible's story of creation, in the Book of Genesis. This validates the enormous power of the spoken word. Since inception, the word has been associated with power, life, being, and vital force (Idowu, 2014).

⁹ According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2009), there various narrative accounts related to the Creation. The argument is that there are many symbolic narratives of the creation of the world

In Christianity, the Word, as stated in John's Gospel, verses 1-18, is not a linguistic word that can be explained vide any human language or comprehended by any human person. The Word, who is God, has the ability to create. It is the metaphysical language through which God formed himself as Son (Jesus Christ, The Word Made Flesh), the cosmos, and all living things (Petric, 2020). On the power of words, Proverbs 18:21 declares, "The tongue has the power of life and death." This signifies that a person's words can pronounce life or death over another. Both Christianity and ATRs believe that words have the power to bring life or death physically, and that is why cursing by word of mouth is taken seriously in both religions.

6.2. Sin, Wrongdoing and Curses

Even though Africans have no fixed theology for the genesis of sin equivalent to the biblical view described above, they accept the impact of sin on individuals and communities. Deadly anger, the inability to obtain food or kill game, blight, and other anti-life events, whether natural, psychological, physical, social, or personal, are viewed as consequences of wrongdoing (sin). Magesa (1987:155) classifies these misfortunes as an affliction, which is commonly interpreted as illness or disease. Misfortunes manifest when rains do not fall, and there is no food in the community; if too much rain falls, and crops are ruined; or if cows do not give birth and there is a milk shortage. Misfortunes are defined as any failure that affects a person or society; and human destructiveness lies at the very heart of this philosophy. Using Westerlund's (1989) description, the cause of misfortunes in humans may be explained in three ways. The religious (superhuman) causality assumes the idea that spiritual powers beyond the human, such as God and spirits, impact on human beings in various ways. Second, the social (human) causality, which relates to human-to-human relationships, such as witchcraft and curses in Africa. Third, natural (mostly physical) causation relates to natural phenomena, elements, and occurrences such as insects, pathogens, natural chemicals, and the weather.

In Africa, natural, social and religious sources of suffering cannot be considered independent and unrelated. Instead, they all represent stages in an unethical situation's psychological and spiritual understanding. A natural explanation typically, but not always, comes first in the order of mental awareness and any attempt at analysis and comprehension of a condition. Unless divine, ancestral, spirit, or witchcraft causes are immediately suspected, a natural cause is sought and first accepted as the rationale for a specific event. Natural causes, such as a tree falling on a person or an injury sustained while hunting, are frequently evident. The natural explanation will serve if the ailment does not progress in severity. When symptoms worsen, as

they frequently do, the social and religious causes are investigated. It is more accurate to state that natural causality already includes social causality. For example, if a tree falls on a man chopping it down and injures him, the person will undoubtedly be aware that the tree fell on him. However, in retrospect he may wonder as to possible ulterior motives or reasons for the incident. Human or religious explanations are required to solve these problems. At this level, misfortune begins to make sense in the African moral vision of the world.

According to Magesa, this explanation is due to the African worldview. The world should be balanced, harmonious, and beneficial. Therefore, misfortune, which is defined as an imbalance or discord in the cosmos, does not occur by chance. If and when it happens, it is due to an evil source, either human or supernatural in nature. According to morality, these causes of disorders and misery in human existence, as well as their reasons, must be identified. Even if the perpetrator is the victim, the truth must be known, and concomitant action taken (Bjerke, 1981: 112). The ancestors may create infirmity and misery in the religious category. Religious experts (diviners) frequently diagnose this as being the situation. This occurs when the living fails to commemorate their ancestors by performing rituals such as pouring libations. The afflicted individual must accept responsibility for his actions and resolve the problem. However, because ancestral spirits are not satisfied with the requested sacrifices, they may inflict affliction.

Human spirits, both non-ancestral and human, can also create misery. Many are merely wicked spirits intent on causing havoc for no specific cause. They might be the spirits of individuals who had died without being appropriately buried and are enraged, seeking vengeance, and never content. This group also includes the spirits of children who did not go through the initiation ritual. They are exceedingly harmful in terms of their ability to harm living entities; they may have been hurt in the early elements they inhabit, and thus seek retribution. Nature spirits may also bring affliction. For example, certain goods and places are recognised as their dwellings and allocated for their usage. Some forests, caves, and trees should not be cut down or trespassed on as this will incite their wrath, with disastrous outcomes.

6.3. Pedagogical meaning of suffering

This materialistic view of life, the phenomenon of curses, and the problem of evil call into question the Christian/biblical teachings on these subjects. According to Christian teachings, Hebrews 12:5-12 provides Christians with the correct mindset when confronted with adversity. Suffering aids us in the fight against sin (12:4); it may even be uplifting (12:5) because it

indicates God's hand in our lives and interest in our progress, and it is a signal of our position as God's children (12:8). It also follows God's relationship with Jesus, who learned obedience through his suffering (5:7-9). The lesson is clear: God allows us to grow through hardship (see also *Rom* 5:3-5). *2 Cor* 4:7-18 is one of the most expressive chapters about Christian suffering. In it, Paul describes his suffering for the gospel in four words:

Afflicted (*thlipsis*): negative troublesome circumstances – turbulent schedule; material sacrifice; loss of comfort so that one can help others.

Persecuted (*diokoo*): hostile attacks from adversaries – could include employment mistreatment, hostility from suspicious family members, persecution, and spiritual attack.

Perplexed (*aporeo*): ‘without a way,’ bewildered – doubt (not just about one's own life but also about others’); confusion about the next step.

Struck down (*kataballo*): to be cast down – the loss of treasured plans or relationships; failure in ministry; betrayal by co-workers; unexpected failures (‘New Testament Lessons on Suffering,’ 2014).

The Book of Job teaches Christians to seek God for who he is, not for the benefits we receive as God's children and members of Christ's family. We must believe in God even when we do not comprehend Him. The story of Job is about ‘disproportionate suffering,’ misery that is much beyond what the victim appears to deserve or what the sufferer may develop in response to. Hunger and starvation in the third world, as well as individuals whose faith is destroyed by a tragedy beyond their ability to bear, are examples of excessive suffering. This category, according to systematic theology, is an illusion. No suffering is unfair, since we are all sinners deserving of death and who are victims of the world's falseness. Carson (1990:140) contrasts these views:

... the link between suffering and retribution found in, say, Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and Romans, is never so mathematically rigid, so symmetrically precise, as to rule out the kind of suffering this book considers. Intuitively we know it is so. When a father rapes his six-year-old daughter, in what conceivable sense is the daughter “responsible”? Of course, her suffering is the result of sin – someone else’s sin. But that is exactly what makes her the innocent victim. Doubtless she is not innocent on any absolute scale. Six-year-old girls cannot possibly be innocent on any absolute scale: they take after their parents. But what sin has the girl committed that makes her incestuous rape an appropriate “retribution”?

Thus, the Bible does not explicitly present suffering as the consequence of one's sins, but sometimes can be attributed to man's fallen nature. This implies that it would be crucial not to attribute atrocity, illness, barrenness, and failure to the notion of curses.

6.4.Curses and freedom of choice

One of the important trends in Christian theology is the emphasis on human freedom of choice. "The Lord commanded the man, saying, "from any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat you will surely die" (*Gen 2; 16-17*). The narrative of Adam and Eve in the Bible highlights that God offered them the freedom to act for their own good. The Book of Revelation is an invitation to that tree of life for all those who listen and do what the Lord tells them (*Rev 2:7*). Suffering and misfortunes may not necessarily be associated with the impact of curses. One proverb in Ewondo of Cameroon says: *If your mouth is in someone else's kitchen, it cannot get its independence*. One needs to take ownership and responsibility.

One argues that there is evil in human life. Sufferings and challenges are not necessarily the consequence of curses, but can sometimes be traced to the wrong choices made by people. In the Book of Deuteronomy, one of the Judeo-Christian teachings is when Moses advised his people to make the right choice, as follows:

"Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster. For I command you this day to love the LORD your God and to keep his commands, decrees, and regulations by walking in his ways. If you do this, you will live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you and the land you are about to enter and occupy.

"But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and if you are drawn away to serve and worship other gods,¹⁸ then I warn you now that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live a long, good life in the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy.

*"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!" (*Deut 30: 15-19*)*

For example, a student who, instead of studying for an exam, chooses to rather fraternise with friends, cannot blame a curse or someone else for his/her misfortune or for failing the exam.

This resonates with the principle of freedom and responsibility. People have the freedom to make choices, but they must also be ready to bear the consequences of their choices.

A long-standing philosophical, legal, and theological stance holds that a person may only be held morally accountable for their actions if they had the choice to act otherwise. As a result, many philosophers believe that moral responsibility requires freedom of choice. (Vierkant et al., 2019). Regarding responsibility, it is assumed that all the alternatives had been examined prior to the chosen action. A holistic approach will be when dealing with the phenomenon of curses.

6.5. Management of the Impact of Curses by Parishioners.

6.5.1. The Awareness of the Existence of Curses in one's life.

The dynamics of any concept reside in the different ways these can be understood, approached, and applied to different cultures. As far as the notion of curses is concerned, one may argue that personal existential experience should be taken seriously. Even though one as a pastor, minister, parent, or friend might disagree, it is advisable to allow the victim to be heard. Allowing them to express their material and social experience could be one of the ways of discovering the dynamics behind the supposed attribution of the ailments to the curse. For instance, people might express themselves like most of the participants in this study:

We usually realize that our life is not improving while others are growing. When our things are not moving, the way they should. In this way, some people start to seek for help from witch- doctors or in church to seek for relief. Junior Alogo, (pseudonym).

This provides a good starting point. It is evident that this person believes in the notion that prolonged or repeated misfortunes, poverty, barrenness, failures in a career, unemployment and all material failures, are mostly the consequence of curses. This might be considered a materialistic view of life, which negates the role of hard work in success and undermines the role of coincidences in human existence. According to this community, the awareness of the belief in the existence of curses can assist in channeling the topic of education by pastors, psychologists, and teachers. One could help the victim to understand that a causal view of life does not always apply in every life situation.

6.5.2. Divination and the Curse

Additionally, the awareness of curses reveals the imminence of curses from experiential experience; both religions have ways of divination. Diviners in ATRs play a pivotal role in identifying and solving ‘mystical’ problems such as an inexplicable illness, death, or curses among people. These diviners are believed to be the “eyes of the gods” that they can see beyond the physical. Zuesse (1975: 158) observes, “Divination as a spiritual phenomenon has had very little written about it, perhaps due in part to the ready labelling of it as a form of magic and therefore irrational, utilitarian, egoistic, and insufficiently “religious.” Zuesse adds that there has also been a tendency to believe that the complexity of divinatory ritual, as revealed to the Western observer in localised societies, is simply an outward effect added by the diviner for greater client impact. Most adherents of ATRs use diviners to reveal the curses and avert them through rituals. While it is an approach to uncovering the problem of curses, care should be taken, as diviners can be excessive and sometimes dramatic, which could cause more confusion and conflict within the community.

Corresponding to the ATRs, diviners also play a role in uncovering the root causes of problems in Christianity. These include using prophets, priests, pastors, and ‘prayer warriors.’ It may be argued that the Judeo-Christian traditions often refer to the kings and the people of God consulting the seer to inquire about their situations (1 Samuel 9). In the Bible, the phenomena of prophecy are described to Christian followers in various instances in the Acts. Consequently, the whole Christian community manifests the Pentecostal experience of languages, which is characterised as prophecy. Ananias, who was given a prophecy concerning Paul, is merely referred to as ‘a certain disciple’ (Acts 9:10) (Ellis, 1970). Along with these texts, Luke limits the word or title ‘prophet’, as it is used by his contemporaries, for a small group of ‘leading men’ (Acts 15:22) who have great influence in the Christian community. The use of the word ‘prophet’ here refers to priests, pastors, and leaders of charismatic groups who can help them uncover mysterious situations.

6.5.3. Cultural process of eliminating a Curse

Participant Bienvenue Maranatha (pseudonym), noted:

For the Shona people, a traditional healer helps through a ritual to determine the cause. Usually, they slaughter a cow for the reparation of the curse, which is known as “Ukushweleza”. In this ritual, they call the ancestors to appease them and to apologize.

Participant Mebele Feg Zamba (pseudonym) concurs with the above submission:

To discover a curse some people seek the help of spiritual healers, a 'sangoma'; some identify this through dreams and visions. Some conclude by seeing the afflictions and suffering that they go through.

6.5.3a. Cultural and Spiritual diversity in Dealing with Curses

There are ways in which Africans deal with what is considered spiritual, mystical, and inexplicable. The Africans' thought processes, belief systems, and worldviews have indeed all been shaped by traditional religions. This seems so because African traditional religions lack a holy text containing mandated beliefs. Due to its powerful oral traditions, one needs to be part of the community to study and understand the meaning behind every rite and action. Africans have diverse cultural rituals to counter the impact of curses.

6.5.3b. The Bandudu Ritual of Cleansing the Curse (DRC)

At The *Mputu* culture among the Bandulu, a tribe of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was selected for discussion as they represent a vast population among the Africans of St Peter's. To eliminate a curse, the people perform sacrifices using chicken and goat mixed with palm wine. This ritual is performed by the elder, the spokesperson for the entire family. The elder is known as *mfumu mbila*. Some families use the diviner or *nganga kisi* or *Mandona*, who performs rituals on behalf of the victims. The process consists of using contrary words from those used for imprecation of curses. Among the Bandulu people, it is believed that the person who curses either a family or an individual can undo or remove the curse by asking for some ransom, cola nut or palm wine. They wash the victim with pure water mixed with herbs by speaking the words: *'Today, I release you from the curse.'* This ritual of eliminating a curse clearly highlights the notion of sacrifice in dealing with curses.

6.5.3. c. Philosophy behind the Sacrifice

In most religions of the world, sacrificial performances play an essential part. Von Stuckrad (2006:1657) maintains "They are most of the time very complicated ritual performances through which communication between worshippers and spirit beings may be made viable, impeded and severed." Attempts to conceptualise a sacrifice have shown that it is "problematic, given that a sacrifice encompasses such distinctions in religious phenomena as in Jesus' sacrifice of atonement, votive gifts, and animal sacrifices, that are distinct, in the intentions of actors as well as in the main theological picture and faith systems" (Von Stuckrad, 2006:1657).

Fahert (1977:128b) posits that a sacrifice is “a cultic act in which objects were set apart or consecrated and offered to a god or some other supernatural power.”

Consequently, the concepts of ‘bloodless’ and ‘bloody offerings’ (sacrifices) must be considered. Blood is used as a "power-packed substance that brings fertility," spraying it over the fields to boost the yield. Fertility rites are sometimes paired with blood ceremonies. Blood sacrifices are usually performed with domesticated animals (camels, horses, fowl, pigs, cattle, sheep, chicken, and goats). The qualities of the sacrificial animal will be determined by the objective of the sacrifice. Black animals are offered to the deity of the "underworld and the dead, or to feared demonic beings," whereas brightly-coloured animals are dedicated to the god of the sky (Eliade, 1987:545-546). The above discourse emphasizes that rituals and sacrifices are very important in healing curses.

6.5.3. d. The *Ikwuala* ritual of curse removing (Igbo – Nigeria)

The Igbo tribe in Nigeria deals with curses as follows: When there is a suspicion of a curse, the person consults the diviner, who first identifies the curse, then provides them with the necessary to perform the ritual that will stop the effect of the curse. For example, when a woman commits adultery, she will be afflicted if she immediately tries to sleep with her husband thereafter. She must reveal her transgression. The husband is asked to offer a sacrifice to appease the ancestor. However, if the husband is aware of her transgression, and conceals it, as soon as he eats the food cooked by the wife, he will die.

Among the Igbo of Nigeria, people use an *Ikwuala*, a traditional priest, to remove the curse. This rite is made through the help of an *Ezemuo*, the traditional healer. In the context of the same ceremonies in colorful rituals, people call upon themselves blessings and revoke the curse upon the victim. At all invocations of the *Ikwala* or the *Ezemuo*, the people will respond with: “ISE”, which means “*And so shall it be.*”

The Igbo also practice a ceremony to expel evil spirits, a kind of exorcism that is "driving away" to avoid causing harm. It is called “*ichupu mmuo ogor nile*” among the Igbo people, expelling all wicked spirits responsible for a person’s suffering. This will need the assistance of a religious professional. When a spirit of affliction is identified, it must be abandoned and sent "where it belongs," that is, back to its natural environment (usually the evil forest). It is chastised, often with foul words, to demonstrate that it is not welcome in the region (Magesa 1987: 89).

6.5.3. e. The *Miti* or *Muti* ritual of purification among the Zulu in South Africa

Among the Zulu people of South Africa, dealing with issues such as curses consists of either *muties* or *ilati*. The *Muties* is a rite of cleansing and purification by using herbs, and slaughtering animals. In the case of those who are slaughtering, they use the blood and the animal's internal organs.

As for the *ilati*, they are intended to light different-coloured candles corresponding to grandparents and children who had died, in order to implore their support. This is accompanied by various prayers to the ancestors, as the Zulu people believe that ancestors make their descendants suffer when the person neglects them. For example, treating the possessions of the ancestors with disdain, or refusing to respect family traditions, or failing to perform ritual ceremonies in memory of the ancestors, can all lead to repercussions, curses, misfortunes, or bad luck. Hence, the ancestors play a powerful role in the performance of the cleansing of the individual or the community.

Following the above examples, it can be argued that performing cleansing ceremonies and rites are commonly presided over by diviners, priests, medicine men/women, or ritual elders, and is one of the techniques used to cope with curses and its consequences. They generally entail animal sacrifice (such as chickens, bulls, goats, or lambs), the use of blood, and occasionally the use of the animal's internal organs, or ceremonies using ritual powders. Sprinkling or drinking the blood or any other liquid, or performing other symbols of cleansing, are all key components of the rituals for eradicating curses and the subsequent calamities. These might be compared to the animal sacrifices that the Jews offered in atonement for their past wrongdoings. As part of the purification ceremony, prayers, litanies, ritual words, incantations, or other words are articulated. Reconciliatory acts and peace settlements may be performed as part of a new beginning. Mbiti (1969: 79) referred to these as "communal" or "formal" measures which aim to provide therapy. All these examples from the various African cultures point to the fact that curses can be broken through reparations, sacrifices, and the help of the traditional priest. Also, the person who placed the curse can release the victim(s) from their afflictions.

However, if the affliction continues, alternative causes are investigated. In the spiritual realm, if religious experts determine that the ancestors are the source of the suffering, morality requires that they be appeased. Those involved are required to make the appropriate offerings and sacrifices to appease the gods and the ancestors, as explained above. The living must fulfil

their obligations to their forebears, as this is the only way for the cosmos to be in order. Peace is a key component of order, and peace is manifested via reciprocity (Magesa, 1987). If human beings do not follow the idea of commensality when it comes to their forefathers, they will ruin this peace.

6.5.4. Prayer in ATRs as a way of dealing with serious issues

It should not appear as if prayer was irrelevant or non-existent in ATRs. Prayer is the most popular form of worship in Africa (Adeyemo, 1979:35). Prayer is most implored when life is threatened or weakened by curses, both in the private and public spheres. Prayer is used to restore completeness and harmony in one's life. The African prayer is wide-ranging, praying that curses and all forms of evil be removed, and that all that was good be restored. Nothing less than this satisfies the religious mentality of the African. It is worth noting that the act of praying itself highlights the importance of interconnectedness in the African moral outlook. It recognises the reciprocal relationship of the visible and invisible worlds. In prayer, Africans recognise that on certain occasions, human existence and the world's order and peace are dependent on forces more significant than human strength. This is especially true when mankind has done something immoral or has life threatening characteristics. Praying places an individual or a society into the hands of unseen and mysterious powers, with the goal of overcoming or assuaging their wrath.

If the community suffered great disasters like diseases, drought, devastating flooding, famine, or locust invasion, there was a unique collective atonement. In many African civilizations, asking God's intervention in certain situations was common. The most popular technique was community sacrifice, which included a confession of people's wrongdoings (sin) and a prayer for God's pardon. Individuals alone asking for God's forgiveness of sin does not appear to have been a frequent practice, according to Mbiti (1969: 120), yet in certain situations, individuals might beg God to cleanse them before approaching Him or speaking to Him. Africans must re-appropriate their African custom of prayer to resolve their difficult situations, particularly regarding the issue of curses dealt with in this study

6.6.0. Christian traditions and Ways of eradicating a Curse

As in African traditional religions, Christianity also has ways of abolishing curses. The participants believe that in Christianity, when curses plague one, the person appeals to the priest, pastor, or church leader for prayers of deliverance. They believe that they can overcome

the power of the curse through confession, counselling, prayers, fasting, invocation of the Holy Spirit, and by praying the rosary.

6.6.1. Spiritual direction / Counselling to deal with Curses

When faced with disorder, most Christians swiftly turn to their priest, pastor or a reliable person in the Faith to confide in. This is known as spiritual direction or counselling. Spiritual direction is an early ministry using the Catholic principles and the Catholic content of Faith. A spiritual director is a person whom one can confide in and trust. Their role is to advise, correct, encourage, challenge, and pray for us to help us live a happy life in our chosen vocation. Christians who go through hardships and other forms of handicap, emotionally, financially, and other hindrances, usually approach the priest or their pastor to seek help. As observed above, they usually suspect themselves as victims of generational curses, evil omens, or bewitchment.

The healing process often involves, first and foremost, listening skills on the part of the pastor/priest or any other spiritual leader. The second step consists of accessing and determining the problem, and assist the victim in understanding the situation from the perspective of faith. The third step is an attempt at finding solutions, which encompass repentance, accepting or acknowledging one's personal involvement in sin, and renunciation. In some cases, the victim is required to use specific prayers, depending on the nature of the identified problem. Here, the victim(s) need is to break every ancestral curse that may hinder the family's progress. They must reject the previous agreement and choose to walk in the light of God (Proverbs 14:2). There is a need for spiritual dialogue [prayer] to call upon the most powerful Power [God] to cast out the evil in the Land.

6.6.2. Submission to the Lordship of Christ

The Bible acknowledges that Jesus is above all things and all powers. "Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18). St Paul speaks of Jesus' Lordship when he says: "*That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And*" that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10–11 KJV). Anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord is set free. "*So, if the Son of man sets you free, you are truly free*" (Jn 8:36). The problem of curses is that cloud of darkness that causes blockages, hindrances, chronic health and mental health issues, poverty, poor relationships,

estrangements, being accident prone, continuous rejections and misfortunes. On the other hand, the acceptance of the Lordship of Christ leads to a new creation, as claimed by St Paul: *“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”* (2Cor 5:17). The aim of the priest is to help the victim enter this new dynamics of a new creation, new mindset, new visions, new perspectives and a new existence. The prophet Isaiah advised: *“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me.”* (Isaiah 46:9)

6.6.3. Embracing Prayer and the Authority of Jesus

6.6.3. a. Using the authority and power of Jesus

Jesus calls his disciples to follow him and embrace a life of prayer, and they will receive whatever they ask. *“If you ask Me for anything in My name, I will do it.”* (Jn 14:14). The believer is encouraged to embrace this calling and promise of Jesus with faith to escape from any situation in which they might find themselves. Moreover, Jesus sent his disciples with his authority and power. The evangelist Luke tells us: *“When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases”* (Luke 9:1). *“Power and authority — δυναμιν και εξουσιαν”* from the Greek are divine and extraordinary manifestation of God’s power. These two words accurately imply the ability to do miracles at this juncture. The power entrusted to Christians as followers of Jesus, indicate the power and mandate to subdue the devil and all his angels. The power of the curse cannot resist such divine authority.

6.6.3. b. Prayer and Exorcism¹⁰

Dealing with the problem of curses in Christianity requires fervent prayers. Christ at Calvary, has broken every curse on the Cross. The writer of Hebrews 2:5-9 emphasises that man does not yet have sovereignty, implying that this is due to sin. In His self-sacrifice, Jesus took the curse of sin upon Himself, and because of His sacrifice, "man's ultimate sovereignty over the earth is assured." Such a representation presupposes that the preposition has a substitutionary significance (MacLeod, 1989:425). Scholars like Lührmann (1974:434), Westcott (1984:47), and Riesenfeld (1972:510), to mention but a few, advocate a "representative sense" like ("for

¹⁰ The term ‘exorcism’ according to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, refers to the practice (sometimes by ritual) in which demons or evil spirits are expelled from persons or objects, and sets them free.

the sake of,"). In the same manner that the Old Testament priests sacrificed "for" the people, Jesus sacrificed Himself in death "for the sake of men" Mvunabandi (2008). One must therefore turn in prayer to the one who died a death of curse on the Cross, so that He can redeem us from the curse. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree" (Galatians 3:13). Jesus reassures his followers that he will solve all their problems if they turn to him in confidence. "*And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it*". (Jn 14:1-13-14).

The Catholic rite of exorcism is a powerful prayer of deliverance and breaking the curse. According to (Stravinskias, 1991:385), the practice of exorcism,

... is the ministry of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and of the Church that find this great Jewish eschatological expectation fulfilled with force (*Mk 1:21-28; Mt 28:28-34; Lk4:331-37*). With Jesus' ministry Satan's kingdom is coming to an end (*Mk3:26-27*). The world once completely and utterly in bondage to evil forces hostile to God and human life, is being reclaimed by God's Son.

Exorcism is the manifestation of God's Sovereign rule and authority to defeat all holds which sin, illness, evil, and eventually the Devil have on people originally "created in God's image and likeness of God" (*Gen 1:27*) in order to live an abundant and fruitful life. With the rite of exorcism and breaking of curses, all consequences of curses are defeated.

6.6.3. c. The Sacraments as Powerful tools

In the Catholic Church, there are seven sacraments (Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Anointing of the sick, Penance, Matrimony, and Priesthood), which are the signs Christ instituted to continue his healing, merciful and loving presence among us. "*Surely, he said, I will be with you till the end of the age*" (*Mt 28: 20*). The sacrament of reconciliation is seen as a powerful weapon in overcoming the problem of curses. This resonates with the principle of restitution, where a penitent is expected to return stolen good or items to the owner after confessing such theft to the priest. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the sacrament of reconciliation is aimed at interior repentance, which is a complete life reorientation, a cessation of sin, a turning away from evil, a return, a heartfelt conversion to God, and a repugnance for the destructive activities man has committed. At the same time, it comprises the desire and determination to make a positive change in one's life, with faith in God's mercy and reliance on his Grace. This heartfelt conversion is accompanied by a

beneficial pain and melancholy known to the Fathers as *animi cruciatus* (spiritual suffering) and *compunctio cordis* (repentance of heart) (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2015: No. 1431). The sacrament's power resides in the fact that it does not judge anyone, irrespective of what the person has done. Pope Francis encourages people to love and cherish the sacrament of reconciliation: “the confessional is not a torture chamber, but the place in which the Lord’s mercy motivates us to do better”¹¹ This sacrament is only administered by a validly ordained priest in the context of the Catholic Church.

6.6.3. d. The Role of the Priest

The role of the priest, pastor, or church leaders in eliminating curses is profoundly emphasised in the process of healing, particularly his listening skills and his capacity to empathize with the victim. He is the representative of Jesus Christ (*Altar Christi*), the High Priest who sacrificed himself for the salvation of all mankind. This underscores the declaration in Hebrews 5: 1-4:

Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. And no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was.

The priest, in the case of the Catholic Church, has to offer the sacrifice of the Holy Mass for the salvation of the penitent (the cursed), while the prayers of deliverance and intercessory prayers are also said to break curses. Sacramentals¹² like holy water, anointing oil, blessed salt, the rosary, scapulars, and candles are used to ward off evil and restore orderliness in the person’s social existence.

Dealing with curses and its consequences depends on the nature of the curse, and differs from culture to culture. According to Christian theology, God had to send His only Son, Jesus Christ,

¹¹ Interview with Pope Francis by Fr Antonio Spadaro, September 2013

¹² Sacramentals “are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church. By them, men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1667).

into the world to liberate it from the power of sin and death (*Jn3:16ff.*). Confession of wrongdoing and faith in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, are powerful ways to overcome evil. In other words, Isaiah tells us that, by his wounds and stripes, we are healed and saved” (cf Isaiah 53: 5).

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.0. Introduction

This chapter summarises the assessments and analyses presented in Chapters one through to six. This chapter draws the study together and establishes the groundwork for future research. It also includes important recommendations as to how African Catholics can deal with the problem of curses as well as proposals for further research. The dissertation is primarily concerned with evaluating the problem of curses in both the Judeo-Christian and African Traditional Religions; the relevance of this concept to the social existence of the African parishioners of St Peter's; and how to deal with the problem of this belief in the power of curses between the Judeo-Christian and ATRs. Specifically, using phenomenology as a theoretical framework, the Braun and Clark six steps are followed to analyse the findings. The study questions in consonance with the phenomenon of curses were matured through the existential challenges besetting the African worshipers of St Peter's Catholic parish. The chapter will discuss the following: the consolidation of the findings, an attempt to reconcile both traditions, the conclusion, and the recommendations.

7.1. Summary of the Findings

This study attempted to understand the parishioners' understanding of curses and the phenomenon of curses, as it related to African religions and their Christian faith. It was discovered that the fear of curses and cursing was widespread in most African societies. Curse and cursing phobia lie at the root of most African societies' social, economic, and existential problems. It was discovered that for most participants, all occurrences had supernatural causes in the primal worldview. The sacred and secular worlds are inextricably linked. Findings indicated that among the African Christians of St Peter's Parish, there was an explicit intervention of the supernatural in everyday activities.

Most participants believed in curses and their impact on human activities. They believed that when one is under a curse, he/she cannot make much financial, social, or material progress. Persons under a curse may find it difficult or impossible to find employment, marry, have children, or enjoy physical well-being. Extreme poverty in a family is often ascribed to the problem of curses. They also believed that the effects of a curse can last for a long time and its impact disastrous, if nothing is done to deal with it. Curses can be the consequences of personal

damaging behaviours or evil committed by a person's ancestors, and this leads to the notion of generational curses. Participants also agreed that curses need to be broken otherwise, this can lead to generational curses. Some families of the participants also believe in the concept of the inherited curse. The phenomenon of ancestral/generational curses in the African/Christian worldviews were discussed in the study.

Further, participants were clear and consistent about what constituted a curse and suggested how to break free from it. The parishioners' understanding of curses was rooted in their cultural backgrounds and existential experiences of the phenomenon. Another point expressed by the participants in their perception of curses is the motive for cursing. Curses can be the result of disobedience, sin, desecrating the holy, sins of the fathers, one's negligence, envy, hate, greed, jealousy, the use of sorcery, supernatural strife, or the urge for vengeance. Sometimes, curses are placed on others out of anger or ignorance. In most African cultures, names can be a source of blessing or a curse to a child.

Sin or disobedience to God and the ancestors is the primary driving force for curses. There are sanctions in African societies that are regarded as the accepted norm of social and religious behaviour on the part of individuals and the community. A breach of the sanctions, or a refusal to follow them, is sin and earns the wrath of the Deity and His servants. As a result, sin is defined as acting in opposition to the Deity's will and directives. Any immoral activity, ritual errors, transgressions against God or man, violation of the covenant, taboo-breaking, and doing anything considered vile and polluted are all included. Sin, for participants discussed in isolation, is connected to God and man.

Moreover, the participants believed curses can be aimed at individuals or families by envious or evil people, witches, and wizards. This resonates with the opinion of scholars such as Kalu (2008) Mbiti (2002) and Edmiston (2010). In the families of most participants, there is a strong belief in the efficacy and potency of the phenomenon of the curse. Along with the idea of curses is the existence of witches and wizards who place curses on people to hinder their progress. Likewise, most interviewees held a very strong view of the consequences of curses. Both their Christian and traditional belief systems underscore this position. Some believed that hardship and long-suffering are the consequences of curses in one's life. However, there are parishioners who believed that sufferings and misfortunes in a person's life may not necessarily be associated with the impact of a curse. For example, a student who, instead of studying for an

exam, prefers to socialise with friends, cannot blame a curse or someone else for their misfortune in failing the exam. This resonates with the principle of freedom and responsibility.

Participants were unanimous on what constituted a curse in both ATRs and the biblical context. Some went as far as giving examples to support their positions. Most African cultures abhor adultery, and the perpetrators, especially women, suffer severe consequences. This is because of the patriarchal nature of most African cultures. Likewise, the values of respect for the elderly are treasured in most African societies. This echoes the dictates of the Christian Bible: *'Honour your father and your mother'* (Exodus 20:12), and it says, *'Every person must respect his mother and his father'* (Leviticus 19:3). This shows a correlation between the two belief systems.

While the notion of curses is closely related in both religions, some participants still believe they can be distinguishable. In ATRs, when the source of a curse is discovered, this often leads to further acrimony between the curser and the accursed. This is particularly the case when people are made to suffer for matters, they know little about. In Christianity, however, repentance for one's actions leads to forgiveness, either way. The blood of Jesus is seen as remedying all manner of calamities associated with barrenness, unemployment, sickness, sorcery, witchcraft, and gender boundaries among the African Catholics of St Peter's Parish.

Similarly, participants had divergent views on the impact of curses. While some subscribed to the idea that there is empirical evidence to support this, others believed that as Christians redeemed by Christ, curses had no power over them. The latter group believed they can only be cursed when they sin against God or profane against him. Most participants, however, believed that the impact of curses is seen in the parishioners' daily lives in the form of hardships, recurrent failures, and barrenness, which are all linked to dark powers. Some participants believed that curses have a visible impact on the lives of the African Christians of St. Peters. They maintain that some parishioners are suffering from barrenness, unsuccessful applications, unprofitable jobs, unfulfilled visions, repetitive sickness and hardships.

Participants were unanimous in their belief in the role of curses in their Christian belief system. They believed that curses played a role in their lives as Christians. They submit that even their conversion to Christianity does not prevent them from cursing and being cursed. Even in the Bible, God cursed his people when they disobeyed him and when they repented of their sins, they received forgiveness and blessing. Similarly, the participants believe that when they obey the laws and commandments of God, He will reward them, but when they turn from his ways

to their wicked ways, he will punish them accordingly. With their faith in Christ and the Gospel, African Parishioners of St Peters have progressed significantly. Their primordial tendencies, however, are acknowledged to continue to affect their theologies and belief in curses. Moreover, their past and present continue to clash because of this reality. Most participants agreed on the implications of curses in the life of a Christian.

Lastly, ancestral curses, witchcraft, and evil spirits are viewed by most participants as the source of a 'bondage' to various illnesses, ailments, and aberrant behaviour, as well as the activity of Satan and his demons. Participants agreed that there were various ways one could discover if they were under a curse. Two major ways of discovering curses were identified by participants: existential experience and divination. Most of the participants in this study have divergent cultural rituals to counter the impact of curses. As in the African traditional religions, Christianity also has ways of eradicating curses. Participants believed that in ATRs, they used rites of cleansing and purification by either the traditional priest or the elders. They also used the African way of prayer, which encompasses everything and every domain of life. In Christianity, when curses plague one, the person turned to the priest, pastor, or church leader for prayers of deliverance. They believed that they can overcome the power of curses through confession, counselling, prayers, fasting, invocation of the Holy Spirit, and by praying the rosary. The next section will attempt to reconcile both Judeo-Christianity and the ATR.

7.2. Attempt of reconciliation Judeo-Christian and ATRs worldview

This investigation shows that Christianity and the African Traditional Religions agree on some key issues relating to the curse phenomenon. They regard curses as any attempt to use an invocation or utterance to hurt others. Participants agree curses are aimed at the total annihilation and destruction of the target, that is, the human person or the object. In keeping with the views of Rugwiji (2018) and Chaffart (2016), participants also agree that the impact and manifestation of curses can lead to (or are evident in) chronic diseases, recurrent accidents or injuries, barrenness, chronic strife, repetitive business failures, persistent suffering, premature deaths, recurrent cases of suicide in the same family, repetitive miscarriages, and persistent financial difficulties, among others.

It is suggested that an inculturation of the cleansing and purification done in the ATRs and the various prayer sessions are also done in Christianity. The Catholic Church, for example, uses blessed water in the rite of Baptism and in most of the exorcism prayer sessions.

Further, participants agree that in both religions, cursing is often executed by word of mouth. The two religions emphasised the power of the spoken word, as discussed earlier. Mbiti (2002) underscores the power of the spoken words when he notes that words have mystical power. He notes that words of parents spoken to a child in anger can ruin the child. Likewise, when the words of a parent are spoken in blessing to a child, it has the power to correct the child's path. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2015: No. 460), "The Word [Jesus, God the Son] became flesh to make us *"partakers of the divine nature ...* Equally, it was through the words of mouth that God cursed the serpent in Genesis 3: 14-15, and Adam and Eve received suffering as the consequences of their disobedience. The Gospel of John opens with:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John1:1-5). The word is personified, and it is the power through which God created all things: "*Let there be light, and there was light* (Gen1:3).

It is suggested that parishes place more emphasis on the creative and healing power of the word through Bible studies, liturgies, and prayer sessions. Some inculturation can be done. For example, since the Catholic Church always uses the spoken word during the liturgy, prayer sessions, or even devotion, this could be done in the same way and with the same consideration that is well know from the cultural background, that is, the word as the performative. During the traditional rite of cleansing, the word of God that has direct link with deliverance and healing, such as the psalms (Psalms 7; 12; 22; 23; 27; 32; 35; 38; 42; 44; 68; 85; 91; 92; 104; 109; 119; 143) could be used. Some scriptures such as the letter to the Ephesians 6:1-11; John1:1-18; Luke 4:18-19; Luke 10:18-19; Colossians 2:15; Exodus 14:13-14; 2Corinthians 10:4-5; Isaiah 10:27; Isaiah 43:2; Isaiah 54:17; Zephaniah 3:17; Joel 2:11) Equally, the Gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John could be selected appropriately for such a gathering.

Lastly, the conciliation of both religions on the power of the spoken word could serve as a pedagogy in the use of words. Both religions forbid swearing at people in the name of anything, because it could harm them psychologically or even physically. The way words are used should be carefully considered and monitored.

The two religions also agree on other forms of cursing or actions/inactions that can lead to curses. These include shedding innocent human blood (refer to Cain and Abel in the Bible, Genesis Chapter 4, where God cursed Cain for killing his brother Abel). On the dangers of shedding innocent blood in ATRs, the story of Okonkwo and Ikemefuna in the novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe is pertinent. *Ogbuefi Ezeudu told Okonkwo to take no part in the killing of Ikemefuna since the boy calls him "father." When Okonkwo failed to heed this advice, calamities befell him.* In both religions, it is believed that the blood of the innocent cries for vengeance against the murderer(s). Both religions, in their teaching on the sacredness of life and the formal interdict to destroy life, could provide a serious moral answer to the excess killing happening in our society today. *"Cursed is anyone who kills their neighbor secretly." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" (Deut 27:24).*

Other acts that can lead to curses in both religions include wrongdoing/sin, abomination, disobedience, disrespecting parents, or elders, killing, and desecrating holy places/objects. Both religions underscore the importance of respecting parents and the elderly. In Exodus 20:2, the Bible declares, *"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."* This commandment comes with a blessing, and the same applies to most African customs and traditions: a child who honours his/her parents will receive a blessing. In Africa, the elder deserves more respect because of his wisdom and what he has witnessed during his life. A proverb from the Ewondo tribe of Cameroon reads: *"What an elder saw while sitting, a youth could not see it standing."* This connection of views on respect due to elders and authority should be re-instated in the various plate forms of religious and traditional education. Religious and traditional education on the power of curse on those who belittle parents, elders, and instituted authority must become a counterweight to the deviances currently witnessed in societies. Children are insulting and killing parents; they disrespect teachers and use weapons against them in the schools; they have no sense of respect for authority, sacredness, and religious leaders any longer. This topic on the social impact of curses is very real with many ramifications, and requires urgent and serious attention.

7.3. Conclusion

This study interrogated the sociological impact of curses among the parishioners of St Peter's parish in Durban. It presented a comparative analysis of the Judeo-Christian and African traditional religious perspectives. The paucity of scholarly contributions on the phenomenon of curses from Christian and ATRs standpoints made this investigation particularly important

and relevant. This study aligns with Whybray (2000: 5), who argued, “The dark side of God is a subject that has received astonishingly little attention from OT scholars...” African theologians (Upkong, 1995) who argued for the inclusion of Africans in the Bible, however, did not include curse narratives as reflected in the biblical text (Baumgarten, 1975). In this discussion, relevant contributions by African biblical scholars and African Christians were examined.

This investigation has demonstrated that the phenomenon of curses in African perspectives is a poorly studied and discussed topic. Many who try cannot help but connect African traditions on the origins of evil and death to the biblical narrative of the Fall. These African myths about the origins of sin and curse must be investigated rather than imposing an unjustified uniformity to match the Christian doctrine on the origins of sin and curses. Although much literature on African traditional religions does not specifically address the phenomenon of curses, this is perhaps balanced by the usage and discussion of related notions such as death, misfortune, disease, sorcery, witchcraft, evil, and magic. For this reason, the problem of curses is a reality in African traditional religions, which may differ significantly from Western understanding.

Most civilization on the planet have a crippling dread of curses. In this study, it was discovered that the phobia of witchcraft dominates and shapes the activities of people's daily lives in traditional African communities. The need to know what causes every human misery and what should be done about it prolongs rather than resolves human disputes. The concerns of how to accept blessings and how to combat curses are evaluated from a biblical and ATRs viewpoint. A new level of understanding of life's challenges is proposed here, as suffering or failures should not necessarily be directly connected to a curse.

The problem raised in this research was the social impact of curses among Africans who were already Catholic Christians. This implied that although Africans in their traditional religions might not perceive God as a triune God as in Christianity, they were aware of a God who always related with them in times of difficulties. The main challenge was to shift from the concept of a distant God, even when they seemed to know where He resides, to a close and approachable God who had entered into the world through the person of Jesus Christ. “*The word was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 3:16). One needs to be aware of a God who desires a covenantal relationship with his people, so that he may become a provider of blessings and a defender to them. David understood this when he declared: “*You are my defender and protector; I put my hope in your promise.*” A sound covenantal connection with the Supreme

Deity, whether horizontal or vertical, brings about benefits, confidence and hope, giving curses a new dimension. The Sovereign God is in charge, and can do all things, heal all sickness, thanks to Jesus Christ, the Son of God who cleansed the lepers, opened the eyes of the blind, and raised the Dead. There is no better way to conclude this study, than by considering the entire phenomenon in the words of Evans (2000:401):

NT teaching echoes the OT view of blessing and cursing as relational. The ultimate and only important blessing is that of belonging to God, being part of his family. The only real curse is being out of relationship with God, outside of the community of blessing. In temporal contexts both blessings and curses can be described in material terms, but their material dimension is secondary. Although bad things can and do happen to those who belong to the kingdom, those who are part of God's people cannot be under the curse; rather they are blessed.

7.4 a. Recommendations

Examining sin and God's love

The concept of curses should be explored in conjunction with the notion of God's mercy. The final canon in the code of Canon Law recognises mercy and salvation of souls as the ultimate purpose of the Canon Law (Canon 1747). It should be understood that God is ultimately good and merciful and a curse cannot be a permanent condition.

7.4 b. Recommendations for Further studies

1. In order to successfully manage the fear of malevolent forces, and in this instance, the dread of curses, religions scholars and theologians should conduct extensive research on the subject. This study's biblical knowledge of the meaning of curses and blessings should be developed and deepened.
2. Verifying the correlation of the spiritual with the physical is beyond the purview of this investigation. However, it is recommended for further studies. It is critical, according to Kant, to always differentiate between the different worlds of phenomena and noumena. Studies like this will enrich scholarship on African religions and cultures told from the African perspective.
3. It is also note that Christian teaching and the use of the terms 'sin' and 'curse' in many African languages are confusing and inconsistent. The missionaries often transferred the terms 'sin' and 'curse' into the African setting without considering language and

different Christian traditions. It is, therefore, imperative for scholars to investigate on a deeper level to unravel an Afrocentric interpretation of these phenomena.

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Appendix I: Gatekeeper's Permit



ST PETER'S CATHOLIC PARISH

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online2269342@telkomsa.net Tel. 031 337 5676
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13th November 2018

Ms. Nonhlanhla HLope
Postgraduate Officer School of Religion and Philosophy
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban, South Africa

GATE KEEPER'S PERMIT: REV. GEORGES ROGER BIDZOGO SAC

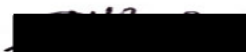
I write in connection with the requirement of your university, requesting permission to be granted before any fieldwork may be undertaken by your students. Rev. Fr Georges Roger Bidzogo SAC, ID. N0 7805185866188, Student Registration No. 217071323, in Religion and Philosophy Studies, has approached our institution with your letter of admission to Masters of Arts in Religion and Social Transformation, requesting access to our premises to interview some of the African parishioners of St Peters Parish, in Durban, in order to augment his research.

I hereby wish to inform you that the application has been approved. Rev. Fr Georges Roger Bidzogo SAC is most welcome to conduct interviews on the topic:

“The sociological impact of Curses among the parishioners of St Peter’s Parish, Durban: A Comparative analysis of the Judeo-Christian and African Traditional Religious perspectives” at his convenience.

I sincerely thank you and the University of KwaZulu-Natal for your professionalism and pray the Almighty God to bless Africans with academic excellence which will have an impact on our future liberation as a Continent.

Yours faithfully



Mr. Luke Emmanuel Obiano
Parish Pastoral Chairperson.

Appendix II: Ethical Clearance

18 April 2021

Rev Georges Roger Bidzogo (217071323)
School of Rel Phil & Classics
Howard College

Dear Rev Bidzogo,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002617/2021

Project title: The sociological impact of curses among the Parishioners of St Peter's Parish, Durban: A Comparative Analysis of the Judeo-Christian and African Traditional Religious Perspectives

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 08 March 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 18 April 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/SCHEDULE

The researcher will hold in-depth, one-on-one interviews (IDIs) with key informants (KIs) from the African population of St Peters Catholic Church, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Durban. Parishioners who participate in the personal interviews will be carefully selected. Careful attention will be paid to the responses of the participants so that new areas of inquiry may be identified that are directly related to the phenomenon being studied. Follow-up questions will be asked by the interviewer as the need arises. This will help to generate the primary data for the study. Therefore, the following questions will guide the interview sessions:

KEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS BASED ON THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To identify what constitutes a curse to parishioners.
 - a. What is your understanding of a curse?
 - b. What do families think about curses?
 - c. What constitutes a curse for you as a parishioner?

2. To evaluate the parishioners understanding of curses within the ATRs and biblical contexts.
 - a. How do you as a parishioner understand curses in ATRs and in a biblical context?
 - b. Do you see any similarities or dissimilarities between the ATR and the biblical understanding of the curses? If so, please explain.
 - c. In your culture, what constitutes a curse?
 - d. How does one become cursed?

3. To understand the impact of curses on parishioners.
 - a. Do curses play a role in your Christian belief?
 - b. What are the manifestations and impact of curses on the life of a Christian?
 - c. Does your cultural belief have any correlation to your Christian worldview on curse?
 - d. In your opinion, do curses impact directly on individuals, families and/or communities?

4. To assess how parishioners manage the impact of curses.
 - a. How do people discover that they are cursed?
 - b. How does one eliminate curses in your culture?
 - c. How do you eliminate a curse in your Christian tradition?
 - d. Do you know of any curses and ways of cursing in your culture?