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**THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN ACTS
(1:12-5:42) AND “MALKIA WA AMANI”
A SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN MUKURU-
KAYABA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

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DEDICATION

This work is heartily dedicated to all members of Team II (2004-2005) of the Missionaries of Africa formation house. They are:

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Bonaventure Mwenda

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Hillaire Guinko

Pierre Lukusa,

Remi Vande Walle

I also dedicate this work to my parents Mr. Lino Tubis and Mrs. Remedios Bargasa and to all my brothers and sisters together with their beloved spouses and children.


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Hoping that I have not forgotten anybody, I finish by saying thanks to the Almighty for his inspiration that helped me work out this essay with lots of enthusiasm. To all people who have contributed to the realisation of this work in one-way or another, I thank you all.

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay (thesis) is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed: 

Name of Student: Walter Bargasa Tubis

Date: 16/11/04

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed: 

Name of Supervisor: Fr. George Kocholickal, S.D.B.; S.T.L., S.T.D.

Date: 16/11/04

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Every Christian community somehow reflects the first community of Acts. We believe it is also true on the case of “Malkia wa Amani” a small Christian community in Mukuru-Kayaba. Our main objective in this study is to establish the biblical foundation of small Christian communities by comparing the first Christian community in Acts 1:12-5:42 (esp. 2:42-47 and 4:32-5:11) and “Malkia wa Amani”. Another objective would be, for us to be aware that the early Christian community can serve as an example or a model to any small Christian community today. To reach these objectives, we will, first of all, identify the characteristics of the first Christian community, highlighting its positive and negative elements. As we shall see, the first Christian community being a model community had its own strengths and weaknesses. Its strength is manifested by praying together, sharing everything in common, etc. On the other hand, mistrust and misconduct like the fraud of Ananias and Saphira clearly signify a weakness within the community.

Like the first Christian community, “Malkia wa Amani” too has its own strengths and weaknesses. Its strength lies on the fact that this community prays together and also shares the Word of God to each other. Malkia wa Amani has several weaknesses, one of them being, lack of basic biblical knowledge on the part of some members.

In this paper, we will start off, in Chapter I, by writing an overview of the biblical foundation of small Christian communities taking into consideration the Christian communities founded by Paul in the New Testament. We will then proceed

by identifying and analysing the characteristics of the first Christian community pointing out its positive and negative elements.

In Chapter II, we will first of all give an overview of the origin and foundation of small Christian communities, in the world, in AMECEA region and finally in Kenya. From here we will go down to “Malkia wa Amani,” A Small Christian Community in Mukuru-Kayaba. We will first of all go through its historical background. After which we will explain its characteristics taking into full consideration its positive and negative elements. Then we will see how “Malkia wa Amani can serve as an example for other SCCs today.

In Chapter III, we will do the comparative study itself. Here we will evaluate “Malkia wa Amani” in the light of the First Christian Community in Acts (1:12-5:42). In this Chapter, we will view the similarities and differences between this two communities. As a pastoral application, we will present how the First Christian Community in Acts can serve as an example for “Malkia wa Amani” and other SCCs today.

Before we continue, let us note few words that we are going to encounter rather frequently below. First, “Malkia wa Amani” are Swahili words meaning “Queen of Peace.” Second, AMECEA, which stands for Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa. Third, AFER, which means African Ecclesiastical Review. We interchangeably use early Christian community, Jerusalem community and first Christian community. They all refer to one and the same community in Acts (1:12-5:52).

CHAPTER I: The First Christian Community in Acts (1:12-5:42)

1. Introduction

Until the election of Matthias (Acts 1:15-26), the early Christian community was composed only of the Eleven Apostles together with some of his disciples who were convinced in faith that the crucified Jesus, who died and was risen from the dead was indeed the Messiah. In the beginning, in spite of their conviction about Jesus' Lordship, the disciples hid themselves for "fear of the Jews" (John 20:19). This fear, however, went away as soon as they received power from the Holy Spirit, that is, at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13).

In this chapter, we shall, first of all, identify the characteristics of the First Christian Community, highlighting its positive and negative elements. The first Christian community being a model community had its own strengths and weaknesses. Its strength lied on the fact that they lived a life of prayer, sharing (e.g. material possessions, breaking of bread, etc.), and lived a marvellously united life. The life of this community, however, was not all that sweet. They had to face challenges. They had interior as well as exterior problems that they had to deal with as a community. A clear example of an interior problem would be the fraud of Ananias and Saphira that expresses mistrust and misconduct within the community. An example of an exterior problem, on the other hand, would be the persecution that the whole community had to endure both from authorities and from those who did not believe what they as disciples confessed, that is, Jesus is the Messiah.

This establishment of the positive and negative elements of the first Christian community will hopefully lead us also to make a reasonable comparison between the

first Christian community and 'Malkia wa Amani' a small Christian community in Mukuru-Kayaba. In this chapter, therefore, we are not doing either exegesis or detailed analysis of the text. Rather we are establishing some elements that could allow us to compare the first Christian community and 'Malkia wa Amani,' that we will see in chapter III.

2. The New Testament Foundation of Christian Community: An Overview

Small Christian communities can be traced back to God himself as being their origin and foundation. This we say because "God is not a lonely being...He is a community of three persons..."¹ James O'Halloran says "God ... is community. From all eternity it has been so".² In his book *Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Companion*, O'Halloran points out that the founder of small Christian communities was Jesus Christ himself.³ Small Christian communities are "as old as the gospel".⁴ When Jesus was preaching the Good News, he was not alone, he had the Twelve apostles with him together with the other disciples. The origin of small communities, therefore, is "the origin of the Church itself."⁵ They have their "origins in the itinerant community that trod the dusty roads of Palestine with Jesus, in the gathering of the early Christians which formed in Jerusalem after the first Pentecost... (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37), and in all those groups that sprang up in the

¹ *Small Christian Communities: From the Series Training for Community Ministries*, No. 19 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992), p. 4.

² JAMES O'HALLORAN, *Signs of Hope: Developing Small Christian Communities* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 26.

³ JAMES O'HALLORAN, *Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Companion* (Dublin: The Columba Press -- New York: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 13.

⁴ JAMES O'HALLORAN, *SCCs: A Pastoral*, p. 13.

⁵ RODRIGO MEJIA, *The Church in the Neighbourhood* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications – Africa, 1990), p. 12.

gentile world largely as a result of Paul's work."⁶ There are Christian communities founded explicitly by Paul and other Apostles after Jesus' death and especially after Pentecost. The *Jerusalem* or the first Christian community, for example, was founded by the Apostles (Luke 24:52-53; Acts 1:12-5:52, etc.). As a result of Paul's work we can find among the early Christian communities, the communities of *Ephesus* (Acts 18:19-28; 19:1-41, etc., Eph 1:1-12, etc.), of *Philippi* (Acts 16:11-24; Phil 1:3-14; 1 Thess 2:2), of *Corinth* (Acts 18:1-11; 1 Cor. 1:10-31, etc.), and of *Antioch* (Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3, etc., and Gal 2:11).⁷ It is in Antioch that Jesus' disciples are "first called Christians" (Χριστιανους) (Acts 11:26). Christian communities came into being "after Jesus' ministry, his death and the events of the resurrection".⁸ The Christian communities were led by the Twelve Apostles who are the core of the people that is to be constituted and empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

3. Characteristics of the First Christian Community (Acts 1:12-5:42)

3.1 Positive Elements

Here are some characteristics of the first Christian or Jerusalem community. First of all, the first Christian community followed the apostles' teaching (*Didache*) (Acts 2:42). Secondly, they lived in fellowship (κοινωνία) with each other (2:42; 44-45). Thirdly, they broke bread together (2:42; 46-47). Finally, they prayed together (2:42d; 46a; 47a; 15:12).

⁶ JAMES O'HALLORAN, *SCCs: A Pastoral*, p. 13.

⁷ For a more comprehensive list of biblical references, see: O'Halloran, *SCCs: A Pastoral*, p. 13.

⁸ MARTIN HENGEL, JOHN BOWDEN, trans., *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 35.

Jeremias suggest that the activities or what we call characteristics of the early Christian community listed above “describe a sequence of an early Christian service... which took place in homes.”⁹ This idea, however, has recently been challenged by some scholars. Others like Daniel Falk tend to be more sceptical by simply saying that “It is not immediately clear what is meant ... by ‘they devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.’”¹⁰ We shall examine each element in considerable detail below.

The first of the four main characteristics of the early Christian community is they followed and “devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teachings” (Acts 2:42a). These Apostles are Twelve friends and followers of Jesus who “symbolize the twelve tribes of the restored Israel”.¹¹ By ‘the Apostles’ teachings,’ we mean that “The Apostles handed on what Jesus had taught and what they believed about Jesus, and the ways in which the Old Testament had been fulfilled.”¹² The ‘teachings’ we are talking about here are “The catechetical instructions given by the apostles to complete the spiritual formation of the three thousand converts.”¹³ This probably includes the redemptive death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and his various apparitions as the Risen Lord. What the apostles have handed on through preaching,

⁹ J. JEREMIAS, J. BOWDEN – C. BURCHARD · J. REUMANN, trans., *The Prayers of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), p. 79.

¹⁰ DANIEL FALK · RICHARD BAUCKHAM, ed., *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting: Palestinian Setting, IV* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Co. Carlisle: Paternoster Press: 1995), p. 270.

¹¹ DAVID NOEL FREEDMANN, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 415.

¹² JOHN HARGREAVES, *A Guide to Acts* (London: SPCK, 1990), p. 30.

¹³ GIUSEPPE RICCIOTTI- LAURENCE BYRNE, trans., *The Acts of the Apostles: Text and Commentary* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1958), p. 76.

etc., was much “later collected, joined with the other records, and became the written Gospels which we have today”.¹⁴

The next element or characteristic of the first Christian community is “fellowship” (κοινωνία) (Acts 2:42b). This fellowship is expressed in other terms, like “were together” in 2:44a; “had all things in common” in 2:44b; and “together” in 2:46a. What is the meaning of “fellowship” in the New Testament context? According to John, the Christians were having fellowship (κοινωνία) with each other (1 John 1:3a) and with God (1 John 1:3b). In his First Letter to the Corinthians (10:16), Paul tells us that the service of the Holy communion is in fact an expression of the worshipper’s communion (κοινωνία) with God. In a more material sense, fellowship also means a collection of money or goods for people in need. It is a sign of the fellowship which the giver has with the receiver as well as with God. (Cf. 2 Cor. 9:13).

In the context of Acts 2:42b; 44a; 44b; 46a, many scholars share a similar kind of view saying that the early Christians experienced a certain form of “communism totally different from modern form of communism”.¹⁵ Fiensy for example says, “The early Christianity was closely tied to Judaism, practiced some kind of voluntary communism, had the Twelve apostles and later the Seven as leaders and ... proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah.”¹⁶ Ricciotti on his part says, the common life experienced and practiced by early Christians is “different from

¹⁴ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 30.

¹⁵ HENRY CHADWICK, ed., *Harper’s New Testament Commentaries* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 72.

¹⁶ DAVID FIENSY, *The Composition of the Jerusalem Church In the Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting: Palestinian Setting 4* (Grand Rapids : William Eerdmans Pub. Co. Carlisle : The Paternoster Press, 1995), p. 214.

communism of other times and peoples because its motives are exclusively religious and Christian".¹⁷ MacGregor and Ferris in a similar way say that "This fellowship found practical expression in experiments in Christian communism".¹⁸ What is in view here, however, is clearly "not absolute communism, but a sharing of goods for the benefit of those in need".¹⁹ We are talking here most especially of the needy members of the community. This fellowship applies "first perhaps with the apostles, but also with reference to the wider fellowship of all believers".²⁰ Fellowship expresses a bond of responsibility for one another as brothers and sisters enjoined on believers.

Talking to some friends, especially priests and those who have considerable knowledge of the Bible, I realised that some people are not comfortable with the word "voluntary communism" in the context of the early Christian community. Some of them suggested that "community of (common) wealth" is much more acceptable. Whatever term we use, however, everything comes back to the same reality. That is, fellowship *koinonia*. That the early Christian community put everything together so that those who are in need may also benefit from what the others got as a blessing from the Lord. They shared their possessions voluntarily, mainly in order to relieve the needs of their very poor members, as mentioned above. This is probably due to the idea that what they as Christians possess is not their own. Whatever they have does not belong to them but to God. It is "therefore to be

¹⁷ RICCIOTTI, *The Acts*, p. 79.

¹⁸ G.H.C. MACGREGOR - THEODORE FERRIS, *The Act of the Apostles*, in the Interpreter's Bible, 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 50.

¹⁹ MACGREGOR - FERRIS, *The Act*, p. 50.

²⁰ MACGREGOR - FERRIS, *The Acts*, p. 32.

shared”.²¹ As Robert Wall says, “The most distinctive practice of the community’s common life is the ‘sharing of goods.’”²²

The fellowship practiced by the early Christian community was expressed in several ways; first of all by meeting in the same place together (vv. 44a; 46a); second, praying together (vv. 42b; 46a; 47a); and third, by voluntarily sharing their possessions and selling what they had in order to have something to share to anyone who is in need (v. 45). It is interesting to note that “The Qumran community, who lived near the Dead Sea until around AD 70, shared their possessions with each other”.²³ This practice was probably based on the tradition of the early Christian community. Theirs, however, was “a rule in the community”.²⁴ It was not done freely and voluntarily as compared to the early Christian community’s voluntary practice of fellowship. A fellowship which is “intimately connected with sharing the body and blood of Christ.”²⁵

This practice of *koinonia* came from Jesus himself. He taught his followers to share their possessions. In Luke (12:33), he says, “Sell your possessions and give alms...” Today, Hargreaves points out, Christians “Share their thoughts and feelings with other members. They give time to one another. They listen as well as talk. They receive as well as give; they share themselves. They share the gospel with one another (and with anyone who is willing to listen)”.²⁶ Basic Christian Communities or Small Christian Communities, as we shall see in the next chapter especially with a

²¹ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 31.

²² ROBERT WALL, LEANDER KECK, ed., *The Acts of the Apostles*, in the New Interpreter’s Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 73.

²³ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 31.

²⁴ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 31.

²⁵ RICCIOTTI, *The Acts*, p. 78.

²⁶ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 31.

particular reference to “Malkia wa Amani”, a Small Christian Community in Mukuru-Kayaba are “experiencing this sort of fellowship”.²⁷

The next characteristic of the first Christian community we are going to deal with is “The breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42c; see also v. 46b). The context here shows that it is “dealing not with a common action but with one of special religious value, the more so as it immediately follows the term ‘fellowship.’”²⁸ Traditionally, “Jews often took bread and broke it and shared it as part of a fellowship meal”.²⁹ In the New Testament, Jesus ‘broke bread’ on many occasions, for example, at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19) and at Emmaus together with his unsuspecting disciples (Luke 24:30). In this verse (Acts 2:42b), Luke is probably “referring to three sorts of ‘breaking bread’: first, eating their meals together in fellowship; second, a very simple form of the service which we call the Lord’s Supper ... and third, the ‘love-feast’ or *agape*”³⁰ (referred to in Jude v. 12). “Every meal to a Jew had a religious significance, but the Christian, when he broke bread, would think especially of the Eucharist-Agape, the re-presentation of the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples, when He had broken bread to give them his broken Body...”³¹ MacGregor and Ferris suggest that breaking bread, though already having a religious significance was “still part of a nourishing meal.”³²

The early Christians “partook of food with glad and generous heart” (Acts 2:46). Joy is something one can notice about Christians. It is something very

²⁷ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 31.

²⁸ RICCIOTTI, *The Acts*, p. 77.

²⁹ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 31.

³⁰ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 31.

³¹ CHADWICK, *Acts*, p. 72.

³² MACGREGOR – FERRIS, *The Act*, p. 51.

remarkable. One cannot miss it among Christians one time or another. Christians are joyful not because they are Christians, that is, by name but because they are “sure that God holds them for ever in His love...”³³ That is why they remain joyful even when trouble comes.

“Praying together” (Acts 2:42d; see also v. 46a; 47a & 5:12) is one of the positive or common elements of the first Christian community. The Book of Acts describes five instances and places of prayer: first, in the Upper Room (1:12-14), second, in daily life (2:4-7), third, at the Temple (3:1), fourth, as an apostolic function (6:1-7), and fifth in homes (12:5; 12). Luke in his idyllic portrait of the early Christian community or simply known as Jerusalem community, underlines its Jewish character (2:41-47). The primitive Jewish Christianity is a “congregation of Jews who in piety and observance of the Law, did not differ from other Jews, but differ in their expectation that the crucified Jesus would return as the Jewish Messiah”.³⁴ That is why they devoted themselves to prayer, especially in the Temple, where the ‘Messiah is expected to appear’ (Mal. 3:1). The early Christian community goes to the Temple, regularly, if not everyday on the hour of prayer, for example the “ninth hour” (Acts 3:1). The ninth hour is three in the afternoon, which is one of the five official times of prayer for the Jews. Christians “Though a distinct group, as disciples of Jesus, they still were Jews...”³⁵ until they officially broke up from Judaism, and as exemplary Jews they attended temple services, one of them being the ninth hour prayer service. Luke in Acts 1:24-25; 4:24-30, provides us

³³ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 33.

³⁴ JOHANNES MUNCK – WILLIAM ALBRIGHT C.S. MANN, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in the Anchor Bible Series, vol. 31 (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967), p. LXII.

³⁵ FRANK STAGG, *The Book of Acts: The Early Struggle for an Unhindered Gospel* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1955), p. 66.

splendid examples of prayer, showing that for this people, “life is defined first of all by its relationship with God.”³⁶ The prayer of the early Church “denotes a liturgical form based probably on that of Temple or Synagogue worship”.³⁷ Christians regularly met at the Temple because they assembled at particular hours of prayer in order to fulfil their obligations. As Falk says, “The ninth hour of the day was observed as a regular time for prayer, in the Temple if in Jerusalem and at home if elsewhere...”³⁸ As already hinted at above, MacGregor and Ferris point out that “So far as public worship is in view this would still be through ‘attending the Temple worship,’ and in the regular meetings of the Jewish synagogue.”³⁹ Luke, presents the “home as an important place of prayer for the Christian community”.⁴⁰ It is not explicitly mentioned, but by interpretation, however, Acts (2:42; 3:1), tells us that prayers do not constitute merely the conclusion of Christian worship, “prayers are said by the Christians together with the Jewish congregation in the Temple”.⁴¹ This is so because the idea of establishing places of prayer distinct or different from the Jewish Temple was not yet in the mind of the early Church. This idea came much later, as we shall see below.

Acts 2:42a tells us that Christians were “praising God”. Praise, which is a special form of prayer means “rejoicing in God because of who He is rather than

³⁶ LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON, DAVID NOEL FREEDMAN, ed., *Book of Luke-Acts*, in the Anchor Bible Dictionary, 4 (New York - London: Doubleday, 1992), p. 418.

³⁷ CHADWICK, ed., *Acts*, p. 72.

³⁸ FALK, *The Book*, p. 276.

³⁹ MACGREGOR – FERRIS, *The Act*, p. 51.

⁴⁰ FALK, *The Book*, p. 273.

⁴¹ ERNST HAENCHEN, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 154.

because of what He has done”.⁴² It is no doubt an important part of personal as well as public worship.

After identifying and going through the four major characteristics or positive elements of the first Christian community in a more detailed manner, we shall now identify some of its rather less specific or minor characteristics that we simply hinted at above or did not mention at all, but are present in all aspects of the Jerusalem community. The first being meeting “in their homes” (Acts 2:46). Second, “The Lord added to their number” (2:47c; 5:14). Third, work of mercy for example, “healing a man who was lame from birth” (3:1-10). Finally, unafraid “preaching of the Good News” (3:11-26; 4:20) linked with the Pentecostal experience, for example in 4:31, “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” We shall discuss shortly each element below.

The first minor but important element we are going to deal with is meeting “in their homes”. Several of the above mentioned characteristics and common activities of the early Christian community were done in their homes, except surely the Temple worship, as we have seen above. At that time “it was in private houses that Christians usually met each other and worshipped together”.⁴³ This was because “special Church buildings did not exist until after AD 300”.⁴⁴ There are some references of such house holds in the New Testament hosting Christian gatherings. “Recent archeological evidence from such diverse places as Capernaum, Rome and Kent strongly suggests that for the first few hundred years of the Church’s existence,

⁴² HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 33.

⁴³ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 32.

⁴⁴ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 32.

Christian groups gathered ... in domestic residences which could accommodate their needs.”⁴⁵ Paul in his *Letter to the Romans* (16:3-5) says “Greetings to Prisca and Aquila ... also the Church in their house. Again in verses 14-15; 23 of this same chapter, Paul, mentions ‘house Churches.’ In the Acts of the Apostles, “the first believers met together in the private homes of individuals ... until the early decades of the fourth century when Constantine began erecting the first Christian Basilicas”.⁴⁶

The second element we are going to deal with is surely a blessing from God, “The Lord added to their number” (Acts 2:47c; 5:14). The community enjoys favour from God and “steadily increases in size.”⁴⁷ In spite of tremendous persecution in the first 300 years of its existence, both from the authorities of the time and from the people themselves, that is, those who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, the Church still grew in a rather miraculous way. Beginning with a small number of Twelve Apostles, plus few other followers, the Church grew until it became the official religion of the whole Roman Empire.

After doing a good work, a “work of mercy” which is our third element, that is, by healing a man who was lame from birth (Acts 3:1-10), and after preaching the Good News (3:11-26), Peter and John were arrested and put on trial (4:1-14). This is because anyone who has a living fellowship with Jesus speaks with the ‘authority’ that Jesus has and gives to his disciples. This act of mercy brought the crippled

⁴⁵ DAVID GILL CONRAD GEMPH, ed., *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting: Graeco-Roman Setting*, 2 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. – Carlisle : The Paternoster Press, 1994), p. 119.

⁴⁶ GILL · GEMPH, *The Book*, p. 120.

⁴⁷ JOHNSON, FREEDMAN, ed., *Book of*, p. 415.

beggar back on his feet. It also restores him “to membership within the restored Israel of God.”⁴⁸

“We cannot but speak” (Acts 4:20). Our final element is “unfearful preaching of the Good News,” highly linked with the early Church’s Pentecostal experience. As we can see in 4:19, the disciples had to be loyal to God before being loyal to the leaders of their nation. This is true because in Acts 1:8 Jesus had commissioned them to be witnesses. They, therefore, had to bear “witness to this power.”⁴⁹ The Power of the Risen Christ.

“In the Book of Acts, Luke describes more than thirty occasions in which Christians were opposed or persecuted.”⁵⁰ To any form of persecution, the Christians’ response is rather notable, they gave answers in defence (4:1-3), they continued preaching (5:17), they prayed (12:3) and sometimes they had to escape (eg. 9:23). In any form of persecution, the disciples or the Christians for that matter, never gave up and never lost hope. They had an answer to any charge labelled against them. They also used every single opportunity to preach the Gospel of Jesus crucified (eg. 4:10) to the rulers of the people and thus to the whole Israel. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the early Christians were bold in preaching the Good News. What is true is that whatever trials the early Christians had to face, their faith in the Risen Christ remained firm and strong. They remained united.

Acts (4:32-37), speaks explicitly of the “fellowship (κοινωνία) of the believers”. Fellowship has already been discussed above. The explicit reference to

⁴⁸ WALL, KECK., *The Acts*, p. 73.

⁴⁹ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 47.

⁵⁰ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 48.

Barnabas who sold a field, belonging to himself, and gave everything to the apostles (4:36-37), however, has a particular importance. Barnabas was one of the believers who voluntarily sold something that belonged to himself and gave everything to the Apostles. This, we believe, he did “so that the Church could give help to its poorer members”.⁵¹ Luke’s pointing explicitly to this action is an indication, as we shall see below, that not all members did what was expected from them, that is, to put everything in common and to help the poor.

3.2 Negative Elements

We have said above that the early Christians had everything in common. Or, at least, they were expected to put everything in common as one and fully united Christian community. Like any community, however, there are always some who tend to be more rebels than the others. There are always some members who think that they are more clever than the others. MacGregor and Ferris call them “Black sheep”⁵² that exist in any family or community. Thus also existed in the early Church. In the first Christian community, this type of people existed in the person of Ananias and Sapphira. In Acts 5:1-11, we are told that Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a piece of their property, kept some of the proceeds for themselves and gave the rest to the Apostles. These two, first of all, did not sell everything but only a piece which was normal. Meaning to say, they still had the rest of their property for themselves. Upon selling a part of their property, they Ananias and his wife were expected to lay down everything at the feet of the Apostles. “The implication is that the proceeds of the sale, having already been dedicated to the community, were no

⁵¹ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 53.

⁵² MACGREGOR · Ferris, *The Act*, p. 75.

longer of Ananias' own disposal."⁵³ That is, they were expected to give everything to the Apostles. They, however, decided to do otherwise. They, therefore, made a mistake. Their mistake, was not in stealing but in pretending that they had given what they owned. "There sin was 'hypocrisy' - the sin of pretending to others, and often to ourselves, to be different from, or better than, we really are".⁵⁴ "In the eyes of the public they were generous givers. In the eyes of God they were hypocrites."⁵⁵ Jesus regarded this as a very serious sin (Luke 6:42). Also, by deceiving the others they committed another sin, that of breaking the fellowship in which members trusted each other, as we can see in Acts 4:32.

Acts 5:4 says, "You have not lied to men but to God". This is an indication that "There is no difference between sinning against other people and sinning against God".⁵⁶ Because "All sinning is sinning against God".⁵⁷ Ananias must have thought he was dealing only with men. In reality, however, "he was offending against God, who through his spirit is present in the community."⁵⁸ Through this story of Ananias and Saphira, Luke reminds us that "people inside the Church committed sin ... They did, being human, and of course Christians, now as then."⁵⁹

4. Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the origin and foundation of small communities was indeed God himself. He, being a perfect community of three

⁵³ MACGREGOR - FERRIS, *The Act*, p. 75.

⁵⁴ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 53.

⁵⁵ MACGREGOR - FERRIS, *The Act*, p. 75-76.

⁵⁶ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 54.

⁵⁷ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 54.

⁵⁸ HAENCHEN, *The Acts*, p. 237.

⁵⁹ HARGREAVES, *A Guide*, p. 53.

persons. We went on by giving an overview of the biblical foundation of Christian communities pointing out the small Christian communities founded by the Apostles, like the *Jerusalem* community, as well as the communities founded by Paul in the New Testament (e.g., *Corinthian* community, *Antiochian* community, etc.). We then continued by identifying and analysing the characteristics of the first Christian community highlighting its positive and negative elements.

An example of the positive elements we identified and analysed above is the fact that the first Christian community listened to the “teachings of the Apostles” (*Didache*). After this we looked at the second element which is the *Koinonia*. Meaning, the early Christians “shared everything in common”. We then continued with the third element which is the “breaking of the bread,” which, as a matter of fact, is just another form of fellowship (*koinonia*) and so on and so forth.

We also looked at the negative aspects of the first Christian community most notably, the fraud of Ananias and his wife Sapphira.

As we have seen, the first Christian community is far from being a perfect community. However, its rootedness in the Risen Christ and the unity of its members through prayer and together with some other aspects of its of community life, like “breaking bread together” and so on, can make us conclude with confidence that the first Christian community with all its positive and negative elements is an exemplary community. It is a model community to ‘Malkia wa Amani’ a Small Christian community in Mukuru-Kayaba and indeed all the other Small Christian Communities that exist today, not forgetting the small Protestant communities or Churches that have been established throughout the world as well as here in Kenya.

CHAPTER II: “Malkia wa Amani”: An Example for Other SCCs

1. Introduction

As already explained in Chapter I, the origin and foundation of small Christian communities is God himself. He is a perfect community of three persons. In the New Testament sense small Christian Communities started with Jesus Christ himself. He gathered around himself a small group of disciples and from among them he chose twelve who are called apostles (Luke 6:12-16). After Jesus' death, these apostles gathered together with some other disciples and formed the first Christian community (Acts 1:12-5:42).

This chapter will deal with Christian communities, as we know them today. We shall start off with a historical overview of the origin and foundation of Small Christian Communities, in the world, in Africa and in the AMECEA region and finally in Kenya. After these we shall proceed with a detailed study of “Malkia wa Amani,” A Small Christian Community in Mukuru-Kayaba. In our study of “Malkia wa Amani, we shall first of all touch its historical background, then we shall see its characteristics, underlining its positive and negative elements.

In this chapter, by pointing out its positive and negative elements, we shall see how Malkia wa Amani can serve as an example to other small Christian communities, in St. Margaret's Church, in South B Parish, and indeed in the world at large.

2. Origin and Foundation of Small Christian Communities: A Historical Overview

2.1 SCCs in Brazil: A Humble Beginning

Leonardo Boff, a prominent liberation theologian, provides us with a precise historical information of how BCCs/SCCs originated. According to him, SCCs, then called Basic Church Communities started in Brazil, “In 1956 when Dom Agnelo Rossi initiated an evangelization movement, using lay catechists, for regions of Brazil not being reached by pastors.”⁶⁰ He then continued with an account of an old woman’s lament that somehow ignited BCCs, in Brazil and eventually in the whole world. Quoting the Brazilian Bishops Conference’s *Plano Pastoral de Conjunto*, he says “It all began with the lament of one humble old woman: ‘Christmas Eve, all three Protestant Churches were lit up and full of people. We could hear them singing ... And the Catholic Church, closed and dark! ... Because we can’t get a priest...’”⁶¹ With this lament, Dom Agnelo, in Barra de Pirai, “decided to train community coordinators to do everything a lay person can do in God’s Church...”⁶² At the conference of Medellin (1968), this new pastoral project gained a full support. Building Basic Church Communities then became a pastoral priority of all the Latin American Churches.

2.2 SCCs Spread Through Other Countries of the World

“In the 1960s-70s they (SCCs) appeared in Chile, Peru, Paraguay, El Salvador and Nicaragua. From the 1970s they started in the Philippines and the

⁶⁰ LEONARDO BOFF, ROBERT BARR, trans., *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 3.

⁶¹ Brazilian Bishops Conference, *Plano Pastoral de Conjunto* (1962-1965), p. 58; Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, p. 3.

⁶² Brazilian Bishops Conference, *Plano*, p. 58; Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, p. 3.

countries of East and Central Africa (AMECEA), where they are called Small Christian Communities (SCCs).”⁶³ In the whole Asian continent, “Small Christian Communities, as such, would be most numerous in the Philippines which is in fact one of the great growth areas for the groups in the whole world.”⁶⁴

2.3 SCCs in Africa and AMECEA Member Countries

In Africa, during the 1971 Synod of Bishops in Rome, “the Africans present noted that small Christian communities already existed...”⁶⁵ in the continent. In fact Ugeux says, “Beginning from 1961, the Zairian bishops ... opted for the creation of small communities...”⁶⁶ After this 1961 decision, it is not clear if the Zairian Church put this completely new project immediately into practice. As Ugeux and Lefebvre tell us, “Small Christian Communities began to appear in Zaire (now DR Congo) and elsewhere in Africa in the 1970’s.”⁶⁷ Despite this lack of clarity, as to when exactly SCCs took shape and became a pastoral priority in Zaire, however, we can still say that the Zairian bishops were most probably “the first in Africa to decide to form small Christian communities...”⁶⁸ “Little by little they (SCCs) spread and today they constitute a substantial network”⁶⁹ in the whole continent. In 1975 Burkina Faso “declared itself for the creation of Small Christian Communities on the model

⁶³ AYLWARD SHORTER, *African Culture: An Overview*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), pp. 96-97.

⁶⁴ JAMES O’HALLORAN, *Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Companion* (Dublin: The Columbia Press – New York: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 13.

⁶⁵ O’HALLORAN, *SCCs*, p. 23.

⁶⁶ BERNARD UGEUX, *Les Petites Communautés Chrétiennes, Unes Alternative aux Paroisses?: L’Expérience du Zaïre* (Paris: Les Editions de Cerf, 1988), p. 17.

⁶⁷ BERNARD UGEUX – PIERRE LEFEBVRE, *Small Christian Communities and Parishes* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), p. 5.

⁶⁸ UGEUX, *Les Petites*, p. 15.

⁶⁹ UGEUX – LEFEBVRE, *SCCs*, p. 5.

Church as family."⁷⁰ Later, other Episcopal Conferences in Africa took similar decisions.

In 1973 an AMECEA study conference was held to prepare the Church in Eastern Africa for the 1980's. "It was at this AMECEA plenary that the need to build SCCs began to emerge..."⁷¹ It was the 1976 AMECEA Study Conference which made the decision that a "systematic formation of small Christian communities should be the key pastoral priority in the years to come, within Eastern Africa."⁷² This decision was later on taken up and confirmed by the 1979 AMECEA Bishops' Conference that made building SCCs "a 'pastoral priority' within AMECEA countries."⁷³ As a matter of fact already in the planning stages for this study conference of 1979, "a big majority of the Bishops of the AMECEA countries expressed their desire to centre the meeting on the same topic as was studied in the previous meeting in 1976: 'Building Small Christian Communities.'"⁷⁴

In Kenya building small Christian communities developed almost immediately after the AMECEA Plenary conference in 1976. This was so because of an effort from the Kenya Episcopal Conference to try out what the AMECEA Bishops decided during their Plenary Conference in 1976. This developed and gained more strength in 1979 after the kind of follow up conference on building Small Christian Communities in the region took SCCs a pastoral priority.

⁷⁰ *Options Fondamentales pour un Nouveau Depart*, (Bobo-Dioulasso, April 1978); see also Ugeux – Lefebvre, *SCC*, p. 9.

⁷¹ RAPHAEL NDJINGI MWANA 'A NZEKI, *Implementing AMECEA's Pastoral Priority*, in AFER vol. 21, No. 5 (October 1979), p. 287.

⁷² AMECEA Plenary Conference 1976: Conclusions to the 1976 Sessions, in AFER vol. 21, No. 5 (October 1979), p. 310.

⁷³ Conclusions of the Study Conference of the AMECEA Plenary 1979, in AFER, vol. 21, No. 5 (October 1979), p. 266.

⁷⁴ AMECEA Plenary Study Conference 1979, in AFER vol., 21, No. 5 (October 1979), p. 257.

3. SCC: A Short Explanation

“The first SCC in Africa seems to have come about in Zaire in 1961”⁷⁵ as mentioned above. “Since that time they have begun to multiply and have been found to be a way of expressing the nature of the Church as a communion and fit very well the culture and situation of the continent.”⁷⁶ These communities got different names like, Basic Christian Communities (BCCs), Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), *Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes* (CEV), in French speaking Africa, etc. However, “... real Christian communities existed long before we called them such”.⁷⁷ But, what really are small Christian communities? Shorter says small Christian communities are “not pious association, but have a pastoral or ecclesial role. They are Bible-based...”⁷⁸ SCCs are somehow a vision of Pope John Paul II when he speaks of the Church as “a community of disciples and confessors, which must increasingly become ... a community aware of its own life and activity.”⁷⁹ Ndingi Mwana ‘A Nzeki says, “a small Christian community is a group of Christians who feel related, and who together live and deepen their commitment to the Risen Lord and their Christian way of life”.⁸⁰ Members of small Christian community have a “common faith.”⁸¹ Basically, members of a Small Christian community “live in the same neighbourhood, experience deep personal relationships and have common needs, problems and anxieties.”⁸² In a biblical sense, SCCs are “attempts to recover

⁷⁵ CECIL MCGARRY, ed., *What Happened at the African Synod?* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), p. 131.

⁷⁶ MCGARRY, *What*, p. 131.

⁷⁷ JAMES HOLMES-SIEDLE, *Overview of Small Christian Communities in East Africa*, in *AFER*, vol. 21, no. 5 (October 1979), p. 275.

⁷⁸ SHORTER, *African*, p. 97.

⁷⁹ JOHN PAUL II *Redemptor Hominis*, No. 21.

⁸⁰ NDISINGI MWANA ‘A NZEKI, *Implementing*, p. 290.

⁸¹ NDISINGI MWANA ‘A NZEKI, *Implementing*, p. 290.

⁸² NDISINGI MWANA ‘A NZEKI, *Implementing*, p. 290.

the New Testament sense of community and brotherhood...⁸³ SCCs are “means by which the Church is brought down to the daily life and concerns of people to where they actually live.”⁸⁴ Again Ndingi Mwana ‘A Nzeki says “The concept of small Christian community is a small group of the people of God – small enough to be manageable in life and work...”⁸⁵ He also says “It is in a small Christian community that the Universal Catholic Church becomes localised here and now.”⁸⁶ It is the “most local expression of the entire mystery of the Church”.⁸⁷ As a matter of fact, BCCs/SCCs, “offer us a new image of the Church...”⁸⁸ Thus, small Christian community is “a hope for the Universal Church.”⁸⁹

4. Historical Background of “Malkia wa Amani”

After dealing with small Christian communities in Brazil, where it all started, in the world, and in AMECEA countries, where it was taken up as a pastoral priority in the 1970s, we shall now deal with a particular small Christian community in Mukuru-Kayaba called “Malkia wa Amani”.

Malkia wa Amani was founded in 1985 by Mwalimu Athanas, then catechist of Mukuru-Kayaba Catholic Church.⁹⁰ The reason why Malkia wa Amani was founded was to create unity within the Church of Mukuru-Kayaba and also to put into practice the project of the Kenyan Church as it decides to apply what was agreed

⁸³ AMECEA Plenary Study Conference 1979, p. 260.

⁸⁴ Conclusions of the AMECEA Study Conference 1979, p. 266.

⁸⁵ NDINGI MWANA ‘A NZEKI, *Implementing*, p. 288.

⁸⁶ NDINGI MWANA ‘A NZEKI, *Implementing*, p. 288.

⁸⁷ NDINGI MWANA ‘A NZEKI, *Implementing*, p. 294.

⁸⁸ ALOISIO LORSCHIEDER, *Basic Ecclesiastical Communities in Latin America*, in AFER vol. 19, NO. 3 (June 1977), p. 143.

⁸⁹ NDINGI MWANA ‘A NZEKI, *Implementing*, p. 294.

⁹⁰ This Church has recently been moved and is now called St. Margaret’s Catholic Church

upon as a pastoral priority by the AMECEA bishops during their Plenary Conference in 1979.

Slowly but surely, Malkia wa Amani increased in number. In 1998 Malkia wa Amani reached a record of 45 members. Unfortunately, however, this number went down to 30 as other members left the community, somehow unnoticed.

In the years 2000-2002 Malkia wa Amani had 30 members. When, all of a sudden, with the departure of its leader and founder, due to his eventual shift of residence, 25 members left the group one by one. It was with this small number of 5 faithful members⁹¹ that Malkia wa Amani struggled to get back to its feet. They visited other Christians in their homes and families, and convinced people to join them. They eventually increased in number once again and elected a new set of leaders that helped them to acquire a new group of 40 members as it stands now. Further investigations and the community's official register, however, proved that the community never really reached 40 members but only 33. Out of these 33 genuine members, around 20 are undoubtedly active. The rest, they come when they want to without really committing themselves fully to the community. There are also members who come only during feast days. While others participate only when a priest comes to visit the community, that is, to say Mass. It is probably these people that made the community reach up to 40 members, as they themselves claimed when answering the questionnaire I gave them.

⁹¹ One of the five is one of the most active members of the group today. All the others have since left the group and also the Mukuru-Kayaba area.

5. Characteristics of “Malkia wa Amani”

5.1 Positive Elements

“Praying together” is one of the objectives of Malkia wa Amani. It is the source of its strength. That is why when Malkia wa Amani reduced tremendously in number due to “lack of leadership,” as they put it, the community felt the need to “pray harder”. It was also through this prayer, together with their effort to visit and recruit more members, that Malkia wa Amani multiplied considerably. Every time Malkia wa Amani meets, it offers prayers to God. In all instances that I visited this community, I realised that praying the rosary is part and parcel of its program. There is, however, something particular about the community’s way of praying the rosary. That is, before praying the “Hail Mary...” or the “Our Father...” the one leading that particular prayer puts up his or her own intention. S/he can either pray for the community or a particular member or any other intentions. They then take turns until a whole decade is finished.

When I say “praying together”, I mean that Malkia wa Amani, does not only pray together during its weekly meetings. Members of Malkia wa Amani also pray together on different occasions, like praying for a sick person when they go to visit someone who is sick, and any other appropriate occasions.

Malkia wa Amani prays at home but also in the Church on Sundays and special holidays of obligation. After Mass the community normally meets outside the Church and decides what to do during the day and/or during the week.

Aside from praying the common prayer of the Church and other personal and communal intentions, as mentioned above, Malkia wa Amani also “Shares the Word of God”. Amazingly enough, when I asked each member of Malkia wa Amani ‘do

you like sharing the Word of God?’ They all answered with an overwhelming ‘Yes’. When I asked them the follow up question ‘Why?’ they gave me answers that can be summarised as, “Because the Word of God helps me to strengthen my faith. It also strengthens the faith of those who listen to me”. The Word of God is also the centre of Malkia wa Amani, perhaps like any other small Christian communities. That is why, for Malkia wa Amani, a meeting is not complete without sharing God’s Word, of course, using the Bible.

The next positive element of Malkia wa Amani is in the area of “cooperation among members and to help each other”. This positive element is realised in Malkia wa Amani by first of all, “knowing each other’s needs”. After knowing each other’s needs, the community does not stop there. It goes as far as “helping a genuinely needy member of the community” or other needy people in the neighbourhood or elsewhere.

Still on the aspect of help, it is also interesting to note that Malkia wa Amani also visits and, if necessary, “helps the sick”. The sick we are talking about here can be a sick member of the community including his/her own family member but also any sick person in the neighbourhood. Sick Christians, however, are more privileged, though not exclusively, as far as Malkia wa Amani’s pastoral activity is concerned.

In order to realise Malkia wa Amani’s pastoral activity of helping the poor and the sick, each member of the community contributes Kshs. 20 membership fee. In addition to this contribution, every meeting, the community organises an offering service that allows every member to contribute as much as s/he wants. There are also

other contributions that are organised when there is an urgent need, for example, to help a particular sick or needy person.

Members of Malkia wa Amani, even though it is a small Christian community in the strictest sense of the term, don't know each other that much. Members perhaps know that this particular brother or sister who is a member of the community is called so and so. Members of the community perhaps know that s/he lives in such a corner of the village and work in such an institution and so forth: however, members of this community still do not know each other as they should. Based on my personal observation, I can say that those prominent and most active members are the only ones who are really known in the community, that is including the leaders. Unfortunately they are not that many. Majority of the members, therefore, are still, as such unknown to the other members of the community, especially those whom I would call irregular members.

This element may sound negative. I, however, put this element purposely as one of the positive characteristics of Malkia wa Amani because, their lack of knowledge about each other encourages each and every member of the community to pay a "visit to each other". Through this desire to know each other better, individual members of Malkia wa Amani gets a chance to visit but also to be visited by other members of the community. Thus I can safely say that "knowing each other" and "visiting each other" are two positive elements that go hand in hand in this small Christian community. Talking of visiting each other, members of Malkia wa Amani do not limit themselves to their weekly meetings that are held in individual houses, to pay a visit to a community member. I know members of the community who take

the initiative to visit other members in an effort to know them better, not only superficially but also more deeply.

In my personal visits and informal conversations with some individual members of the community, I also realised that members of Malkia wa Amani also love and support each other. They do not complain against each other. They do not harm each other with negative criticisms, but instead praise and support each other as much as possible. This practice, I can say with absolute surety, is opposite to other small Christian communities that I personally know around Mukuru-Kayaba. The reason behind this good behaviour being, Malkia wa Amani has good and respectable leaders. As a consequence, members of this community also love, respect and support each other as brothers and sisters. As a matter of fact, backbiting coupled with jealousy, caused hatred and division in other small Christian communities around this area, but not with Malkia wa Amani.

Malkia wa Amani being a member of the Universal Catholic Church is not an island on its own. It is what people would call a community within an enormously big community, that is, the Universal Catholic Church. Malkia wa Amani being a fully committed Christian community realises this fact. It, therefore, as a community, faithfully “links each individual member to the Church”. What I mean here is that, they do not only go to Church every Sunday to pray, they also “participate fully in Church activities”. The community of Malkia wa Amani is not in any way influential in St. Margaret’s sub-parish Church and even less in Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish. It, however, made the Church its point of reference.

This element leads me to yet another element that has so much to do with the Church and liturgy, that is, the most “Holy Eucharist”. The Eucharist together with

the Word of God is at the centre of Malkia wa Amani. That is why, for most members of this community, Sunday is not a Sunday, if they have not yet received Holy Communion. They obviously do not go to the Church together as a community. For them, however, the Church aside from being a place of prayer, is also a meeting place. The Church is where each member of Malkia wa Amani meets the Risen Christ through prayer and reception of his Body and Blood, that is, the Eucharist. The Church is also where members of Malkia wa Amani meet each other every Sunday in order to decide what to do during the day and/or the week.

The final positive characteristic of Malkia wa Amani is “meeting in individual houses”. This, I believe, does not need so much explanation as this is a characteristic of all small Christian communities here in Kenya as well as throughout the world. What is perhaps, particular about Malkia wa Amani, however, is that they give a chance to every member to welcome the whole community one after the other, moving in a kind of a circle within the community. If, for one reason or another, a member is not able to welcome the community in his/her house on a date previously set, the community, through its leaders will find another time so that this particular member may be able to do his/her part of welcoming or hosting the community into his/her house.

5.2 Negative Elements

Malkia wa Amani, good as it might seem, also has its own weaknesses and challenges. It has some negative elements to deal with. One very common negative element is that “members come late” for meetings, and others are very “irregular in the community”. This is not all, because there are people who claim to be members of the community but who do not come at all to weekly meetings. Being late in

community meetings is negative because of several reasons. First of all, it makes other members waste their time waiting for those who are late. This waiting also means sacrificing all other, perhaps, important tasks as well as individual household chores of other members. Others who cannot wait any longer are obliged to leave the group when it is still half way through in the meeting. The second, negative effect of being late is that, it disturbs the whole community meeting. Third, it distracts the attention of some, if not all members of the community, when latecomers enter the meetinghouse. All these and other reasons, not mentioned here, are truly present and are happening in Malkia wa Amani. I have seen people going away in the middle of the sharing without coming back, at least for that particular meeting. I have seen people coming in when the community is reflecting on the Word of God or praying the holy rosary etc., and thus disturbing the whole community and also distracting the whole flow of that meeting. There are still others who turn up only when the meeting is about to finish.

With regards to “sharing the Word of God,” which is the second negative element of Malkia wa Amani, I noticed that some people are not fully at ease with this practice. When it comes to sharing God’s Word, I feel that some members of the community are more at ease listening to others rather than sharing their own reflections. There are members who share the Word of God but in a very shy and unconvincing manner. There are also others who don’t share at all. They are simply there. For a small Christian community which is centred on God’s Word, as mentioned above, this attitude being present in the small Christian community of Malkia wa Amani, is negative. It is also, in a way counter productive in the sense that, all the members of a small Christian community, in our case Malkia wa Amani,

are expected to share God's Word with one another. Sharing God's Word is a two-way traffic. I share what I have and I expect others to share theirs as well. This is the essence of a small Christian community. There is talking and there is also listening. There is giving, there is also receiving. If one of these two is missing, then it is incomplete. Thus it cannot move forward as properly as it should. For it cannot be one or the other. It has to be both. If I am a member of a small Christian community and I only listen, then I cannot put my message across. This can also mean that I am not fully active in the community, even if I am always present. This we can say because being present in the community is utterly different from being active. Being present and being active are two different things, and they don't always go hand in hand. Or, better still, the former should not be confused with the latter.

Due to lack of biblical knowledge there is also the risk of "misinterpretation of the Holy Scripture". This is the third negative element of Malkia wa Amani each and every member must be careful about. Meaning that, if I share the Word of God with other members of the community, with my own wrong interpretation of it, then those who are not very sure about their knowledge of that particular text might start doubting about what they think they know. If each and every member is open enough to each other, however, so as to be ready to clarify things within the group, then this can easily turn into a positive element. Not all members, however, are ready to do this, especially if the one who misinterpreted the text is a leader of the community or someone who is considered to have a considerable knowledge of the Bible.

Still on the aspect of God's Word, is the fact that some members of Malkia wa Amani do not have a Bible of their own. This reality limits their knowledge of the Bible only to what they hear in the Church, that is during Mass, and in their

community meetings. When they are at home, they do not have access to God's Word.

I have mentioned above that Malkia wa Amani aside from being centred on the Word of God is also, in a way, focused on the Eucharist. There are, however, members of this small Christian community who are not properly married in the Church. They, therefore, cannot receive Holy Communion. This aspect, in a way, isolates them from the group. Isolation is a difficult situation to live with. However, something needs to be done on this aspect. I am happy to say that, Malkia wa Amani, does not only welcome people who are not properly married, but also encourages them to get their marriages blessed in the Church. This is not an easy task considering the cultural, financial, etc., constraints of the people concerned. This should not, however, hinder the community from moving forward.

As mentioned above, Malkia wa Amani has different financial contributions that are organised for the running of the community itself, but also in view of helping any needy person, especially the sick. This idea is undoubtedly good. Records, however, show that not all members give the full amount expected from them. There are some members who are undoubtedly faithful and generous as far as financial contribution is concerned. Some others, however, would prefer not to open up their own wallets or reach their own pockets even when necessary. This is a reality that nobody wants to hear about. Unfortunately this exists in this community.

The following negative elements are identified through my personal observation. The times I have spent with Malkia wa Amani especially during weekly meetings make me feel that there is "too much formalism" in this community. Formalism in the sense that, people talk or share as if they are on a formal meeting

with a government minister or something of the like. What I mean here is that, they don't share as freely as they should. They don't share as friends or as brothers and sisters. Instead, they share simply as members of Malkia wa Amani, nothing more.

This observation leads me to another one which is, "some members seem to be ill-at-ease" in the community. To the point that whenever they share something with the community, they are not properly heard or understood. This can also be taken as an element of shyness, as far sharing God's Word is concerned. The fact that it is there, however, I believe that it is worth noting it down.

The key to all these negative elements, I must say is "listening". Together with listening, I can add "openness". Without these two important attitudes, there cannot be a genuine progress, and there cannot be a genuine small Christian community called Malkia wa Amani.

6. Conclusion

A humble beginning, a great end. Small Christian communities came into being because of a lament by a humble old woman, who, perhaps never thought that her plea will, in any way, be heard. With the Holy Spirit being at work, however, this old woman's lament was heard not only by the Church of Brazil, but also by the whole Universal Catholic Church. That is why, today, even the smallest Christian community one can find, still finds its way to have its voice heard in the whole Church. Any member of today's Church no longer finds him/herself alone because in his/her own neighbourhood a small, but not insignificant, unit of the Church is present. Sometimes, this unit called small Christian community is not only present, but also active in the whole Christian family.

Such is the case of Malkia wa Amani. This community does not only represent the whole universal Church in its neighbourhood, it most of all, makes all Christians welcome in the wider Christian community. With Malkia wa Amani, one can say that there is no loneliness in the Catholic Church, but belonging. Belonging is a reality that everybody longs for. With Malkia wa Amani, one does not only belong, he/she is also listened to and taken care of, things which are very important to every human person.

With this reality and after seeing the positive and negative elements of Malkia wa Amani, I believe that we can safely say and conclude that Malkia wa Amani is indeed an exemplary community. It is an example for other small Christian communities in St. Margaret's Church, in South B Parish and, indeed, an example for all Christian communities in a much wider sense.

It is an example in its way of dealing with difficulties. It is an example in its effort to know and support one another. Most of all, it is an example in putting the Church, prayer, the Word of God and the Eucharist at the centre of its existence.

CHAPTER III: Evaluation of "Malkia wa Amani" in the Light of the First Christian Community in Acts (1:12-5:42)

1. Introduction

The first Christian community is an example to "Malkia wa Amani" in many ways. It is an example in almost all aspects of its existence, like praying together, listening to God's Word, sharing everything in common, and so on and so forth. As we shall see below, the first Christian community's exemplary role did not fade

away. Instead, it continued through all generations. That is why the first Christian community is a model, not only to “Malkia wa Amani,” but also to all Christian communities that exist today including the small Protestant communities or sects that are mushrooming throughout Kenya or even the whole world these days.

In this chapter we shall evaluate “Malkia wa Amani” in the light of the First Christian Community in Acts (1:12-5:42). Here also we will view the similarities and differences between the first Christian community and “Malkia wa Amani”. As a pastoral application, we will see how the first Christian community in Acts can serve as an example for “Malkia wa Amani” and other SCCs today.

2. Similarities and Differences Between the First Christian Community and “Malkia wa Amani”

2.1 Similarities

The first Christian community in Acts (1:12-5:42) and Malkia wa Amani have so much in common. Malkia wa Amani, like the first Christian community has its own positive and negative elements. Let us now evaluate Malkia wa Amani in the light of the first Christian community using the positive and negative elements, properly dealt with in chapter I, in the case of the first Christian community, and chapter II, in the case of Malkia wa Amani. We start with their similarities. The first common element between the early Christian community and Malkia wa Amani is the “Word of God”. The early Christian community uses the Word of God in its daily existence. It listens and follows the “apostles’ teachings” (Acts 2:42). The early Christian community also “preached the Good News” boldly (Acts 3:11-26; 4:20). It used the Holy Scripture as its strongest instrument of defence against its persecutors

(e.g., the non-believers, the Jewish authority, etc.). Thus the Word of God is part and parcel of its daily life. On top of using the Holy Scripture (*Torah*), that is, the Old Testament as we now call it, the early Christian community also used the Gospel, the Word of God the apostles and other disciples directly heard from Jesus' own mouth in his teachings. As Hargreaves says (already quoted in full above) this tradition was later on collected, put together and thus made up the New Testament part of the Bible as we have it today.

Similarly, Malkia wa Amani has the "Word of God" as part and parcel of its daily existence. It uses the full Bible, that is, as well as all the other Christians or any group of Christians, etc., and indeed any human person who searches God's truth, has and is available as its tool. The New Testament part of the Bible, like the Old Testament, is the Word of God. It comes from Jesus himself and is handed down to us through the apostles, the very ones who inaugurated the first Christian community.

Today also, Malkia wa Amani listens to the Word of God, to the Word of Jesus, through a priest who celebrates Mass for the community every month or in the Church on Sundays. Another way of listening to the Word of God is at the personal and individual level when individual members of Malkia wa Amani read the Bible personally. It must, however, be noted that this particular practice is not done by everybody, for the reason that not all members of Malkia wa Amani have a personal copy of the Bible.

The early Christian community lived in fellowship (*κοινωνία*) with God, and with each other (2:42; 44-45). First, "with God". The first Christian community lived in fellowship with God by listening to his own Words preached to them day

after day by the apostles (Acts 2:42). They also lived in fellowship with God through prayers either in the Temple (Acts 3:1), or at home (Acts 2:46). It is through their faithfulness to prayer that they are in *koinonia* with God.

In a similar way, members of Malkia wa Amani also live in *koinonia* with God by praying together, sharing God's Word with one another, that is, through the Bible and in attending Mass in the Church every Sunday and other holidays of obligation.

Second, "with each other" (2:42; 44-45). The early Christian community lived in *koinonia* with each other by "sharing everything they had in common" (2:44) in view of helping the poor and by "breaking bread together" (2:42; 46-47).

Today, Malkia wa Amani lives in *koinonia* with each other through cooperation among members and by helping each other in times of need. Another way Malkia wa Amani lives in fellowship with each other is through acts of kindness and love which is by helping the poor and the sick especially the poor members of the community, but also those poor or sick people they know in their neighbourhood.

This leads us to the next common element or similarity, which is "breaking bread together" (2:42; 46-47). The early Christian community broke bread together in Eucharist-*agape* as a sign of unity (*koinonia*) and love for each other. This breaking of bread together can also mean that the early Christians really had a "nourishing meal."

This breaking bread together understood as a daily meal, as the early Christian community did, does not apply any more today. On feast days and special occasions, however, one can be sure that this community shares food with each other

in a more fraternal and friendly manner. We must, however, point out that the early Christian community's practice of breaking bread together was not only an ordinary meal, but also a Eucharist-*agape*. In this sense, therefore, Malkia wa Amani is very much similar to the early Christian community. Today, Malkia wa Amani breaks bread together and shares meal with each other and with the whole Church through the Holy Eucharist.

As already explained above, the first Christian community "prayed together" (2:42; 46; 47; 15:12). This they did as an expression of their unity, fellowship (*koinonia*) with each other, either "in their homes" (2:46) or "at the Temple" when in Jerusalem.

In the case of Malkia wa Amani, praying together is almost a direct imitation, in a way, of the early Christian community's practice of praying together. This we say in a sense that like the early Christian community, Malkia wa Amani prays together in their homes or in private houses when they meet to share God's Word or in the Church (God's Temple) when they pray or attend Mass together with the whole Church.

The Temple, aside from being a place of prayer for the early Christian community, is also a place of meeting both among themselves and also with other people. Similarly, Malkia wa Amani meets and prays in the Temple, that is, in the Church. After praying together during Mass, members of Malkia wa Amani stay behind to meet each other outside the Church, to talk and discuss whatever there is to be discussed especially urgent issues to be dealt with.

Meeting "in their homes" is just another common element between the first Christian community and Malkia wa Amani. The early Christian community met in

private houses for prayer as well as for a common meal. In a similar way Malkia wa Amani also meets together in individual houses for prayers. Common meals cannot be put as one of the reasons why Malkia wa Amani meets together in private houses. This is because, today, this practice is no longer applicable as such.

The next common element we are going to deal with is “increase in membership”. In the case of the early Christian community, “the Lord added to their number” (2:47; 5:14) mainly through their witness together with the preaching of the disciples especially Peter and John who dared to preach the Word of God even in front of the Jewish authorities, the Sanhedrin as well as in the Temple.

Malkia wa Amani in a similar way multiplied or increased in number because of its members’ prayers, together with their effort to visit and convince many people to join their community especially when they suffered a sudden loss of members.

The care for the poor and the sick are two similar elements that exist both in the early Christian community and Malkia wa Amani. The first Christian community had the “healing of a man who was lame from birth” (3:1-10) well documented. This is, perhaps, to emphasise not only the healing power of the Risen Christ active in the apostles, but also the early Christian community’s care and concern for the sick. The early Christian community also helps and cares for the poor. This can be underlined through the community’s practice of sharing everything they had so that the poor and especially the needy members of the community may not any more suffer but share in the blessings of their brothers and sisters.

Obviously Malkia wa Amani does not perform miracles, as Peter and John did at the “beautiful gate,” when they cured a man lame from birth by invoking the

Lord's name. Today, however, Malkia wa Amani shares in the early Christian community's practice of caring for, and healing the sick through their humble acts of visiting them in their homes, or if possible, in the hospitals; by praying for them and also by helping them materially whenever necessary. The poor in a similar way get help from Malkia wa Amani through its effort of providing them some of their material needs whenever it can.

The early Christian community was filled with the Holy Spirit when He was poured out upon them at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). From this time on, the early Christian community gained more strength and witnessed more boldly to their faith in Jesus Christ. Their assemblies were also filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is also present in Malkia wa Amani through its gatherings, which are constantly entrusted to the protection of the Holy Spirit. What we mean here is that during each meeting Malkia wa Amani invokes the Holy Spirit to be present, to protect and guide its assembly.

This common element between the early Christian community and Malkia wa Amani, leads us to the next element which is the "bold and fearless preaching of the Good News". This is true for the early Christian community every time it went under attack by the non-believers and also by the Jewish authority of the time.

In the case of Malkia wa Amani, this is also true in as far as the whole community is concerned. Here, as an example, and with due respect to the member concerned, we can point out a particular event that occurred during one of their meetings. What happened was that a member of Malkia wa Amani welcomed the community to her house without telling her husband, as it was not foreseen that the community meeting would take place at her house on this particular Sunday. Her

husband, who was apparently a drunkard, came home from wherever he had been that day and found people in his house. During the meeting he came into the house and sat down without saying a word. He looked upset. As some of us did not know who he was, we asked him his name with the idea of making friends with him. Our attempt, however, proved unsuccessful because, instead of answering our question, we got bombarded with his complaints of getting into his house without asking his permission. He would not accept our apologies even if we told him that we were people of God and that it was his wife who proposed that we meet at their house since, for some reason, we could not go to where we were supposed to meet that day. In any case, using the Word of God, leaders and members of Malkia wa Amani faced him boldly and answered all his attacks while clinging all the time to the power of God's Word. This silenced the man, and later on he promised to stop his drinking habit and being a Christian, he would come back to the Church. We were all happy with our victory, with God's help. He did not, however, keep his promise until now and we hope to make a follow up talk with the man when the right time comes.

The other challenges members of Malkia wa Amani are facing today are the challenges coming from non-Christians as well as Christians from other denominations. Non-Christians are a challenge because they do not know what is Malkia wa Amani and what it is all about as a group. Because of this, they dismiss the community as one of these Protestant sects that they don't like to associate themselves with. The other Christian denominations or sects are also a challenge to Malkia wa Amani because of their radical and very often wrong interpretation of Holy Scripture. Using this misguided and often limited biblical knowledge they have, they try to convince some members of the community to join them saying that

they are the right Church of God. This is, in a way, risky especially for those members whose faith is weak. We are, however, proud to note that until now not a single member of the community has been misled. The risk of being misled, of course, is real.

We remain on the aspect of similarities, but this time under the negative element. The early Christian community had everything in common so as to assist those who were in need in the community as well as outside it. To do this they would sell everything and give the proceeds to the community. Ananias and Saphira then sold a part of their property. They, however, kept some of the proceeds for themselves, an act condemned by Peter and perhaps, by the rest of the community.

Malkia wa Amani also, in a slightly different manner, endures a difficulty that is caused by its own members who refuse to contribute for the welfare of the needy members of the community or neighbours and the sick. This fact becomes evident when they talk of contributions and that some members are reluctant to pay. The community's record book also proves this unfortunate reality.

Meeting "in their homes" and "sharing everything together" are indications that members of the early Christian community are well at ease with one another. Again the "Fraud of Ananias and Saphira," indicates an element of contradiction.

In a similar way, members of Malkia wa Amani seem to be well-at-ease with one another, "too much formalism," however, makes some members, in a way, uncomfortable in the community.

2.2 Differences

The early Christian community was bold and unfearful in preaching the Good News. They preached the Good News to each other as well as to the people they met in whatever circumstances.

In the case of Malkia wa Amani, however, some members share the Word of God in a very shy and unconvincing manner. Some others are bold and strong just like the apostles Peter and John (Acts chapters 3:1-4:22), as we can see in the story above.

When members of the early Christian community preached the Good News, they were convinced in faith of what they were saying. They knew what they were talking about. They knew the Scriptures.

On the other hand, some members of Malkia wa Amani risks misinterpreting the Holy Scripture. This is because of their obvious lack of biblical knowledge.

The early Christian community “broke bread together”. That is, in a sense of a meal and also in a sense of the Eucharist. Presumably, all members took or shared this bread together. Malkia wa Amani also “broke bread together”. That is, during the Eucharist in the Church or in the house of one of their members, when a priest goes to visit them. However, some members of the community are excluded, or should I say “excluded themselves” from receiving Holy Communion because of some discrepancies in their Christian life, for example, non-sacramental marriage. Unlike members of the early Christian community, these members of Malkia wa Amani cannot fully share this bread together with all the other brothers and sisters in the community because of the above mentioned problem.

The early Christian community had God's Word readily available for them. They had the Scriptures (*Torah*) as their source of God's Word. They also had the apostles, who, for them, were the source of the Gospel, that is, Jesus' teaching given to them during his earthly ministry.

Unfortunately, unlike the first Christian community, Malkia wa Amani has limited sources of God's Word. First of all, some members of the community do not have a Bible of their own. Thus, their source of God's Word is nothing more than what they hear in the Church, during Mass, and what is read out to them during their weekly meetings. On top of that, there are only three priests in South B Parish, making it impossible for them to meet all 32 small Christian communities in the whole parish for at least once a month. In terms of God's Word, therefore, Malkia wa Amani is, somehow, unfortunate.

3. The Christian Community in Acts (1:12-5:42): An Example for "Malkia wa Amani" and Other SCCs

We have seen the similarities and differences between the first Christian community and Malkia wa Amani. We have also seen that the early Christian community shared more similar elements than being totally different from each other. Let us now see how the first Christian community can serve as an example to Malkia wa Amani and other small Christian communities today.

Unity (*koinonia*) is, perhaps, the strongest and the most important feature or characteristic of the first Christian community. This *koinonia* is expressed in many different ways. First, by "listening to God's Word" together especially through the preaching of the apostles. Second, by "praying together" whether at home or at the

become the essence of any other small Christian communities today, although we might still be far from that reality.

The next essential element of the first Christian community, that serves as an example to Malkia wa Amani and other small Christian communities today, is faith in the Risen Christ. This faith is expressed through bold preaching of the Good News either in front of a hostile crowd, that is, the Jews, or in front of the authority. Through this bold preaching of the gospel, many people listened and joined them. It is by faith that the first Christian community was able to move forward. It is the same faith that helps Malkia wa Amani to be what it is today, i.e., united. This faith can also serve as an example to any small Christian community that exists today. This faith is also expressed by the first Christian community through prayer. The same practice proves to be true in Malkia wa Amani and should, by all means, become an essential practice of all Christian communities today.

4. Conclusion

There can be no better conclusion to this chapter than saying that 'Malkia wa Amani comes from the first Christian community'. It comes from the first Christian community because all aspects of its community life are truly modelled (though not intentionally) after the example of the first Christian community. It would not be too naive if we say that Malkia wa Amani is, in fact, a continuation of the first Christian community. It is not, therefore, surprising that almost all elements or characteristics of the first Christian community are also present in Malkia wa Amani.

After evaluating Malkia wa Amani in the light of the first Christian community, we can say that the first Christian community is truly an example, a

model to Malkia wa Amani as well as to any other small Christian communities that exists today. After identifying all the positive and negative characteristics of the first Christian community, we may also point out that the first Christian community aside from being a model to Malkia wa Amani and to other SCCs that exists today, is also an example to other small Protestant Churches that exist today here in Nairobi and obviously, in the whole world.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

We have seen in chapter I how the first Christian community lived a marvellously united life. They were united both among themselves, especially by putting “everything in common,” and with God by being faithful to prayer, and so on and so forth. This community kept their unity and made it, perhaps unconsciously, part and parcel of its characteristics as Christians. This unity and all its other characteristics were then handed on to all other small Christian communities that followed it. The first Christian community, as well as all the other early Christian communities (e.g., those founded by Paul) were characterised by their being small in number. They were, however, strong and firmly united. That is why they stood their ground amidst all trials and persecutions. It is not surprising, therefore, that many people, struck by the firmness of their faith, resolved to join them. Day after day Christians increased tremendously in number until Christianity became the official

religion of the then Roman Empire. Now Christianity has become one of the biggest (if not itself the biggest) religions in the whole world.

Realising that it is no longer possible to fully take care of their flocks all by themselves, the bishops decided to start a new venture; the small Christian communities. As we have seen above, this initiative started in Brazil and spread throughout the world.

In this paper we made a comparative study between the first Christian community or Jerusalem community in Acts 1:12-5:52 and “Malkia wa Amani”, in Mukuru-Kayaba. Here, we put emphasis on the exemplary role, the first Christian community can play in the community life of “Malkia wa Amani”.

The reason why we decided to compare this two Christian communities is that, reading the Acts of the Apostles, and seeing especially the life of the first Christian community (Acts 1:12-5:42), and after seeing how “Malkia wa Amani,” a small Christian community in Mukuru-Kayaba lives its SCC life, we realised that these two communities have so much in common. It is perhaps because of this fact that “Malkia wa Amani” serves almost as an exemplary small Christian community in Mukuru-Kayaba. This is because the Holy Spirit that is poured upon the first Christian community in Jerusalem moved and continues on moving from then until now. This study, therefore, established these relations between these two communities and made us conclude that indeed the first Christian community is a model community. It is a model both for Malkia wa Amani and all other small Christian communities today. It is also a model for small Protestant communities or Churches that is mushrooming throughout Kenya and undoubtedly throughout the world.

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