Review

"Troubled and troubling souls: The case of African Churches"

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The African [Initiated] Churches has shown a phenomenal growth in the past century and today as people speak of the 'Christian South' or shift of the centre of gravity of christianity from the West to the South they definitely include these churches in their category. Their growth in the Sub-Sahara Africa has increasingly manifested a great challenge to European mission churches. The emergence and expansion of these churches remain a challenge to Western mission and calls for soul-searching (introspection) on those who brought christian message to Africa. This paper investigates the puzzlement as to why African [Initiated] churches exist and continue to grow rapidly in areas or space where Western churches shrink and diminish.

Key words: Civilization, christianity, colonisation, commerce, expansionism, messianic, separatist, sectarianism, western christianity, African christianity, liberation, self-determination, African Initiated Churches.

INTRODUCTION

The expansion of African [Initiated] churches (AIC) in Africa should be seen and understood primarily in terms of the historical cultural and socio-political conflicts between the missionaries and their successors, on the one hand, and blacks on the other hand (Pato 1990:24-35). Particular ills (including colonial and missionary policies and practices) existing between the two cultures are part of explanation of emergence of African churches. Nosotro (:1) singles out David Livingstone and Robert Moffat missionary motives of three Cs; Christianity, Commerce and Civilization as a major factor that brought about a host of atrocities committed against African people (Nosotro :1, Anderson 1997:1).

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

This paper follows the methodology of 'decolonization'. Smith (1999:1) proposed 'decolonizing' methodology which sets the scene for an extensive critique of Western paradigms of research and knowledge from the position of indigenous people. The paper proposes new ways of interpreting African revolt against western theology of imposition. African scholars should be the ones who should interpret African religiosity without borrowing from Western academic tools. Names given to African religious movements by western scholars are disconcerting and labelling.

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They were merely used to disguise the wrongs committed against Africans that led them to break away from the Western churches.

In the main missionaries set out to 'convert 'pagan' to christianity and to preach the gospel while denying life-giving practices in African religions. Although missionaries did good things, but they also committed errors that harmed Africans than the good they indented for them (Dada 2013:1). Kanyandago (2003:43-58) called Western christianity to face the reality that it caused to destroy African values without which Africans are unable to sustain life. Although the quality of African theology of resistance and liberation may be questioned but its emergence remains relevant and appropriate to African struggle against imposition of foreign values.

The objectives of the paper include critical analysis of western terminology- including labels and names given to African churches. It is argued in the paper that even the names given to African churches were a form of self-justification by missionaries that African leaders are always fleeing from western benevolence of wanting to 'civilize' them and in that way hiding atrocities committed against them. African theology should be interpreted by African for Africans.

What is in the name?

These first explorers and missionaries saw everything in African culture as pagan that needed to be eradicated and replaced with Western 'civilized' culture (Nosotro : 1). Africa was first seen as economic opportunity for the European countries second as a dark continent that needed to be civilized in order to provide the colonial powers with human resources such as free labour and thirdly as a continent where traditional superstitions and evil practices of the natives had to be stopped through introduction of Christian religion (: 4). The unfortunate outcome of these motives was the fact that colonizers mistreated and abused the African people to the extent that African Christian leaders could no longer tolerate the hypocrisy of the west (Pato 1990:35).

There is much that catches the eye in the naming, discussion, characterisation and definition of these churches by white missionaries and their successors. They are called messianic, separatist, independent, sectarianism, syncretistic, schism and now commonly African Initiated/Independent churches (Anderson, 1997: 2-3, Appiah-Kubi and Kofi, 1979:241-249, Beyerhaus, 1975:77, Daneel 1992: 35). None of the categories or names given to them comes from them but from those from whom they have separated. They see themselves as 'proper' churches of God that they do not need to be qualified. They have names they call themselves which clearly describe what they are and are doing. The Western churches and their successors caricature them in a manner that suggests that they are the 'other' and

not part of them. The names given to these African churches expresses 'sigh of relief' by those who name them. They suggest that they (name-givers) are innocent in so far as the origin of the African churches are concerned and the whole blame can be put on either their lack of understanding scriptures, their inclinations to revert back to their 'Unchristian' African past, or cultural, socio-political and economic conditions that bogged down their ability to separate secular from profane. Let us briefly look at the names.

The word messianic, for example, has acquired a meaning that suggest a leader in these churches is deliverer (De Jonge, 1966: 132-148), who is to lead a violent rebellion against occupying foreign colonial and missionary forces and it has nothing to do with christianity. For this reason, many African christian leaders were incarcerated and died in colonisers' prisons (e.g. Simoom Kimbangu in Martey 2006: 5). Separatist suggests that those who are named as such have separated from the truth and are indulging in something foreign to the gospel. Syncretistic suggests illegitimate mingling of different religious elements. It assumes deviation from conventional standard of reference and should summarily be rejected (Pato 1990:24-35 and Beyerhaus 1975:76). Independent suggests breaking away from the main body. It has negative connotations, that refers only to a specific group. Those who are called independent are regarded as deviant from true teaching. Sectarianism refers to those who possess half-truth and are internally damned. They possess half-truth of the gospel. Schism blames those who broke away without self-introspection.

All the accusations the Western theology might accuse African theology of, much of those accusations can be levelled against it (De Gruchy 1985:85-97). European colonialism and its 'soul mates', civilization and christianisation have wrought untold misery on African people. All these names are derogatory and con-descending. Even the widely accepted and used name African Initiated/Indigenous churches is problematic. As much as it is awkward and cumbersome to call missionary churches european Initiated/Indigenous churches as such it is inappropriate to call African churches African Initiated/Indigenous churches. Why should they be modified before they could be called something? What credit are they stealing away from the mainline churches if they are called African churches?

Site of struggle

The situation in which African [Initiated] churches came into existence was that of struggle for survival. They had to struggle to be African churches as they are still struggling to this day. Mosala (1985:103) defines doing theology in Africa as a form of a protest. Racial and social conflicts have been indelible marks of African theology.

Shenk (1990:5-8) describes the origin and development of African [Initiated] Churches as self-invigoration within life-threatening social, economic and political structures. They are contestation to formulate meaningful theology of self-liberating embedded in their life experience. African churches are an outgrowth of the desire by African christians to be more African in their life and less artificial form of Western church that does not know or ignore African aspiration. They are a response to a situation where blacks are forced to be something they are not (Tlhagale 1985:126-134). Martey (2006:2) argues that they provide security, fellowship and spiritual guidance in the midst of crumbling traditional structures and the influx of foreign religious groups.

The inability of Western churches to grasp the salvation needs of African people led to the frustration and disenchantment with Western churches coupled with the missionary patronising attitudes and racist inequalities are some of factors that led to African protest against Western christianity (Ibid: 3). Martey (2006:7) argues that in a situation of suppression, a newly acquired self-confidence leads to a political protest. Colonial paternalism and imperialism led to the rise of African nationalism and struggle for self-determination in politics as well as in religion. The super-imposition of external colonial authority triggered a dissent and forced African Christians to look for new ways of worshiping God without external hindrance (Ibid:8).

The encounter of African culture and Western colonialism and christianity created tension in the lives of African people. Although Africans have huge reservoir of hospitality they were driven to their limits by the religion that pleaded for their dislodgement from their cultural system and be cast on the desires of their guests. Those who wanted to embrace the religion of their guests were uprooted from their culture only to be cast adrift on the fringes of the missionary community as adopted clients (Sanneh, 2008:221). The host culture had to be denied and negated for the promotion of stranger culture. The strangers became the host and the host aliens in their own countries (Mofokeng 1988:34-42). Converts were told that their own culture was against the gospel and it was forbidden to take any element of their culture into the new religion. It was not negotiable but forbidden to do that (Mofokeng 1988). Even those who tried their best to be faithful to the new found religion could not be trusted. They had to be supervised strictly in everything they did and in that way rendered perpetual infants of the new faith. They could not be entrusted with leadership positions no matter how hard they tried to prove themselves capable (Sanneh, 2008: 223).

Christianity was brought to Africa by Wetern missionaries who in some cases acted as 'anointed by God' to be exclusive host for the benefits of salvation to Africans (Sanneh, 2008:222). Sanneh (2008:223) argues that this practice was not confined to individual missionary tradition but the denominational system that was widely upheld. The result of this widely practised Western domination and obstruction led to local resistance by those who embraced Christianity. They did not reject missionary morality as they embraced his/her religion. But their resistance was construed as either politically, economically or culturally motivated but wrong missionary practices were never blamed for the insurrections. Missionary continued to dispossess the converts of their natural ties on one hand and without giving them a real stake in missionary culture on the other (Ibid 2008:223). Revolt on the part of the converts was inevitable. Verryn (1971:14) argues that revolt by Africans against Western domination was often than not blamed on bad African leaders instead of been seen as symptom of trouble within the life of missionary Church. Colonial authorities shared the missionary view of Africans not wanting to be subjected to strict Christian morality. They were ridiculed as moral degenerates, unable to live up to civilized mores. Paul Kruger, one of Voortrekkers leaders in colonial South Africa wrote 'Let the black preach to black, why bother them' (Verryn, 1971:16). Black aspirations and concerns did not matter in the eyes of both missionary and colonial societies.

Contributions of African Christianity to the Struggle against Western Imperialism

Western imperialism refers to a system of control of African countries on all spheres of life. It includes military, political, economic, cultural and religious control after defeating them in their wars. In pursuance of their ideals epitomised by commerce, civilization and Western Christianity, the western world waged a war against all that was not western within African people. In response to this onslaught on their ways of life, African people devised their own survival techniques sometimes using the very religious paraphernalia the invading forces were using against them (Martey, 2006:7). Many African leaders correctly perceived that the driving force behind western colonisation and Christianity was a form of lust - an inherent desire for more and more material goods (Njeru Wambugu and John Padwick, 2006:5). By and large, economic interest was the main mediating force whereby the individualistic, competitive, consumerist, acquisitive attitude of western values were transported to and imposed on Africa (Martey, 2006:6).

It was in response to political, economic, cultural and religious intrusion by the west that African religious leaders rose to the challenges of invading forces. Often the African religious leaders felt let down by their political counter-parts that were lured into imperial system of capitalism after hard earned liberation (Kgatla, 2013:8).

They had to stand their ground and provide principled leadership to their people. In some situation, the religious leaders worked side by side with African nationalists to fight the colonial paternalism (Martey, 2006:7). Some of

them were imprisoned by the colonial authorities and died in prison for their convictions (Martey, 2006:5). When African religious leaders felt the pressure of super-imposition of external authority of colonial rulers and realised that it weakened the powers of their traditional institutions such as chiefs, they not only registered their voices of dissent but acted swiftly to protect their own by forming their own churches using the same religious tools they learnt from missionaries (Ibid :7).

The colonial, civilizing and christianising forces were resisted at all fronts. Religious insurrection against western religion became one of major side where the struggle was taken to. African prophets such as William Wade Harris in Ghana, Simon Kimbangu in the Democratic Republic of Congo Nehemiah Tile of South Africa are some of the outstanding African religious leaders who resisted the western christianity and introduced African christianity to their people. Their ministries came as a breath of fresh air to many especially those who were torn between their christian faith which came clothed in European garb as Martey (2006:12) puts it. Their ministries were both timely and pertinent because it helped African people to reclaim their faith in Jesus Christ in the way it addressed their uncertainties, sicknesses and death. Western motives of colonization, civilization through Christianization of African people was seriously debunked and halted in some areas. In this respect, the African religious leaders, who emerged during the great time of the scramble for Africa were messianic indeed in the sense that they delivered their African people from colonial invasion and brought them salvation by showing them the way.

Neo-colonisation, globalisation and the commercialised gospel and African Initiated Churches (African Initiated Churches)

African religious leaders that emerged during the colonial era were not only opposed to missionary arrogance and vanity but also to the wider western massive project of harnessing the African continent with its resources and its people (Njeru Wambugu and John Padwick 2006: 4). The African religious leaders provided a resistant movements that protected and provided for African interest. They continued providing a critical model in which western neo-colonialism was resisted and fought. When their courter-parts in governments were capitulating and succumbing to the pressure of new wave of globalisation they stood up to be counted. As was mentioned, the ministry of African leaders came as a breath of fresh air to many, who were torn between their new faith in God and the ideology of those who brought it to them. The efficacy of their ministry did strike at the heart of the African deepest 'soul-need' and provided them with a new theology of life (Martey 2006:13).

They read signs of time then and acted in the interest of their people. In our recent past they also demonstrated their resilience when they detected encroaching neo-colonisation and globalisation with the same agenda and goals as their predecessors colonisation and civilization. Western christianity did not change much when it abandoned colonisation and civilization as motives for its mission. These two have been replaced by neo-colonisation and globalisation (Kgatla, 2013:4).

The era of colonial expansionism, right of conquest and forced conversions came and went, but missionary influences remained fraught with many contradictions. However, today, churches try to base their mission work on sound biblical foundations, although they still have a long way to go to avoid the mistakes of the past. Examples of wrong motives are condescending pity, patronizing gestures, including financial and economic gestures, avoidance of correction of the past in the name of reconciliation and introduction of development projects that ensure the continuation of dominance of the Western churches (Otto and Strausse, 2010: 20). Rieger calls these new developments neo-colonialism, arguing that the old, traditional civilization is replaced by western patronage and economic expansionism, colonialism by neo-colonialism and globalization.. A change to the old ways of doing mission has not changed the heart of wanting to be the first and the best. Subtle dominance of the other in the intellectual and economic spheres remains the inherent motive for social projects that the Western countries embark on, in Third World Countries.

The phenomenon of globalization is defined as an interaction of activities of human societies bringing change across the world which makes the world to become small and technologically accessible to the powerful economic forces from the west (Oni: 2003). It is a process that involves political, economic, military, and social order. It operates under the pretence that its aim is benevolent to the less privileged in developing countries of the South and East (ibid). It has potential of influencing social institutions such as education, culture, religion, community values and social life in a remarkable way. It promises better life and future to its victims while in fact it is destroying their very social institutions that keep them together.

It hides its rue colours while embedding societal structures. Its potent arsenal includes information technology, western music, and public media: electronic and printed. Globalization is a new form of colonization that Rieger (2004:8) calls neo-colonialism. Boesak et al (2010:10) and others call it a new world empire that controls political, economic, social and religious order. It is all pervasive and unbridled menace that seeks to establish its own throne from where it can rule the world (Kgatla, 2013:8).

Globalisation with all its ramifications wants to establish a new order in the world (Rieger, 2004:9). People talk of living in a global village but they do not ask themselves who rules this village, and how those who are in charge

view its inhabitants (Njeru Wambugu and John Padwick 2006:7). Globalisation is a process that involves political, economic, military, and social order aimed at the transcendental homogenization of political and socio-economic reality across the world.It operates under the pretence that its aim is benevolent to the less privileged in developing countries of the South and East. It has the potential to influence social institutions such as education, culture, religion, community values and social life in a remarkable way(Kgatla 2013:6).

Globalisation takes advantage of the poor country and thrives on inequality between rich and poor countries the latter being the greatest losers. Because its philosophy is based on cheating those who are less educated in terms of western standards most of its casualties are in Africa. African religious leaders have been better placed to debunk and resit some of its ill effects (Wambugu and Padwick, 2006:8). Globalisation does not favour African communal and collective approach to survival methods, African religious leaders have been highly vigilant against its operations. They created counter-contours and frustrated free market interest of the western powers, although with limited resources (Ibid:9).

Another area where they did well is in the fight against the prosperity gospel (commercialised gospel). A pro-sperity gospel has become a globalized entrepreneurial spirit that flourishes on the appalling social conditions under which poor people live, while it enriches the powerful preachers who are driving it (Kgatla, 2013:8). It is built on the notion that God loves his people and wants them all to have material possessions in abundance. Portions of Scripture are quoted out of context and are applied selectively to support the new ideology. Slogans such as "name-it-and claim-it-in Jesus-name" are used to entice listeners. Like advertising in consumerism, it promises satisfaction of one's unlimited (artificial) wants by buying into the system. Tithes and love offerings are no longer gifts of gratitude, but investments, and the church becomes a pyramid scheme. A new materialistic mind-set is promulgated worldwide in the name of God and in the interest of "consumerism culture". African religious leaders protected their people against this intrusion (Kgatla, 2013: 7).

Conclusion

African religious leaders that emerged during the neo-colonial era were not only opposed to missionary paternalism and dominance but also to the wider western massive project of harnessing the African continent with its resources and its people (Wambugu and Padwick, 2006: 4). The African religious leaders provided a resistant theology that protected and provided for African interest. They continue providing a critical model in which western neo-colonialism is resisted and fought. When their counter-parts in governments were capitulating and

succumbing to the pressure of new wave of globalisation they stood up to be counted. The ministry of African leaders as was indicated, came as a breath of fresh air to many, who were torn between their new faith in God and the ideology of those who brought it to them. They acted like the anti-bodies to resist western imperialism. The efficacy of their ministry did strike at the heart of the African deepest 'soul-need', a quest for 'Ubuntu' (African wholeness) (Martey, 2006:13).

They read signs of time then and acted in the interest of their people. In our recent past, they also demonstrated their resilience when they detected encroaching neo-colonisation and globalisation with the same agenda and goals as their predecessors colonisation and civilization. Western christianity did not change much when it abandoned colonisation and civilization as motives for its mission. These two have been replaced by neo-colonisation and globalisation.

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Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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