



# Circumcision as a Pastoral concern in the South African Catholic Church

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## Abstract

The local Catholic church's views on circumcision in South Africa are examined and discussed in this article. It highlights the fact that circumcision is a widespread practice in South Africa and differs from the biblical definition of the procedure. Numerous tribes engage in circumcision. The few languages spoken in South Africa include Xhosa, Sotho (Sepedi), Venda, and Zulu. They perform circumcision as a rite of initiation of a young person into adulthood. It is a custom that occasionally betrays South African families and God by failing to take seriously the politics surrounding circumcision and by ignoring the pain or death that some young boys experience during the procedure (there is no anesthetic treatment given) and after being circumcised (boys go home and while others are not healed completely, some of them must go to the hospital to heal that wound, and some even go as far as losing their manhood), as well as the reliabilities that result from these events. Blinds the family to the dangers of ritualized circumcision as a path to manhood. The article is a means of introducing the local Catholic church to handle such a situation pastorally. The goal is to make circumcision so that other nations can benefit from it. pastoral care is the church's role in nation-building. The article's central idea is circumcision. Since circumcision is a gift from God to the family, the process is a literary contemplation.

**Keywords:** Circumcision, pastoral, healthcare, South Africa, Catholic Church.

## Introduction

This article is focused on circumcision. The Roman Catholic church is responsible for both the pastoral care of the family and the removal of men's foreskins (hereafter known as the church). A pact between men and God (Genesis 15; 17; Joshua 5:2-9). The removal of a male's foreskin is a major pastoral concern in South Africa. The failings in circumcision as pastoral care are examined and described, along with how these errors have impacted the family by encouraging the pain and suffering of young boys. This includes torturing the minds of parents who have lost children because of circumcision. Worst of all, circumcisions undermine ties between people and



God by eroding the church's morality. It appears that other African nations are also impacted by the destruction of traditional circumcision rituals. The Lornwe and Yao tribes are reported on by Harry Godfrey Mtike in Malawi. They also perform customary male circumcision rites: "While these rituals have value and fill key functions in society, they are at the same time troublesome. The lack of proper medical equipment and training in performing actual circumcision, as well as accompanying teachings which encourage sexual promiscuity, makes these ceremonies physically, spiritually, and morally dangerous" (Mtike, 1999: 1).

Contrary to the report and Council of Trent Session 6, Pius XII emphasizes circumcision is morally acceptable in Chapter 7, Paragraph 3. If it halts a sickness that can't be treated in any other way (Paus XII 1547). HIV/AIDS is a real-world illustration. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have both recommended voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC) as a key strategy for preventing heterosexually acquired HIV in men in environments where the prevalence of heterosexually transmitted HIV is high (WHO, 2020: August 17). Fortunately, or sadly, circumcision is a widespread custom among many South African tribes and even around the world. A few of these are the Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho (Sepedi), and Venda tribes in South Africa. Here, some parents and their kids turn to the age-old cultural practice of circumcision. The other families then proceed to carry it out at the hospital.

Male circumcision is still a popular cultural and nontherapeutic practice in some households, but in general, Catholic teaching forbids it out of respect for bodily integrity. According to the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (2017:552). "Except when performed for strictly therapeutic medical reasons, directly intended amputations, mutilations, and sterilizations performed on innocent persons are against moral law" (CCC, 2297). That rule is broken by parents who choose to mutilate and degrade their sons by having them circumcised. The circumcision of newborn children is included. Because there is no sickness and no need for therapeutic treatment, it is nontherapeutic. There is an absence of severe Catholic prohibitions on circumcision. Including a lack of medical organizations that support the therapeutic value of circumcision. The church's moral teachings rarely mention male circumcision. Many influential texts on moral theology ignore it. everything but medical ethics. Furthermore, circumcision is a common practice in many cultures around the world and is morally acceptable.

### **Circumcision as a covenant**

According to the church, the covenant of circumcision is a result of God's relationship with Abraham, a man of great faith, as recorded in the book of Genesis:

God said to Abraham, 'You on your part shall maintain my Covenant yourself and your descendants after you, generations after generation. ... this is my Covenant ... you are to maintain between myself and you, and your descendants after you: all your males must be circumcised. You shall circumcise ... and this shall be the sign of the Covenant between myself and you. When they are eight days old all your male children must be circumcised, generation after generation of them, no matter whether they be born within the household or bought from a foreigner not one of your descendants. They must always be circumcised, both those born within the household and those who have been bought. My covenant shall be marked on your bodies as a covenant in perpetuity, the uncircumcised male, whose foreskin has not been



circumcised, such a man shall be cut off from his people: he has violated my covenant (Genesis 17:9-14).

A sign of the love between God and men is circumcision. It is an order and an obligation that every man must uphold and adhere to. Jesus was circumcised when he was eight days old (Luke 2:21). Male neonates younger than eight days old and ladies could not be circumcised. It is a means of observing and purifying what is included in the Lord's and Moses' Law. The church must have emphasized the circumcision of men as a command and a gift from God during sermons and other teachings. It must have followed God's commands. However, throughout time, as more and more Orthodox Jews and Muslims vowed to uphold God's original directive to Abraham regarding circumcision practice, things began to alter. The Roman Catholic Church has accepted both the practice of circumcision and non-circumcision. Some people can view the church's behavior, which occasionally does not involve physical circumcision, as a breach of God's promise to Abraham.

### **Un-circumcision**

The apostolic church had an impact on the uncircumcision issue in the church. That is the Apostles' Acts. Here, certain Judean men urged St. Paul that a man cannot be saved unless he is circumcised in the manner prescribed by Moses. In Jerusalem, a few Pharisees who had converted to Christianity objected to the uncircumcision. mandated the circumcision of pagan people and gave them instructions on how to follow the Law of Moses (Acts 15:1-5). It was a pastoral issue that the Jewish community, Pharisees, and St. Paul had to deal with. However, when presented to the apostles, Peter, James, and Paul were able to present a superior solution that is still in use today.

Peter's statement, in which he reminded the Jews of "the early days when God made a choice of the pagans to learn the Good News through Jewish converts to Christianity and so become believers," caught the audience's attention first. God reads everyone's hearts and gives them the Holy Spirit to signify that he approves of them, just as he did for Jewish Christians who converted to Christianity. God did not distinguish between non-Jewish converts to Christianity and Jews. By faith, he or she cleanses their hearts: "It would only provoke God's anger if Jewish converts imposed on the disciples the very burden that neither they nor their ancestors were strong enough to support. Jews converts are saved in the same ways as the uncircumcised: through the grace of Lord Jesus" (Acts 15: 7-11). This presents St. James' perspective on circumcised and uncircumcised people. When God says: "After that, I shall return and reconstruct the fallen House of David; I shall rebuild it from its ruins and restore it," it is consistent with the prophecies. The rest of humanity, including all the pagan devotees of my name, will then seek the Lord as the one who revealed this so long ago (Acts 15:16-18). Sending letters to both circumcised and uncircumcised individuals is another technique to rule out challenging situations for pagans who wish to turn to God. to forewarn the uncircumcised against anything idolatrous, fornication, eating animal meat that has been strangled, and blood (Acts 15:13-20). These are not the issues now plaguing South Africa's local churches.

### **The situation in South Africa**

Initial circumcision in South Africa is a rite of passage into manhood known as *ukwaluka*. That serves as a rite of passage for children into adulthood. A viewpoint that occasionally fails to consider the politics of traditional circumcision, contemporary scientific warnings against bodily



dehydration, and the neglect of young boys who risk suffering or dying after circumcision (Mutasa). Unsanitary conditions (National Geographic). Included is failing to address the tensions between Christians and Muslims over religious issues, which might be easily resolved if the South African Catholic Church supported efforts opposing unethical practices like circumcision.

The local church may overlook the morality of circumcision, as is the case with many of the contemporary Catholic Church texts. As a result, the Church considers circumcision to be a sinful act. The practice of circumcision continues to violate the physical integrity of young male children and robs them of a body part that can serve as a barrier between their developing glans and their private parts, which are used for adult sexual functions (Dietzen, 2004: 33). Lutherans and Jews disagreed over this issue, which has now been resolved. After encountering hostile and violent caricatures of the murderous, cruel Jewish ritual of circumcision, Lutherans disapproved of the rite. They learned that the Jews push the skin and tear it open with sharp fingernails during the cutting off of the foreskin of a male kid (Neutel & Anderson, 2016). The purpose of circumcision is to help people uphold moral principles. This is done by adopting circumcision to keep oneself clean and healthy and to prevent diseases like HIV/AIDS. But not to disregard the article's mentions of clean air, water, and food for humans. The parents have asked for it to happen for social reasons; so as to avoid social marginalization and to be seen as decent parents and children by the clan. The entire family must do it at home. The concept might undermine circumcision's traditional goal of turning boys into actual men. But it could have prevented dehydration, improved hygiene, and even saved lives. In some locations, the procedure is done out. There is no therapeutic or remedial justification that makes it ethical to habitually give something to a child that they don't need. The family also referred to as the "domestic church" (Paul VI's *Lumen Gentium*, 1964:11, 31), is naive to the dangers of the improperly performed circumcision ceremony as a path to manhood. The main idea of the article is circumcision, and textual reflection is the methodology. In conclusion, God gave the family circumcision as a gift.

## Theory Framework

Circumcision, etymologically, is a Latin verb of "*circumcidere*", which means, I "cut around, make an incision around, clip, trim; circumcise; ring (a bark); or I cut off, shorten, diminish, abridge, circumscribe; get rid of, abolish" (Word-Sense Dictionary, 2022). It relates to the excision of the male reproductive system's foreskin. That is a man's private area. This also applies to other cultures' customary rituals. The covenant that exists between God and his people is symbolized by circumcision. God and Joshua's followers have a relationship that is symbolized through circumcision (5:2-12). The etymology was included at this point in the original story for theological rather than historical reasons. Joshua's troops could not have been allowed the recuperation time needed following circumcision (Joshua 5:8; Genesis 34:24–25) under these risky conditions. The custom primarily gets ready for Passover periscope (Joshua 5:10-12).

The initial conquests are traditionally characterized as a holy event that involved an incursion into Canaan. In the original story, the affirmation point served as the foundation for the circumcision narrative. The entire original story went as far as to say that after the crossing, the entire nation of Israelites still needed to be circumcised (Joshua 5:8). This disregard for circumcision is a historical issue that must be clarified. It evokes the irreligion of the generation that perished while traveling; a generation that was bad (Brown, Fitmyer, & Murphy, 1969:128-129).

It anticipates the baptismal rite of Christian initiation. It serves as a symbol of inclusion into the covenant people or Abraham's offspring. It serves as a symbol of the circumciser's compliance



with the law (Gal 4:4; CCC 528; CCC 2022:871, Glossary). God and the men who use science to identify a person's sex have a close relationship (Schnebly, 2021). God's initiative to mankind, both young and old, is circumcision. Examples include Isaac, who was circumcised by Abraham at the age of 8 days (Genesis 21:4-5), and Abraham, who was circumcised at the age of 90 years. Men have continued to get circumcised for millennia. The practice of circumcision was reserved for males who were born into the family and slaves who were purchased from a foreigner. Every child born into the household, regardless of whether they were purchased, must be circumcised. The practice permanently imprints the ongoing covenant on the bodies of males. It means being a part of God's family (Genesis 17:9-14).

Jews, such as Haredi (ultra-Orthodox), Dati (religious), Masorti (traditional), and Hiloni (secular) and Muslims, such as Sunni and Shia undertake the religious rite of foreskin cutting off males, as a social habit or for potential health benefits. It also pertains to "female genital mutilation," sometimes known as "female genital circumcision," defined as "a process often performed as a cultural ceremony that comprises the whole or partial excision of the female external genitalia, particularly the clitoris and labia minora" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1828).

This article does not cover FGM because the incidence is not widespread in South Africa (South African CEDAW Report). The topic of the article is male circumcision in South Africa. In South Africa, it is a very important pastoral issue. Its methods include the use of sharp edges and stones, spears, "knives of flint" (Joshua 5:2), razors, and fingernails like those used by the Jewish community. The use of these instruments varies depending on the tribe or race's traditional and cultural heritage.

## **Reflection**

During circumcision, it is not the circumcision that kills many young boys. It is rather inexperienced and untrained, and by being negligent in South Africa.

## **Real Issue**

Nearly 80 boys and young men have died in South Africa from injuries incurred during a ritual circumcision," BBC Africa's Nomsa Maseko writes from the Eastern Cape (BBC News, 2013). This poses a hazard to the population because it is so large. For instance, there are skilled circumcisers among the Xhosa people who have no official training. A boy is instructed not to drink any water following circumcision in a circumcision school. food and drink are not fresh. Some of the circumcisers are reportedly drunkards, the local leader said Al Jazeera (Mitrara, 2022). This implies that such circumcisers do not maintain the tribal culture in a secure and accurate manner. Additionally, the traditional authorities are not sufficiently watchful of such careless traditional cultural circumcisions.

## **Solution**

As an alternative, traditional leaders must ensure that those who circumcise young males are competent in what they are doing. Circumcising the boys won't help them learn on the job. The government representative must join forces with the traditional leaders to support their efforts to prosecute the careless circumcisers. Government representatives, such as law enforcement and legal counsel have a responsibility to encourage only circumcisions that have been trained for and registered with the health department, alongside traditional leaders. The youth will always be



in danger of dying until this occurs. because traditional circumcision presents the newly circumcised with a problem and a menace.

### **Dilemma**

Should they continue to follow their forefathers' customs, death is a possibility. If they break with their forefathers' customs, they won't be regarded by society as real men. No man wants others to question his sexuality, of course. The practice of circumcision in South Africa has created divisions within families, separating those who choose to have their children circumcised traditionally, in a hospital, or not at all. just confusion.

It was learned that some parents send their sons for medical circumcision, and afterward, those kids go to a traditional circumcision school, either on their own or with parental consent. This school is a facility where young men are segregated, educated, and circumcised in accordance with customary practice prior to becoming men. Additionally, it refers to the group of young men receiving this training (Soanes, 2008:153). This shift from hospital to traditional circumcision can be related to a few socioeconomic factors. Young guys who had their circumcisions in hospitals desire to be recognized as actual men by society. These young men had proper traditional circumcisions.

The scenario undervalues the family togetherness that the religion promotes. Included is providing children with appropriate parental care to prepare them for responsible adulthood. Parents or guardians must pay close attention in such circumstances to keep the reins on their children's introduction. The decision-making process shouldn't be left to the traditional authorities or the young person. It's crucial how the local church handles the circumcision controversy in South Africa. For instance, the Xhosa people of this nation think that a biological man is not a man until he is circumcised. This must be in keeping with the Xhosa people's ancestral traditions. Worse so, modern injections and medications are not permitted for traditional circumcision. The newly circumcised must only be treated with natural methods. Even though the sickness is worse, that is how tree leaves are used to treat and cure the wound left by circumcision (Armella Nke Nga, 2022). These include mashed *Helichrysum pedunculatum* leaves, which are used as a bandage for the circumcision wound (Family Asteraceae). Dress the wound with the dry outer layer of the *Boophane disticha* Herb (Family Amaryllidaceae) bulb (Dilika, Nikolova, & Jacob, 1996). Traditional circumcision, however, carries a significant risk of infection. Therefore, circumcision wounds might be dangerous if they are not examined and bandaged with plants that have antibacterial qualities. It is necessary to test sterilized plant extracts against the typical germs that infect circumcision wounds, which is occasionally not achievable with boys who are traditionally circumcised.

### **Discussion**

In South Africa, almost the entire community takes part in the rite of passage of circumcision (National Geographic, 2022). The pastoral care and lives of the entire family are impacted by circumcision. Governmental approval and traditional cultural leaders organize it. Pastoral rules are required. The South African Bishops will be unable to resolve the circumcision-related issue, which touches on the theology of circumcision and the pastoral of the family, without assistance and careful consideration.



## **Pastoral care**

The Holy Scripture, particularly the Bible, and other church writings are essential for illuminating this circumcision issue in the church. The promotion of cultural values is permitted in South Africa and is carried out by the traditional cultural authorities. In most cases, it is the "Laity," or regular Christians, who contact the traditional leaders to enroll the boys who would be sent to circumcision school (Vatican II's *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 1965: Chapter 1). Before sending the youth to cultural initiation schools, they also ask the priests to bless them. The priest's job is to call upon the divine spirit to successfully circumcise the candidates and to properly initiate them into culturally moral ideals. When holding family mass at home or at the church's Thanksgiving service, some families also ask the clergy to officiate. Following the Holy Mass, gifts are given to children by parents, family members, and friends. The priest prays for the applicants individually or as a group on behalf of the church. They congratulate God for successfully performing the circumcision on the young boys.

To address the challenges that influence the church's family pastoral care ministry, bishops communicate with traditional leaders and officials through priests and Laity. These are the spiritual world's rulers, subordinate to Christ, who performs circumcision on non-Jews and not by human hands. For them, the role models are Abraham's justification, Christ's naming, and Saint Paul. Paul explained how the gentile believer's baptism brings him into union with Christ.

The external symbol of inclusion in the old covenant is circumcision. It is an additional approach to link baptism with circumcision. There is no external human mark made during baptism; instead, participants are plunged into Christ's death and resurrection. Circumcision is a mark of Christ, casting off the body of flesh. The complete removal of bodily flesh during baptism contrasts with circumcision, which just removes a portion of it. The phrase "body of flesh" can refer to a person's frailty. The believer rejects human frailty' inclinations.

Every bishop tries to make sure that he exercises his ministry from within the Episcopal College and the Holy See to address the circumcision issue in the context of South Africa. The priests are likewise resolved to ensure that they carry out their duties as bishops' agents from within the "Presbyterium" (CCC 2022:232-233, no.877) of the diocese. The Church has no objections to the circumcision performed for therapeutic, cultural, or religious reasons. Except for Christian rituals, it takes no official position against the practice when carried out for other purposes. The moral consensus on this issue is not universal (Shackleton, 2021).

## **Homiletically**

The Bishops of South Africa are not adamant that the idea that a person's flesh has not been circumcised is a sign of their separation from God. True circumcision is found in the faithful in God. Christians ought to think of themselves as "the seed" and "sons of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7). This is a result of their faith in Christ. The dynamic source of the Christian life is the Spirit of Christ, which is present in those who worship God (Ephesians 2:1, 5; Galatians 3:29; Galatians 4:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Galatians 6: 14-15; Colossians 2: 11-13; Romans 8:15). Bishops' viewpoints are influenced by Abraham's, who was justified prior to having his circumcision.

Genesis states that before circumcision, Abraham's faith was regarded as uprightness. Later, Abraham was circumcised. Bishops believe that circumcision has no bearing on justification as a result. The "symbol of the covenant" between Yahweh and Abraham's family is circumcision



(Genesis 15; 17:11; Acts 7:8). The rabbis deemed circumcision the symbol of the later covenant between Yahweh and Israel. It serves to set Israel apart from other countries (Judges 14:3; Samuel 14:6). God makes his real covenant with men of faith. The originator of all believers at the time when Abraham placed his faith in God and was declared righteous was an uncircumcised Gentile. This establishes his spiritual parentage in the eyes of all Gentile believers. The men of faith are the true descendants of Abraham (Galatians 3: 7). Therefore, to be considered in the future as His true posterity—those who emulate not his circumcision but rather his faith—all God-fearing individuals must likewise follow in the footsteps of their ancestor by adopting his faith. This spiritual fatherhood of Abraham is seen by bishops like Saint Paul as a crucial step in God's plan of salvation for all men. This involves hearing God's message and receiving it into one's heart, which is more significant than circumcision of the physical body.

### **Infant Genital Cutting**

A male child's circumcision, particularly in post-exilic Israel, became the most significant act, bringing him into the covenanted people of God. The apostle Paul vehemently opposed the necessity of it attaining salvation via Christ in his epistles. However, Luke 1-2 elevates the act of circumcision to a pinnacle event for the bishops by establishing a covenant between God and his people that call for both perfect promise fulfillment on God's behalf and faultless compliance of the Law on Israel's part. In Israel, naming a boy such as John the Baptist after his father is a relatively recent tradition.

Jesus' circumcision is described in a manner like John the Baptist's (Luke 1:59). Jesus was officially recognized as one of God's special people, through whom the world was to be saved. Such expectations had now been met in Jesus, even in his name (Luke 1:31). God showed himself to the Abrahams, emphasizing the importance of man's moral and religious obligations to God (Leviticus 11: 44-45). According to Genesis 15:18, God does not "cut" a covenant but rather "gives" it to Abraham. Abraham's action represents his assent to God's covenant.

### **Uncircumcised**

Uncircumcised refers to the gentiles, also known as "the nations" (*ethne*), the non-Jewish people of the earth who are distinct from the Jews, the people of God, by race, origin, and election. Additionally, it denotes the foreskin (Galatians 5:6). It serves as the covenant's outward symbol. Uncircumcised is a derogatory phrase used to refer to those who do not belong to traditional Jews. Circumcision is performed by a human hand. It is merely superficial and does not imply an inner attitude or true distinctiveness from the Gentile in any meaningful way.

### **Recruiting and healing**

Circumcision is a common practice in South Africa. Its preparation starts with parents hiring a guardian or someone to drive their sons to circumcision school. Most typically, a male is this person. Sometimes the boy escapes with his peer group to circumcision school after learning that they will be circumcised on a mountain. Without informing the parents, of course. The boy has already left when the parents eventually find out later. The parents are then responsible for paying the circumcision charge.

Many parents, albeit not quite accurately due to the taking of young boys and teenagers, are like Abraham. At the age of 13, Abraham took his son Ishmael to be circumcised (Genesis 17:25-26).





Today in South Africa, it is not old as in Abraham's day, when circumcision was performed at the age of 99. (Genesis 17:24). In South Africa, youth and young adults make up the majority of those who get circumcised. For social and health integration, this circumcision is necessary.

Without going through customary circumcision ceremonies, a man in South Africa is not considered a man in that society but a "boy, irrespective of their age or social status. They are not allowed to marry or perform rituals" (Mfecane, 2016: 204-214). It is customary for young men to act their age during circumcision instruction to prevent and avoid the uncircumcised as actual men. Male circumcision is common in South Africa. It is like South Africa has declared to God that "all... males shall be circumcised" (Genesis 17:10e).

Some families choose to have their children circumcised at medical facilities. There is no outright prohibition of circumcision in the Catholic church. Pope Pius XII, who deemed hospital circumcision ethically acceptable to avoid HIV/AIDS sickness, appears to have had an influence on the concept of therapeutic circumcision. He felt there was no other way to stop the outbreak (Dietzen, 2004).

Failure to recognize the church's disrespect for customary circumcision is wrong. Families that are already at odds, both of which the church is meant to protect, are split apart. In the South African culture, circumcisions are performed at that time on infants aged 0 to 1. Additionally, it is consistent with the covenantal requirement that all male children be circumcised at the age of eight (Genesis 17:12) This statement is attributed to God, and circumcision as a tool was not mentioned.

### **Female Genital Mutilation**

In contrast to many other African nations, South Africa does not practice FGM, which is against the Biblical teaching of circumcision (Article 4 of UN General Assembly, 1993). However, this does not imply that women did not produce the circumcised or the circumcisers. They are. The circumcision of young boys in the South African community involves a woman indirectly. For instance, the circumcised boys are taken into the chief's palace by their sponsors when they are about to get full healing among the Northern Sotho-speaking people at night. Each boy bows and kneels, lowering his head. He has a sponsor behind him. Both continue to stand in front of the chief, who is seated. They keep up their raucous singing. Without the lads' attention, the chief's wife enters with some seeds and starts to saw at the freshly circumcised boys. They are instructed not to gaze at any women during that period. We could claim that this woman's presence represents the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ, in the church. She serves as an intercessor in church life, the fresh Eve.

The newly circumcised chief sends them back that evening to their circumcision schools to complete their recovery after the symbolic deed of the chief's wife. When the mending is finished, the applicants receive approval from the chief to become men, though not full men since they still need to complete further requirements to become true men. But first, each person is sent back to their parent's homes by the chief. To thank them for adopting the custom of their ancestors, parents welcome them with a feast. In South Africa, circumcision is considered a blessing and a badge of great dignity for the family. Today, no one can imagine a family in the South African Community where the males are not circumcised. It reflects ancient Jews' lives, but in South Africa, teenagers are given more attention than infants who are circumcised. This age group is simple and susceptible to peer pressure. These are the people who are genuinely interested in



what's happening in society. Most adults and senior citizens in South Africa have already undergone circumcision. Boys throughout their early years, and particularly young people, seek to fit in with society. They rapidly seek circumcision as a result. Some may start with a hospital circumcision and then, without their parent's consent, move on to cultural or traditional circumcision practices.

## **Circumcision**

When people ignore what God desires, Saint Paul, warns in his letter to the Romans that "the law will not rescue" (Romans 2:12-24). implies that for the Romans, circumcision was an actual law that had to be upheld. That is without considering the benefit it provides or the motivation behind it. After that, the uncircumcised agreed that circumcision was a good thing if individuals followed the law. But if they broke the law, they might as well have remained uncircumcised. The man who observes the Law is contaminated by how others disrespect it despite having been physically circumcised and having it all written down, even though he hasn't been physically circumcised. This is supported by the following passage from the letter to the Romans:

If a man who is not circumcised obeys the commandments of the Law, surely that makes up for not being circumcised? ... To be a Jew is not just to look like a Jew, circumcision is more than a physical operation. The real Jew is the one who is inwardly a Jew, and the real circumcision is in the heart – something not of the letter but of the spirit. A Jew like that may not be praised by man, but he will be praised by God" (Romans 2:25-29).

Despite being written in Greek, the epistle to the Galatians emphasizes that Titus was exempt from having to undergo circumcision. The problem came up, nevertheless, when certain people who do not actually belong to the apostles arrived covertly to witness their freedom in Christ Jesus and to reduce the apostle to servitude. Paul was anxious about preserving the gospel's true message for the helpless. He wouldn't give in to such folks for even a moment out of respect. The gentiles were considered leaders because God doesn't have any preferences.

However, the authorities eavesdropping on St. Paul had nothing fresh to add to the spread of the Gospel. But they recognized that he had been granted the same power as Peter to share the gospel with the uncircumcised. The same person whose action had made Peter the apostle of the circumcised gave Paul his mission to the pagans. So, these leaders and pillars, James, Cephas, and John, clasped hands with Barnabas and St. Paul as a sign of unity. St. Paul and his companions were to visit the circumcised as well as the pagan population. They just requested that St. Paul and his friends keep in mind to contribute to those in need, which St. Paul was happy to accomplish (Galatians 2: 1-10). Contrarily, on behalf of the entire church, Eugene IV outlined the early position of the Roman Catholic Church about the practice of male circumcision in a papal Bull, Bull of Union with Copts Council Florence, 1442. that it's possible to lose one's eternal salvation. "Therefore, it strictly orders all who glory in the name of Christian, not to practice circumcision either before or after baptism, sincere whether, or not they place their hope in it, it cannot possibly be observed without loss of eternal salvation" (Eugene IV, 1442).

The moralists who adhere to Catholic Church doctrines vehemently oppose circumcision. The circumcision causes the infant immense suffering and goes against God's will, so instead of celebrating it, the father weeps as his child sobs, piercing his heart.



As an alternative viewpoint, Paul asserts that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything." Due to the basis for circumcision, it serves as an illustration of the importance of freedom to a strong faith (1 Corinthians 7:18). The rest is what the Lord has given each person, and they should carry on as they did when God first called them (1 Corinthians 7:17). This instruction was given to all churches by St. Paul. If someone had already had circumcision when he made his call, he did not need to conceal it. Anyone who wasn't already circumcised when he called didn't need to be when he called (1 Corinthians 7:18). Because it makes no difference to them whether someone has been circumcised. What matters most is following God's instructions (1 Corinthians 7:19).

In the 19th century, King Shaka of South Africa forbade circumcision in Zulu territory on behalf of the traditional cultural icons. He saw it as a plundering of his army of youthful warriors. Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini later decided to reinstate circumcision in Zulu territory due to the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It was assumed that circumcised men were less likely to acquire HIV through sexual contact than uncircumcised men. Studies reveal that due to the disease's prevalence at the time, KwaZulu-Natal was home to many HIV-positive South Africans ( New Humanitarian, 2009).

This reveals the high regard with which circumcision is held in South Africa. It upholds traditional Jewish practices to the exclusion of the modern medical treatment provided to boys who have undergone traditional circumcision. Boys frequently experience dehydration, glare, gastrointestinal problems, and some even lose their genitalia. These young guys were traumatized for life by the government's treatment of untrained traditional surgery (BBC, News Report, 2013). How does the local church in South Africa manage to maintain such contradictory circumstances?

Everyone in South Africa is a target of the nation's traditional cultural authorities and the government is no exception. This circumstance has made the church's family pastoral care ministry in South Africa easier to carry out. It enables the church to work with the government through established figures. People are required to obtain reference letters from their traditional leaders, the police, and their church leaders before applying for any official documents or positions in the government. But in terms of circumcision, this collaboration between the government, traditional leaders, and the church has not yet taken place. In this area, the church needs to play a prudent and astute prophetic role. Numerous factors are involved, including the negative effects of customary circumcision rituals. Traditional chiefs are referred to as *dikosi* in Sepedi. They are also regarded as arbiters of disputes, judges, and mediators in addition to being the guardians of their communities and/or subjects' traditions, customs, and culture. Despite having undisputed authority and power, a Kgosi consults his chiefs before making a significant decision in matters of importance. Keep in mind that a Kgosi is a traditional chief with final authority over his subjects. He has a duty to preserve their customs and culture so that future generations can continue to practice them (Merwe & Thebe, 2019).

As the cornerstone of tribal identity and social cohesion, traditions and customs are crucial in South Africa (Kgosi Lehatshe Mankuroane 2017). When tradition is still upheld in South African society, it shouldn't be broken. Because it is a bond that holds society in its grip, members of that society don't take the chance of departing from that established tradition. It is accurate because many myths and rituals support the established order. The order requires an indigenous tradition-based culture. From the viewpoint of the church, the cultural perspectives are reasonable. They imply that culture is a set of institutions that expresses a society's, a nation's, or a community's views on morals, values, and traditions. Insofar as they unite people and give



them a feeling of common identity, security, and dignity. The basis of every tribe's identity is its traditions. In any country, worldwide, tribes and communities are committed to upholding them at all costs because of what they stand for. It would be equivalent in South Africa to erasing history or, worse yet, erasing a tribe's soul and identity to abolish traditions and customs.

As a result, they would lose their culture and identity (Kgosi Mankuroane, 2017). The traditions and cultures that a Kgosi converts to Christianity should be preserved and passed on to the next generation clash with his brand-new religious beliefs. Due to what he should be doing as a leader in this situation, Kgosi in South Africa is in a challenging position. whether, despite his conversion to Christianity, he should maintain his customary obligation to protect his people's culture or simply give it up. Included is his attempt to separate and put his personal convictions aside from his role as a representative or steward of the community values, which is questioned.

One of the issues that exacerbate the predicament traditional leaders in South Africa are in is the conviction held by some that their culture is above reproach and impervious to the gospel's and the Holy Spirit's transformative power:

cultural imperialism must terminate first to allow the indigenous culture to relate more effectively to the gospel, on its own terms and without pressure from outside. With humility and gratitude let us borrow and learn from other cultures but let us not become their cultural slaves, argues Mbiti (1977:28).

This argument places culture above the gospel. It implies that the only ways to understand the gospel are through cultural lenses. It is a well-informed position to claim that the Holy Spirit has no place in traditional African religion. According to Amanze (2000:3). One of the most distinctive features of traditional African religions, in general, is the concept of a Supreme Being. Cultural barriers make it difficult for missionaries to share the gospel with people from different tribes in a nation like South Africa. Kgosi's position in this situation is to address the issue and express that position (Mankuroane 2017).

In South Africa, the culture of the community influences its identity. It serves as the cohesive force behind social cohesion. When people believe that cultural norms conflict with the Bible or go against Christian principles, issues always arise. Tension can arise when young Christians refuse to participate in initiation rites. Initially allowing the converts to forego initiation, Kgosi soon becomes more concerned that the tribe will eventually break apart and perish because of the Christians' refusal to participate in a few other communal rituals.

Kgosi still thinks it's important to maintain cultural practices like an initiation. He contends that cultural practices have been in place for a very long time and cannot be altered because, in the opinion of tribal leaders and subsequently the tribe, it is through these practices that the young members of the tribe are taught about its history and culture. Even more essential for ensuring an orderly society where respect reigns are the initiation process, which teaches the youth about their future roles as men and women. Kgosi talks about initiation in relation to the place of men in society. Thus, a prince would always serve as the group's leader. Before they leave for their initiation, they congregate in the royal kraal where the ruling Kgosi bestows his blessings and gives that group (*mophato*) a name. The name is then used as a status or symbol in society by every young man until his death. Despite not always reflecting their social roles, naming *mophato* is a way to group age groups. The majority of *Mophato* would then likely be made up of young people in the same age range.



With the assistance of the local church, young people are taught what truly gives life. What gives life is a relationship with God and living in accordance with God's will. The Archbishop of Pretoria in South Africa, Dabula Anthony Mpako, acknowledges the Christian Brothers' crucial role in instilling Gospel values in young people "with Jesus Christ at the center" at the Catholic institution: All young people who go and do not go through traditional circumcision school are blessed (Pires, 2022). A demonstration of the South African local church's efforts to support the most vulnerable members of society through its institutions and members is the positive response of many of its members to the Catholic Church's call for youth naturalization. They have tried to finish this work in a variety of places, such as Catholic schools and numerous outreach organizations that serve God's people by tending to their very human needs. They aim to follow in the footsteps of St. Paul, who provided for the weak and upheld the dignity of everyone, in these endeavors as well as in the parish, healthcare, counseling, and other ministries.

The South African local church has taken great pride in recognizing the contributions made in the past and present by devoted Christians to the nation's ministries and educational institutions. Many Christians promised and still promise to continue serving the Church by adhering to God's revelation of creation, the Gospel message of Jesus of Nazareth, and the spirit and charism of the Apostles while working in classrooms and other ministries (especially, St. Peter, St. James, and St Paul).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) concluded that circumcision shouldn't be routinely advised because the benefits of the procedure typically outweigh the risks. They counsel parents to follow their own moral, religious, and cultural convictions when making decisions. The idea is compatible with the church's ministry of pastoral care for families. Whether circumcision is practiced in the Church or not, the importance of the family must be increased. Every church member must therefore pay close attention to behavioral factors, such as preserving life and avoiding suffering and death. They vastly outweigh any potential protective effect of circumcision, so they should be the focus of effective and moral prevention strategies.

The old circumcision made Jews and other Hebrews covenant members of God's family. They needed to be made clean through circumcision to cross the Red Sea and arrive in the Promised Land. Joshua was obligated to circumcise any children born during the crossing to uphold their ties to Mosaic law and God's command. It served the local South African church as a preview of the baptism. Through baptism, people embrace the Christian faith and turn into followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

This article is a reflection on ritual circumcision. The context is South Africa. It emphasizes the risks associated with conventional circumcision. It is pastoral care as well as traditional culture and a steppingstone of the Roman Catholic church. The goal is to start the promotion and development of moral and humane circumcision practices while avoiding the risks of circumcision in a way that respects the cultural heritage and preserves the traditions of people while preventing bodily harm and moral decay from setting in. This study outlines the transformational process that allows the church and the people of South Africa to jointly consider options and formulate strategies for addressing the harmful aspects of circumcision teachings and related rituals.

It is unacceptable for young people to get circumcised without their parent's permission. Such a shift in attitudes and human structures, for this article, frequently puts into question established



values. They have frequently become impatient, especially among young individuals. It's a method for them to revolt in their misery. They desire to participate in society sooner because they are aware of their personal impact on it. This frequently makes it harder for parents to carry out their duties day after day. Institutions, rules, and ways of thinking and feeling that have been passed down through the generations do not always fit into the context of the present. As a result, there is a change in how people behave and even in the conventions of behavior

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