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Religiosity in Vihiga District: Modernity and Expressions of Outward Forms

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Introduction

From a cultural perspective, religion is a very diverse phenomenon. This is because culture influences people to behave in a certain way, affecting the way they express themselves, including their religiosity. The many African cultures can be argued to have caused religious and/or denominational diversity in African religiosity. For our purposes, a simple definition of religious diversity should be put forward: it is the assorted nature of the religions of the world as dictated by people's needs/tastes and cultural milieus. In Vihiga District of Western Kenya, which was the survey area for this paper, the mushrooming of Christian groups can simply be explained through the cultures of tradition and modernity. This has led to a vibrant sprouting of both African Independent Churches (AICs) and New Religious Movements (NeReMos) amidst the mainline or mission-founded churches. The diversity is in reference to the different tastes and needs of people in the district. The study will take Christianity as the point of reference and draw examples of the diverse nature of the religion in Vihiga District. This will aid in explaining the outward forms of religiosity of various religious groups in the setting of the study.

In order to properly historicize our observations, it should be noted that Christianity as brought to the Africans by the missionaries was thought to be an 'eye-opener' to the 'savage' Africans. It came along with goodies such as the 'medicine of the white man', and education and church for the backward, pagan Africans. In most missionary-founded churches, the system of worship was inflexible and the services followed a predetermined procedure as dictated by the mother-churches abroad. The Africans aped these forms of worship, though

some still retained their ancestral and indigenous forms of worship. Those who defied the conversion procedures of the white man were denied the benefits that accompanied it, which were meant for the converts, and consequently their children were not educated in missionary schools or treated in the missionary hospitals.

When most of the missionary-founded churches were left in the hands of African leaders, the situation gradually changed. Whereas some of the churches readily accepted inculturation (incorporation of African forms of worship), others remained faithful to the missionaries' approach of religiosity. It is from this time that African Christian groups started mushrooming. People founded churches that would benefit their livelihoods (though this is not the sole reason for diversity, as demonstrated in Table 1). Formation of these churches has continued up to date and, as opposed to Mbiti (1973) who argues that the diverse occurrence is a messy soup, the study proves that this is a rich way for Africans to express their religiosity. The existence of these religious groups is accompanied by assorted expressions in dance, music, worship, evangelism, and artistic representations in a bid to capture both modern and traditional cultures.

Statement of the Problem

The way in which the diverse Christian groups express their outward forms of religiosity has been changing as mediated by their changing socio-cultural, economic, political and technological contexts. The former missionary forms of worship have to some extent been replaced by free expression of one's religiosity in varied dance forms and worship structures accompanied by new forms of evangelism in the different churches, some of which are methods aimed at acquiring more converts. Most importantly, these forms of expressing a people's religiosity have been contextualized in a way that fits into their cultural milieus. This has been influenced by the advance of technology. It is in this context that the need to examine the outward forms of religiosity through a cultural and contemporary analysis cannot be underestimated. This chapter endeavours to answer the following pertinent questions:

- What are the causes of religious diversity in Vihiga District of Western Kenya?
- What are some of the outward forms of religiosity in a religiously diverse region like Vihiga District?
- In which ways are these forms of religiosity expressed?
- What are some of the cultural transformations that the people of Vihiga have experienced through the wake of religious diversity and the advent of technology in the district?

- What are the cultural implications of these transformations to the people of Vihiga District in the light of 'Christ and culture' arguments?
- What is the perception of religiosity within the populace, and what could be the way forward for harmonious existence of the varied religious forms amidst cultural and technological issues?

Objectives of the Study

The paper posits the following objectives:

1. To explore the ways in which socio-cultural changes have affected people's religiosity by analyzing culture and modernity as sources of change, hence causes of Christian diversity;
2. To study the outward forms of religiosity and the modes used in expression of people's spirituality in Vihiga District;
3. To probe into the implications of 'Christ and Culture' arguments to the churches and people in Vihiga District.

Samples and Methods

The findings of the study were part of an extensive research in Vihiga District of Western Kenya between May 2006 and March 2007 (Kenya is divided into eight provinces and each province is further divided into several districts). The broad area of research was on Religious Diversity and Community Development. The study zeroed in on twenty-three denominations in the district, with a random sample of two churches from each denomination, hence forty-six churches in total. The study had a sample size of 424 respondents.

Structured and unstructured questionnaires were completed by church members, community members and lay leaders. In-depth oral interviews, for generation of qualitative data, were held with the forty-six chief church leaders. For site studies, case studies were used. In this case, the units of study mostly happened to be social groups and this encouraged the use of contact-group type case studies. To analyze the data, both descriptive and inferential means of data analysis were employed. This chapter therefore draws examples from the data generated from this study as well as relevant literature that was analyzed to suit the context of the discussion.

The Study Area and Denominations

Vihiga is one of the eight districts of Western Province. Vihiga District lies between longitudes 34° 30' and 30° 0' east and between latitudes 0° and 0° 15' North. The Equator cuts across the southern tip of the district. The district covers a total area

of 563km², and is divided into six administration divisions, which are further sub-divided into twenty-seven locations and one hundred and fifteen sub-locations (Ministry of Finance and Planning 2002-2008:4).

The twenty-three different Christian denominations and movements chosen during the pilot study include: Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG), the Catholic Church, Friends Church (Quakers), Salvation Army, African Divine Church (ADC), Deliverance Church, Word of Faith (Praise Centre), Maranathas, Seventh Day Adventist (SDA), Legio-Maria, Church of God, New Hope Outreach Ministries, Roho Israel, African Israel Nineve, Chrisco, PEFA, Coptic Orthodox Church, Apostolic Church, Redeemed Gospel Church, the Holy Spirit Church, Abundant Life Church, Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) and Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK). Some of these denominations/movements have been used to draw examples for this paper.

Concepts

Change in any given society does not result from unidentified areas, but from a wide range of sources. Religious change can result from structural strains, religious conflicts, competition among various religious groups, cultural conflicts, and technological advancement, among other factors. These sources of change have influenced the way in which religious groups (sects and denominations) emerge and change in different societies. Religious change can contextually be analyzed in diverse ways vis-à-vis: religious identity, which can be related to the forms of transformation; levels of change to the group, persons, organizations, or the institutions being changed or affected by changes in religious structure; the magnitude of change weighed through the impact of religious changes, which could be marginal, comprehensive or revolutionary; and the rate of change can be gauged through the speed with which religious institutions are changing – slow or fast, continuous or spasmodic, orderly or erratic (Vago 1996:9). Religious changes have led to the processes of renewals, schisms, acculturation, diffusion, modernization, novelty, inculturation theology, among others. These processes are explained below to provide a conceptual framework for the chapter.

Renewals

Societal changes have resulted in religious renewals. Diminished religious beliefs and practices can easily be revitalized by founding a religious group to suit the needs of the people. Renewal movements therefore revitalize extinct doctrines as the social, religious, and cultural contexts of the people demand. Renewals have seen the mushrooming of splinter groups from the mainstream churches, as these groups focus special attention on reinstating African traditional practices in the renewed movements.

Acculturation

Culture, according to Kornblum (2005:51), is all modes of thought, behaviour and production that are handed down from one generation to the next by means of communicative interaction. A people's culture can be modified, or can either accommodate/tolerate or resist encroachment from other cultures. Acculturation therefore connotes taking on material and non-material attributes from another culture as a result of prolonged face-to-face contact. It is the interaction of cultures. Such contact in religious circles may be as a result of missionary activity, cultural exchanges and technological advancement (Vago 2000:87). Acculturation may be voluntary or involuntary.

Diffusion

Diffusion is the process by which innovations spread from one culture to another or from a sub-culture into the larger culture. It is a theory that emerged as an alternative to evolution (Vago 1996:77). Ninety per cent of known cultures in history have acquired elements from other people. A considerable amount of borrowing, therefore, goes on in human societies and, as Vago argues, the processes of diffusion (reinterpretation of borrowed or introduced elements, innovations and synthesis of the old and new) are ongoing and are present in all of them to varying degrees. This chapter therefore proposes the fact that in as much as some renewals are emerging in Africa to recapture the traditional beliefs and practices, this cannot be done in utopia since contemporary society is changing simultaneously. Technological advancement influences the cultural changes and vice versa.

Inculturation

Gumo (2004:167) briefly defines inculturation as the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. It is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and culture(s). By accepting inculturation, we allow a renewed formulation and interpretation of the existing religious doctrines to suit people's cultural contexts. Whereas acculturation and diffusion may only place emphasis on cultural changes of the absorbing group, inculturation, on the other hand, is aimed at incorporating cultural views to the foreign influence – e.g., Christianity as a foreign culture incorporating African worldviews into its doctrines. This in the long run modifies the imported worldview to capture the natives' beliefs and practices; and when this happens in a given religion, it becomes, in the words of Welbourn and Ogot (1966), 'a place to feel at home.'

Inculturation Theology

This is meant to refer to processes that allow for incorporation of African beliefs and practices in Christian doctrines. This allows for integration of what is held indigenous to what is thought to be foreign and/or of Western culture. In Africa, this has been a platform for the appropriation of African Theology. The formation

of All African Conference of Churches (AACC) in 1963 gave an impetus to this quest and the 1966 AACC convention provided space for African theologians to map out Christian theology for African people by drawing from the grassroots movements, African traditional beliefs, and African cosmologies (Nthamburi 1995). This was a strong foundation for Africans to take initiatives to propagate their religiosity, and inculcate their theologies into the Christian doctrines.

African Theology

To Mugambi (1989:9), African theology denotes two meanings and/or implications: First, the discourse which Africans conducted among themselves before their contact and influence by Christians and Muslims; and, secondly, the discourse which is being conducted by Africans in order to relate their own cultural and religious heritage to Christianity. While quoting Kurewa (1975), Nthamburi (1995:4) corroborates that African Theology is a study that seeks to reflect upon and express the Christian faith in African thought forms and idioms as it is experienced in African Christian communities and always in dialogue with the rest of Christendom. This therefore implies that inculturation of African beliefs and practices to Christianity is an on-going process.

African Independent Churches (AICs)

Barrett explains that 'independency' in African churches is:

The formation and existence within a tribe or tribal unit, temporarily or permanently, of any organized religious movement within a district name and membership, even as small as a single organized congregation, which claims the title Christian in that it acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord, and which has either separated by secession from a mission church or an existing independent church, or has been founded outside the mission churches as a new kind of religious entity under African initiative and leadership (Barrett 1968:50).

An African Independent Church is, then, a church that has been founded under African initiative and leadership to contextualize its operations as directed by the people's needs. To be recognized as a Christian movement, it must acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord.

Novelty

Literally, novelty refers to newness of something, or the occurrence of what was not previously known. The term novel has been contextualized herein to mean new religious movements. These are completely new sects, movements or denominations. The newness of these groups is implicated in their religious beliefs and practices, and to some extent their ministerial names.

New Religious Movements (NeReMos)

As contextualized in this study, a NeReMo may not necessarily address people's cultural needs or be pioneered by African initiatives. Its main characteristic is that it will liberally accommodate waves of culture and modernity and liven the gospel as demanded at a particular place and time. Most of the NeReMos are charismatics and evangelicals.

Schisms

Schisms are splinter groups that break away from AICs, novels, or mainline missionary churches. This may be due to any one of a wide range of reasons (see Table 1). Schisms are at times referred to as sects because they hardly differ from the churches of origin.

Modernization

Modernization is the process by which traditional beliefs and practices are transformed into what most people have believed to be modern/Western cultures. The process of modernization has been taking place rapidly in the recent past. However, this could be described as the encounter of cultural hegemony, which would generally be referred to as Westernization of African cultural beliefs and practices, with the Western culture as 'stronger' culture exerting hegemony over the 'weaker' African culture. I also would assert that the African culture has seen a period of revitalization of these formerly eroded practices. This observation provides a paradoxical picture, especially in religious circles. The paradox is that as Africans are busy reviving their 'buried' cultures, the advancement of technology is taking toll in many African institutions including religious groups.

Conceptual Orientation

The above-defined concepts provide a complex structural background upon which we can conceptualize this paper. Though most of these terms may have a Western origin and explanations for their literal meanings, they have been contextualized to fit the setting of an African study. The argument here is that a web of interaction among these ideas – diffusion, acculturation, inculturation, African Theology, and modernization – as sources of change in the contemporary society, has resulted into both positive and negative responses from most religious groups, leading to the founding of NeReMos, AICs, renewals, schisms and novels. This conceptual orientation helps us to examine the current outlook and adaptation of the mainstream churches, most of which are controlled by the mother churches abroad. It also enables us probe into the ways in which the AICs inculturated African indigenous ways of life in their religious practices while still maintaining a Christian outlook. The chapter therefore tries to un-puzzle the paradox presented by the two conflicting worldviews, which are viewed from two extreme

perspectives – the return of culture, and the advent of modern technology in the arena of religion. Both extremes are competing in a bid to provide the best basis for African Theology, which must play role in liberating the Church from structures that do not help in the contextualization of the Gospel to fit into the life milieus of Africans.

Findings and Discussions

The Return of Culture in African Christianity

The advent of Christianity in Africa eroded many African traditional beliefs and practices. Mugambi (1989:33) rightly observes that some Africans accepted Christian faith without question and criticism. They denounced, rejected and tried to abandon their cultural heritage, of which they were taught to be ashamed. For over two centuries Missionary Christianity reigned in the minds of many Africans with a small range of traditional beliefs and practices only being identified in limited areas, and with few Africans in these areas readily associating themselves with African beliefs and practices. The few who rejected the missionaries' approaches challenged the insistence that conversion to Christianity and the adoption of Western culture were inseparable. Thus, they accepted Christian faith but rejected Western domination. The tensions between Africans and the missionaries led to the establishment of African Independent Churches (AICs) as counter-hegemonic forces to missionary Christianity. This development has stirred a major resurgence of African beliefs. Though the AICs cannot fully claim to adopt African forms of worship *per se*, they are movements that endeavour to bring back the African traditional/cultural glory that was lost due to the advent of Missionary Christianity. They widely bear an African outlook, and a somewhat Christian position.

It is without any doubt that Western Missionary Christianity no longer enjoys a stronghold in many African communities. Fieldwork indicated that Missionary Christianity has lost its original power for two major reasons. First, it is now apparent that the lost cultural glory of the Africans is an important facet that African societies are trying to recapture in their religiosity. This is visible in the rising of the number novels and the renewal of religious groups that give a cultural perspective to African worship and the different contexts of life. Second, there is now a new wave of African Christianity, which is characterized by formation of sects and denominations that are 'liberated' to accommodate advanced technology as a way of contextualizing the gospel to suit people's situations and environments in the contemporary world. Some of these African Christian movements have either a traditional cultural background or missionary Christianity background, but have incorporated new trends into their services, in order to ensure that they are on par with the changing technologies.

Diverse Nature of Christianity in Vihiga District

Christianity is the dominant religion in Kenya; and statistically, the country is one of the most Christian-dominated countries in Africa (Ogutu 1993:88; Mbiti 1973:144). This results from a diverse range of reasons as illustrated in Table 1, which is sourced from an in-depth analysis of the causes of the diverse nature of Christianity in Vihiga District.

Table 1: Major Causes of Christian Diversity

Cause	Frequency	Percentage
Missionary conflicts	33	7.8
Monetary demands by the church leaders	25	5.9
Cultural tensions in the community	12	2.8
Stinginess of the missionary churches	36	8.5
Search for power and status/leadership wrangles	53	12.5
Economic or material gains	66	15.6
Persecutions in the churches	20	4.5
Social rejection	8	1.9
Theological and ecclesiological differences	46	10.8
Rapid church population growth	23	5.4
Prophetic call/inspirational visions	40	9.4
Churches resulting from family lines	13	3.2
Socio-political factors	6	1.4
Existence of various ethnic groups	7	1.7
Magic/witchcraft	4	0.9
A source of donor funds	32	7.5
Total	424	100

Source: Field Data, Vihiga District, Kenya

The above tabulated reasons can be culturally justified and thus offer a suitable explanation on the resultant NeReMos and AICs. Stinginess of the missionary churches appeared in the top five causes of the opinion count with a percentage of 8.5. The highest opinion, however, was on economic and material gains with 15.6 per cent, which can culturally be explained as a causal factor of the advent

of modernity. The research also revealed that this form of diversity has resulted in individualism, with religion dividing people along ethnic/clan and family lines. It is therefore relevant to point out that the occurrence of these religious groups and movements, be they AICs or NeReMos, is taking place within a changing society: a society characterized by modernity and a wave of new technological advancement. This consequently affects both the mainstream/missionary-founded churches, the NeReMos, and AICs.

Whereas both positive and negative views on this form of diversity were given, one issue remained very clear: the diversity has enabled people to practice their religiosity in the ways they find fitting in their diverse economic, social, cultural, geographical and religious contexts. The two major categorizations of religious practices lay in arguments from modern and cultural perspectives. Proponents of cultural arguments for diversity held that culture is part and parcel of every aspect of life, including religion. On the other hand, those who have integrated elements of modernity in their religious practices view cultural aspects as old-fashioned, and argue that, to a given degree, Christ is against culture (we will return to this proposition later). It was relevant after the above assertions to explore various aspects that would indicate how the two components (modernity and culture) were sources of change in the religious arena in Vihiga District.

Outward Forms of Religiosity

What was notable from the area of focus is that the varied religious groups have assorted ways of expressing their religiosity. These expressions are relevantly designed to suit the cultural and technological conditions of the populace. This study points out that Africans are now at liberty to found their own denominations, movements, cults and sects that are situational to them. The study unearthed the following indications to explain how people's religiosity has been expressed amidst the waves of modernity and culture.

Music and Dance

Christianity as established by the missionaries had for a long time been dictated by the mother churches overseas. Services in most churches were formalized and standardized to minimally include African forms of worship. This has greatly changed in the modern society. The schisms, renewals and novels that are currently mushrooming in the society have a new way of worship, through music and dance. Some of these churches are appreciating the value of African forms of worship. In Vihiga District, the *Isukuti* and *Lipala* dances, which are traditional, are now acceptable in some churches, especially in the AICs. Traditional drum-beating (*sukuti*) and dancing accompany traditional gospel songs; this makes the churches 'a place to feel at home'. To the AICs and NeReMos, Christianity in its mission form, as Shorter (1974:93) observes, was not radically united to the

rational structures of African society. The society appeared to be threatened by modern changes. Independent church movements are therefore transposing the social problems onto a mythical plane, helping the Africans ‘feel at home’ in the changed plane. Shorter’s observations help us strengthen our argument regarding the need for African churches to liberate themselves from the structures of cultural oppression through the establishment of more viable, explicitly Church structures.

Churches such as New Hope Ministries, Redeemed Gospel Church, Praise Centre and the Abundant Life Church, all found in Vihiga District, have amplified music systems, guitars, drum sets, pianos, tambourines, cymbals, and triangles, among other musical instruments. Most of these churches fuse both modern and traditional music; but whatever the music, it is accompanied by a wide range of modern musical instruments. The dance styles are both modern and traditional. The fascinating observation is that some perform using modern instruments and attire, but the music and dancing styles are traditional. To the church leaders, this kind of music and dance makes the services lively, unlike in the ‘traditional missionary churches’ where the extremes of tradition and modernity are not practised. These churches allow the youth to explore their talent in music and currently there is a wave of hip-hop, rap and reggae tunes of gospel music. Gospel music production has become a booming business for the youth in Kenya.

The church leaders in the missionary established churches, however, condemn these ‘extreme’ westernized dances and music in the churches by noting that they ‘dilute’ and compromise the gospel of Jesus Christ. They have labelled the reggae-hip-hop gospel music produced by the youth as secular, and lacking in spiritual fulfilment. Such comments have nevertheless been shelved by zealous youth as they seek either to explore their talents or express their religiosity in the ways they find fitting. Despite the condemnations, this type of modernity has definitely had some effect on the mainstream churches. Some are therefore changing their forms of worship to capture the attention of the youth. They include: the Catholic Church, Church of God, and Anglican Church of Kenya. Faithfuls of the Catholic Church observed that the Latin language formerly used in music and liturgy has been replaced by vernacular languages. The opening of the mass and handing over of offering are often preceded by vernacular songs and dance (though not in all churches).

Prayer

Prayers in most mainstream churches are predetermined, standardized and written down for the faithful to read through. This presents a form of communal worship in which a group of people pray together, a common prayer to God. There are prayer books which the faithful can buy in order to memorize the prayers written for them. Culturally, prayers in African communities were offered either

communally or individually in local languages. The needs of the people were given a priority, and offerings and sacrifices would be offered as per the needs of the people during prayer. The AICs therefore find dissatisfaction in the formal prayers of some mainstream churches, as they do not focus on people's needs but are said as a formality. To them, prayer should be contextual and should provide results of abundance, healing and blessings. They liken prayers to acts of sorcery and witchcraft, by noting that the acts of a magician to manipulate supernatural forces always brings good or bad results. Prayers contextually directed to the divine being(s) should therefore find solutions to people's problems.

For most NeReMos, prayers are more often than not individualized. In the charismatic movements, there is great emphasis on speaking in tongues as a sign of spirit-filled worship. Unlike in the AICs where local languages are often used in prayer, in most NeReMos, there is the use of foreign languages (English and Swahili), if not 'tongues'. Communal prayers are evidenced by Home Bible Churches, which are composed of a number of members in a given locality. Unlike the mainline churches, NeReMos emphasize on 'prayer as the spirit leads an individual'. They do not use prayer books. These differences could be explained by the fact that NeReMos draw the membership from different ethnicities and geographical regions, whereas AICs have members drawn from the localities – people with the same language and cultural needs.

Modern technology, on the other hand, has greatly transformed the area of prayers in the churches, especially the NeReMos. Prayer can be recorded and aired either on TV or radio; there have been cases where individuals call pastors or priests and prayers are said for them over the telephone; with the advent of the internet, a prayer can be sent to various people as a way of 'encouragement' or evangelism; there are also instances where prayers have been produced and distributed through the print media. These are just a few references that depict the effect of modern technology on prayer.

Evangelism

Inculturation theology seeks to reinterpret the Christian message from the perspective of the socio-cultural context and historical experience of African peoples (Chepkwony 2005:45). African theology should therefore be an important consideration in the inculturation of the modes of evangelism. Stressing on the negative attitudes towards African cultures and religion, Magesa explains that:

Contact between Christianity and African religion has historically been predominantly a monologue, bedeviled by assumptions prejudicial against the latter with Christianity culturally more vocal and ideologically more aggressive. Therefore, what we have heard until now is largely Christianity speaking about African religion, not African religion speaking for itself (Magesa 1998:5).

The majority of mainline churches, as Chepkwony (2005) notes, therefore find it difficult to synthesize Christ and other cultures, especially because Christianity as established by the Western missionaries has its own worldviews.

It is evident, however, that the fight for inculturation in NeReMos and AICs has not yet lost hope, and maybe the challenge is only felt in the ‘stingy’ missionary churches. In the evangelism circles, inculturation has affected varied areas such as translation of the Bible into various vernacular languages, use of local languages in preaching, use of African attires by the officiators of evangelism, and a return to African Liturgy. These changes are aimed at incorporating values embedded in the African cultural worldviews. These cultural values have largely been accepted in the AICs and some NeReMos. The field research in Vihiga District showed that some church leaders are now interested in cultural studies to understand the people’s cultural roots, since culture seems to be a part and parcel of every aspect of people’s lives – irrespective of the church’s perspective. The catholic priests expressed their concern as they observed that the faithfuls only invite them to officiate masses, especially during burials. However, there are other pre- and post-burial rites that they are not allowed to attend. This is the stubbornness of culture! The need for the church leaders to understand people’s cultures and contextualize the gospel to meet the cultural needs of the people was observed. In this regard, the failure of the mainstream churches to contextualize the gospel has been a reaping ground for the AICs and some NeReMos because they readily absorb the outcasts from these churches. The existing paradox, however, is that despite the need to recapture traditional forms of evangelism, the wave of modernity is largely adopted in most churches, both mainstream and NeReMos.

The radical structures of the mainline churches and some NeReMos are a great hindrance for the adoption of a theology of inculturation. Nthamburi (1995:4) advises that the ultimate purpose of African Theology is to make the Gospel and Christianity meaningful in the life and thought of African people. To do so, such a theology must articulate and reflect on the concrete situation in Africa in which religious experience is perpetuated. To address the diverse needs and expectations of the people of Vihiga, the churches have a wide range of forms of evangelism as explained hereunder.

Multimedia Religious Productions

Radio and Tele-Evangelism

In Kenya, the past ten years have seen the mushrooming of television production and airing of gospel messages. Most charismatic and evangelical churches have acquired their own studios, which are fully equipped to enable shooting and production of video messages. To the leaders, this is global evangelism, which

not only targets the faithfuls of a particular denomination/movement, but also those of different faiths. Digital Video Discs (DVDs), Visual Compact Discs (VCDs) and Compact Discs (CDs) as well as videotapes and radio cassettes are now available at affordable costs in the market. As Thode and Thode (1996) rightly observe, desktop video production has become much less expensive, even in Third World countries, and this has enhanced video production, editing and special effects. It has become more efficient and effective for various churches to own their own media production studios than to outsource their audio/visual production needs.

Our study in Vihiga District depicted that, though it might be expensive to air a TV series of evangelism messages, production of VCDs and videocassettes is relatively cheap, due to the available modern technology. The videotapes, VCDs, and DVDs are sold at affordable prices of approximately two dollars to the faithfuls. Besides TV productions, numerous radio stations have been established to answer the high demand from various religious groups. Some of the radio stations are purely faith-based and serve the purposes of evangelizing, through airing of gospel messages. Two dominant examples in Western Province given during the field research were '*Sauti ya Rehema*' (*SaYaRe*) – Swahili equivalent for 'Voice of Hope' – and '*Mulembe FM*'. The latter airs both secular and religious messages in local languages. It is therefore evident that due to the advent of modern technology, the traditional door-to-door apostolic evangelism, though still practised, is gradually being replaced by multimedia evangelism. There were reports from the church leaders that some people have been 'saved' through the multimedia evangelism.

Other various modes of evangelism noted from the field research were the use of public address systems in crusades. This is a technology that attracts crowds and enables the message to reach far and wide. It substitutes home to home (popularly known as door-to-door) evangelism, which is tedious and time-consuming. The public address method is commonly used by NeReMos, and some mainline churches. The AICs, on the other hand, commonly use door-to-door evangelism and 'roadside shows'. They emphasize communal sharing as a form of evangelism, and this was exemplified during their cultural ceremonies such as pre- and post-burial (*makumbusbo*) rites.

Forms of Gospel Delivery

Some of the charismatic and evangelical preachers commonly use the pulpit mode, and with the advent of technology, there is the use of PowerPoint projections and laptops at the pulpit as opposed to the Bible and note reading from the notebooks. Digital productions have been used in church as a way of evangelization, the most common being movies and audio tapes. This is common in both

mainstream churches and NeReMos. Such modes capture the attention of the youth and are consequently used as educative means for both the old and young. The major demerit of this method, however, is that it is unsuitable for the visually and hearing impaired persons, as well as the non-literate.

The proliferation of print media also enables faster spread of the gospel. This medium can avail the gospel both in local and foreign languages as suited to the audience. The print media has also been used in churches to disseminate other ideas and information, such as the church's weekly announcements. Pamphlets can be distributed to the adherents, and this saves time, though it is only effective if the audience is literate.

Art and Design

By art, I imply symbolic representation of various structures and images in the various churches. Art also refers to the codes of dress by the members of these churches. The different Christian denominations in Vihiga District have engaged themselves in a form of a competition as they establish church buildings at various localities in the district. The buildings vary from simple structures including tents that are temporarily hoisted to accommodate the faithfuls on Sundays, and other days of worship, to the most complicated modern buildings. This range of buildings does not only apply in NeReMos and mainstream churches, but also the AICs, despite their emphasis on cultural renewal.

The leadership of African Divine Church (ADC) and African Israel Nineveh Church (AINC), which are AICs, argued that though they are concerned with the people's cultural and situational contexts, they cannot ignore the advent of modernity in issues like artistic representations. The use of shrines for them is outdated in spite of their efforts to propagate cultural beliefs and practices. They claimed to have over 300 and 100 churches respectively, in Vihiga District alone. They also claimed to be establishing a nursery school in every church they build in the district as a way of evangelizing even to the little children. The argument of using churches (buildings) was evidenced by the number of churches that exist from the various denominations in the district. Table 2 below shows the number of churches in the 12 randomly sampled denominations since the year of their establishment.

Table 2: Evangelism through Establishment of Churches

Denomination/Movement	Year Established	Current no. of Churches
African Divine Church (ADC)	1948	330
Church of God (COG)	1905	325
Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG)	1926	241
African Israel Nineveh Church	1949	172
Anglican Church of Kenya	1906	86
New Apostolic Church	1975	82
Friends Church	1902	74
Salvation – Army	1927	38
Word of Faith (Praise Centre)1989	14	
Redeemed Gospel Church	1996	8
New Hope Outreach Ministries	1990	6
Roman Catholic Church	1915	4

Source: Field Data, Vihiga District, Kenya

The churches claimed to be using buildings as a way of attracting people for their services: the more the churches, the greater the number of faithfuls. ADC, COG and PAG had the greatest number of churches in the district. The modern artistic representations in form of church building in AICs have been complemented by other traditional artefacts such as interior décor, e.g. wooden crosses, wooden pulpits and carvings, and traditional musical instruments. In most NeReMos, however, the opposite is true, with most interior décor furnished with modern artistic representations such as wall draperies, glass pulpits, modern seats, national flags of different countries, modern instruments, and artificial floors, among others. The artistically adorned buildings with golden decorated altars and expensive statues have been used to attract faithfuls.

For dressing codes, most of the mainline church leaders (priests, reverends and bishops) have official clothes and collars, generally referred to as vestments. These codes vary from one denomination to another and their colours symbolize different things and occasions. Some of the AIC leaders also use vestments, the

designs of which differ according to the positions held in the church. However, it was observable that the NeReMos leaders rarely have official clothing. Most of them wear modern suits. The faithfuls in some AICs (e.g., ADC, Legio Maria, and AINC) and some mainstream churches (e.g., Salvation Army) also have uniforms. Some mainstream churches, however, insist on ‘conservative’ forms of dressing, especially for women, who must cover their heads and wear long, loosely fitting skirts. The opposite of this is found in some NeReMos who are not strict on dressing codes. The youth’s dressing code in these churches is ‘modern’.

Cultural Religious Beliefs and Modernity

Cultural tensions, stinginess of missionary churches, persecutions in the churches, social rejection, ecclesiological differences, and ethnicity, among others, are some of the issues linked to cultural religious concerns among AICs, NeReMos and mainstream churches (see Table 1). Some cultural aspects of tradition have persisted in the district for a long time, and it has been a losing battle for the mainstream churches to fight and ignore the persistent cultural beliefs and practices. These include the practices of polygamy, wife inheritance, rites of passage, planting and harvesting rites, traditional healing, and pre- and post-burial rites. Many faithfuls in the AICs said that they had been forced out of mainline churches because of practising their cultures. Their comfort was therefore availed by the AICs. This had seen a wave of competition and conflict between and among these differing groups.

Vago (1996:19) opines that competition and conflict are characterized by an attempt of two or more parties to reach certain objectives. To Vago, parties in a conflict believe they have incompatible goals, and often it involves attempts by adversaries to threaten, injure or otherwise coerce each other. The emotions of distrust, hatred, suspicion and fear are accentuated in conflicts by emphasizing the differences between parties while minimizing their similarities. This is exactly the case in Vihiga District, among the AICs, NeReMos and mainstream churches. The extreme practices of these Christian groups could be justified from Neibuhr’s arguments on Christ[ianity] and culture. Though Neibuhr articulated his thoughts in the 1950s, his arguments still remain relevant for they give a distinction for the practices of mainline churches, NeReMos, and AICs. There are African scholars such as Mugambi (1989), Nthamburi (1995), and Mbiti (1986), who have made efforts to explain the role of African Theology in the lives of African people. They propagate the ideas that African Theology offers a place for African culture and African people to contextualize their religiosity while maintaining a Christian outlook in their denominations and movements. These are important observations that help maintain the status quo in African Christian churches. Still, Neibuhr’s work remains relevant in as far as the three positions of Christ (Above, Against,

and Within culture) are concerned. It is relevant in the Kenyan context because these three positions are represented in the diverse Christian groups in the district of our survey.

Religio-Cultural Arguments as Contributing Factors to Christian Diversity

'Christ Above Culture'

'Christ above culture' is an argument that has been raised by most mainstream churches, especially those that trace their origin and spread from the first missionary activity in the country. One example of such churches is the Roman Catholic Church. The argument here is that Christ's knowledge and power surpasses all other cultural authorities and for this reason, the Church should not be partisan in cultural activities and ceremonies such as ceremonial rites of passage (a good example is the *Tiriki* circumcision rites in Vihiga District), burial rites, marriage rites and planting rites as observed by most natives of Vihiga District. For this reason, the Catholic Church and other mainstream churches have side-lined such practices (though they are still secretly practised), since Christ is above culture. Niebuhr's view about this group of people who believe that Christ is above culture is that:

Christ should be seen as a fulfillment of cultural aspirations and the restorer of the institutions of the society. However, in Him there is something that neither arises out of culture nor contributes directly to it. He is discontinuous as well as continuous with social life and its culture. Culture therefore is not possible unless it goes beyond human achievement. All humans search for values, yet Christ enters into life from above with gifts which human aspirations cannot attain unless he relates humanity to a supernatural society and a new value centre (Niebuhr 1951:42).

To Niebuhr, though Christ is a Christ of a given culture, He is above human culture because His values are high above humanity's values and perceptions. This stand of 'Christ Above Culture' as adopted by some churches is one of the reasons that has led to the formation of splinter groups by those who feel that it is important to hold on to cultural practices. The Pentecostals and evangelicals on the other hand have a different argument from the Roman Catholic Church, namely 'Christ against culture'.

'Christ Against Culture'

The argument here is that Christ, being the founder of Christianity, is against cultural observances and those who practise such should not be considered as 'those of the faith'. In this particular debate, whatever may be the customs of the society in which Christians live, and whatever human achievements it conserves,

Christ is seen as opposed to them, so that He confronts men with the challenge of an ‘either-or’ decision (Niebuhr 1951:40). Churches that take this stand have abandoned wholly the customs and institutions of so-called ‘heathen’ societies, since Christ is against culture. The Pentecostals and evangelicals consequently condemn activities such as beer drinking, traditional burial rites, wife inheritance, and polygamy. Some of these practices are accommodated by the ‘Christ above culture’ proponents. An example is beer drinking, a behaviour which can be accommodated in the Catholic Church unlike in most evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Some of the victims that fall on these condemnations find solace in the third argument, ‘Christ within culture’.

‘Christ Within Culture’

Argumentatively, here Christ seems to accommodate all people, irrespective of their family background, their cultural contexts, and their weaknesses. This is the argument advanced mostly in AICs and some NeReMos. To them, Jesus appears as a great hero of human cultural history. To Niebuhr, the argument here affirms that Jesus’ teachings are regarded as the greatest human achievement, since He confirms what is best in the past and guides the process of civilization to its proper goal. He is a part of culture in the sense that he himself is part of the social heritage that must be transmitted and conserved, thus, ‘Christ of Culture’. He does not condemn culture. The outcasts from the mainstream churches have, therefore, sought alternative denominations in such movements.

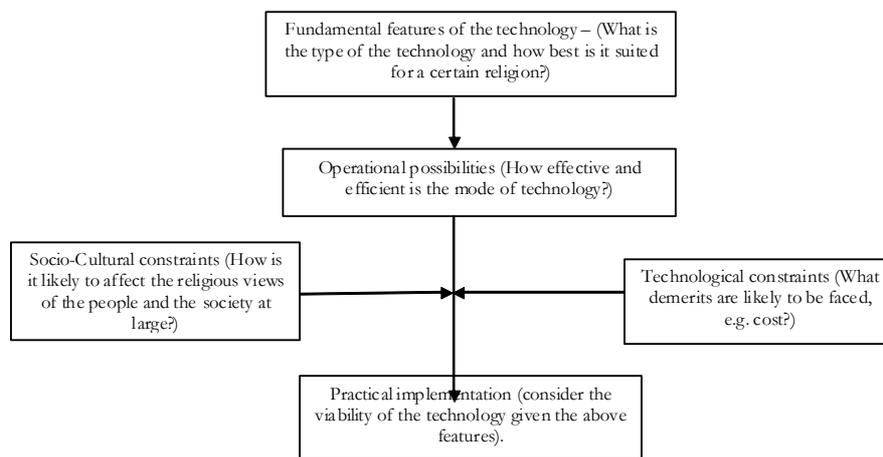
A Biblical Stand on the Church’s Cultural Perspectives

To Nthamburi (1995:33), in the search for liberation, African Theology should not ignore the Bible since the theme of liberation, which is basic to African Theology, runs through the Bible. It is also important to note that the Church itself is a culture – a community with its own doctrines, beliefs and practices, guided by its own rules and regulations. However, the Christian communities should rightly observe inculturation theology, and this will enable the Church to accommodate people from the diverse groups and cultures. Its teachings should be liberalized to ensure an enriched form of culture where teachings are offered to strengthen and maintain positive cultures while neutralizing or discarding negative cultures. This argument is from Nthamburi’s picture of the religion: Jesus Christ, who was a Jew and did not fight to discredit the Jewish culture, but identified with it, only changing Judaism’s laws that depicted negative attitudes toward humanity, and thus toward God. The cultural arguments, if well conceptualized, can return the Church to an existence that can become distinctively, exhilaratingly Christian – a social, economic and political existence quite like that of the Church in its earliest days (of sharing through the love of Christ).

Implications of Christian Diversity: Culture versus Modernity, Towards a Synthesis

The major observation from the preceding argument is the division of Christianity which has been brought about by both culture and modernity. The negative impact of these groups is that there is a noted hostility amongst them, and consequently, religious dialogue becomes impossible. This is both in spiritual and economic development issues. The hostility has been characterized by competition for membership and a varied range of technological production.

Diagram 1: Variables Underpinning and Influencing the Adoption of Technology in Religious Circles



Modified from Hartley (1990:4)

The quest for increased membership in these groups is vivid in their evangelical approaches. Competition for technological productions is evident from the many radio and TV stations with a variety of these groups airing both music and evangelical messages. To some church leaders, it is hardly possible to distinguish some gospel music productions from secular music. Concerns were also raised on the social and cultural factors to be considered, especially by some of the AICs which are hesitant to fuse modern technology into their cultures. It is in this perspective that Hartley (1990:4) provides a schematic representation of the variables that underpin and challenge the adoption of technology.

The fundamental features of a given technology and the possibilities of operating such technology, coupled with the socio-cultural and technological

constraints, are the greatest determining factors for the practical implementation of the technology. Besides these factors, Vago (2000:235) also provides an explanation of factors that are likely to influence adoption of technology and they are summarized and modified as follows to suit the context of this study:

- Organized opposition by a given sub-group within the larger group, for example the schisms against the mainstream churches and vice versa;
- Authority, especially the voices of leadership who can decide on the adoption or discarding of a given technology;
- Ignorance and non-literacy of church members;
- Selective perception and understanding, and, oversight of major or relevant components of the technology;
- Norms of modesty;
- Superstitious beliefs which are opposed to foreign culture;
- Fear of the unfamiliar, that is, the resultant effects of the technology;
- Vested interests, which once met, other technological issues are overlooked;
- Sources of motivation for the technology to be adopted;
- Ineffective communication;
- Incompatibility with the already available technologies;
- Cultural integrative fears which may lead to conflicts of cultures.

The complexity of both cultural and modernity issues in religious arena determines either the growth or retardation of spiritual, cultural and technological processes. The field research findings implied that whereas some cultural observances such as polygamy, wife inheritance and initiation rites readily accepted by most AICs may negatively affect community development, others are a sign of religious growth. Such may include the multiplicity of AICs which accommodate outcasts from the mainline churches. Those applying modern technology in their services, especially the NeReMos, though they are thought to diminish cultural beliefs and practices, are promoting the advancement of multimedia productions in a world which has become a global village. The complexity is that modernity in these churches cannot exist without some aspects of culture, for example, modern musical equipment and Western tunes, accompanied by traditional dances and attire. In this regard, conflict within and without the churches should, in the words of Lauer (1982:19), 'be used as a factor in the enhancement of innovative and creative strategies of benevolent intentions'. The various forms of accommodation or adjustments in the various Christian groups should be a means of either compromising or alleviating tensions and underlying causes of conflicts for harmonious existence.

Recommendations

The findings of the survey conducted in Vihiga District of Western Kenya helped in the formulation of the following recommendations for a healthy co-existence of culture and technological advancement in the churches:

- Christian churches, especially the mainline groups, should be at the forefront in an effort to soften rigidity towards African religious worldviews. There is a wake-up call for contextualization of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that meets the socio-cultural and spiritual needs of the populace. The arguments for 'Christ within culture' should be strengthened.
- The need to fuse cultural forms of religiosity into modern technologies, as already discussed, should be an issue that is encouraged by the church leaders. Considerations should, however, be made about the influential factors (see Diagram 1).
- Conflicts within and among the religious groups should be minimized through an appreciation of other people's expressions of religiosity. This will cultivate a sense of originality and desire to explore the unexhausted potentials. It is also likely to minimize further splits in the already existing religious groups, hence minimal community divisions.
- Chepkwony (2005:50), in an effort to provide workable solutions for the church in the twenty-first century, suggests that there is a need for rethinking on the direction in which inculturation theology is expected to take. He rightly argues that it is not possible for the different churches to come together for inculturation issues, but the differing views can grow, albeit in different directions.
- In the search for peaceful co-existence which may reduce schisms, the church leaders should be unequivocally committed to struggle in the promotion of sincere dialogue which enables a conducive environment of forgiveness of the warring groups (Wheaton 2005:10-11). This calls for leaders who are not egocentric and who realize the need to appreciate the differing views of individuals.
- Increasing poverty coupled with economic and social marginalization (McSpadden 2006) should be understood as a breeding ground for upcoming religious groups, in an effort to comfort and accommodate the affected. It is certainly a challenge for missionary work, for community mission, for the churches. This again calls for contextualization of the gospel to provide for people's needs.

- People lack information on the need for acculturation and inculturation, yet as Strelitz (2004:626) rightly posits every culture has ingested foreign elements from exogenous sources with the various elements becoming neutralized within it. The need for cultural institutes in Africa that sensitize people on both Western and African cultures is a matter of urgency. Sociologists should further seek to understand the nature of humanity and religiosity through deeper sociological and anthropological studies, in an effort to aid the society understand the complexity of religious diversity.

Conclusion

In the wake of a new spiritual wave in which Africans have realized their potentials and the demise of their culture with the advent of Christianity, it is important to understand the ways in which they have revived the same, and this should not only be in their cultural beliefs and practices away from their religiosity, but their spirituality itself, which is part and parcel of their livelihoods. Also, the way in which these Christian groups inculturate advanced technology and modern techniques of religious production in their endeavour to improve their modes of worship subsequently remains very relevant. The chapter has explored these mandates.

The discussion has mapped out both the symmetrical and the asymmetrical existence of culture and modern technology in the religious circle. From these arguments, it appears that these two ‘opposing’ aspects produce both positive and negative yields in people’s religiosity. The positive results, however, seem to outweigh the negative ones, which appear to be religious conflicts. The study argues that the conflicts can be strengthened to accommodate, or be adjusted to alleviate tensions brought about by the renewal of culture and the advent of modern technology. Given such a scenario, where neither of the aspects is ready to relent for the benefit of the other, the only alternative is to cultivate an environment for peaceful existence of the two if we are to sustainably enjoy diverse religiosity in our African communities. Diffusion and acculturation, as processes that affect and enhance existence of these facets, should be encouraged.

Summarily, as a way of recommending, the study advocates for a deeper understanding of acculturation, inculturation and diffusion in the African context. These terms, if well conceptualized and articulated for practical application, are likely to provide solutions to the religious conflicts. This will enhance a fertile ground for the exploration of new and better ways of expressing a people’s religiosity in the mainstream, NeReMos and AICs, and in turn encourage the contextualization of the gospel in a way that suits people’s socio-cultural milieus.

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