

EMERGING RELIGIOUS TRENDS IN KENYAN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES AND INNOVATIVE CONTEXTUALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

African contexts are characterized by a number of outstanding religious trends, one of which is the emergence of new religions. A study was carried out on innovative contextualization of Christianity by African Christian teachers in forty secondary school communities in Nyandarua County, Kenya. Notably, emerging religious trends, ways in which they influenced doctrine, faith and practices of Christian teachers, strengths or weaknesses introduced by emerging doctrinal teachings, faiths or practices on capacity to contextualize personal faith within school communities were investigated. Challenges faced by believers in their effort to contextualize their particularistic doctrines, faiths and practices in holistic lifestyles within school communities and viable strategies to minimize the challenges in order to contextualize particularistic doctrines, faiths and practices were identified. One of the outstanding finding was that teachers' efficiency in contextualization process varied with gender, school, teaching subject, and relationship with God and opportunities available. He strongest recommendation that more viable contextualization programme be developed using the guidelines in the curriculum of Christian religious education and the Bible.

Keywords: Religious trends, Religious Commitment, Dimensions of Religiosity, Contextualization.

Background to the study

The traditional understanding of contextualization of Christianity has rendered definition to concentrate on a white missionary from Europe or America bringing the Gospel to Africans in order to convert them into Christian communities. Contextualization of Christianity refers to the way Christian workers apply the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Biblical truths to the various cultural contexts in which those Christians live or go to with contextualization as their mission. It involves relating the gospel to the culture (As good as that meaning of the term contextualization is appreciated; time has come for the African Christians to contextualize their Christian doctrines, beliefs and practices (orthodoxy, orthocardia and orthopraxy) in their own communities. Taking culture to be the content of what is learned and shared in a society (Stanbell, 2005), a more inclusive task of contextualization of Christianity needed in postmodern communities in Africa and around the world. What then is the meaning of contextualization of the Gospel? Various scholars and researchers in the field of religion have defined the term contextualization differently, usually referring to

inculturation of the gospel to a culture previously foreign to Christianity. In the words of Leffel (2012), in his article, *Contextualization: Building Bridges to the Muslim Community*,

Contextualization, then, seeks an effective, long-term Christian witness in a culture foreign to the communicator. This definition rightly presumes that the gospel is a trans-cultural message capable of being authentically embodied in the wide embrace of human societies. This principle is implicit in Jesus' teaching (John 4), directed the leading of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8) and became axiomatic for first century Christian missionaries (1 Corinthians 9). In taking the Gospel beyond Palestinian Judaism, evangelists to the Gentiles clearly separated cultural Jewish wineskins from the wine of the Gospel. Reaction from Judaizers was both swift and predictable, but God's wisdom prevailed and the Apostles affirmed that salvation is independent of conversion to Judaism. The scriptural question, then, is not "if," but "where" and "how" contextualization should shape the missionary enterprise.

By foreign, Leffel (2012) refers to the Western missionary travelling to a foreign religious field, in this case to South America, to preach the Gospel to people who are non-Christians, they are converted to Christian faith and are helped to live it up as new lifestyle of the community. According to Kamaara (2009), 65-70% Kenya's population is Christian. Based on findings from the limited sample of teachers in Nyandarua County, secondary and primary schools, the estimated practicing Christians were 25%.

Biblical and theological foundations for contextualization of Christian doctrines, faith and practices

Historically, in the biblical sense of history, missions are as old as humanity. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were confronted by God who was *Misio Dei* to them. In this regard, God was in a sense contextualizing His love for mankind in a practical sense (Genesis 15:1-15). Jesus re-echoes this love in Luke 19:10 saying that He came to seek and save the lost humanity, lustiness of man in relation to Holy God puts him in a predicament that invites God's loving response to contextualize Himself and His message of salvation to every lost human being in any culture, school communities in Kenya included. At human level, contextualization expands the missionary's understanding of the gospel, hermeneutical challenge; transforms the culture and the missionary, prophetic challenge; and the missionary becomes part of the body of Christ in a different culture upon successful contextualization, a personal challenge. The teachers in the study were the missionaries to experience the three challenges as participants with God and people in the process of contextualization.

Key Questions which guided the study were:

- i. What doctrines (religious teachings) existed in primary and secondary schools in Nyandarua County?
- ii. In which ways were doctrines taught influencing faith and practices of Christian teachers in primary and secondary schools in Nyandarua County?
- iii. What challenges were faced by believers in their effort to contextualize their particularistic doctrines, faith and practices in holistic lifestyles within school communities?
- iv. What viable religious strategies were being used to minimize challenges to contextualization of particularistic doctrines, faith and practices within school communities?

Significance of findings

The participants sampled through snowballing and convenience techniques indicated the religious diversity. It also reflected that sampling techniques were moving towards fairly representative sample. Schools were selected from one of the largest counties in Kenya (Nyandarua County). Great religious diversity emerged from the findings with only 28% admitting they were not ready for any religious beliefs that as long as they led to the knowledge of God. At a macro level, and taking the findings to be generalizable, the findings can act as the basis for refuting the claim that Kenya was 80% Christian. If taken for what the participants indicated and assuming that this was a fairly representative sample, Kenya may have only 28% of the population as practicing Christians. At a micro level, the findings are useful to teachers as a predictor of kind of learners they were likely to produce, learners with mixed ethical standards. In all the schools sampled, Christian religious education was taught. The findings were also an indicator of challenges some learners might have faced in embracing Christian values while in the hands of teachers with divergent views regarding Christianity.

Theoretical framework

The best evangelical model that served the purposes of the study was the theory by Hilty, Morgan and Burns (1984) which presents a more specific and measurable religious dimensions as factors to investigate various aspects of religiosity in Christian individuals and communities. According to the theory, personal faith indicates the degree of active faith in the private life of the individual. It reflects the intrinsic aspect of religion. Intolerance of ambiguity measures the degree to which a person holds the rigid doctrines, beliefs and

practices of his or her religion. Orthodoxy refers to the degree to which a religious person is willing to accept the traditional beliefs of his or her church or religious group. Social conscience is the measure of personal and church roles in society. Knowledge of religious history is the fifth dimension. It measures the extent to which a person is conversant with the history of his or her church. General life purpose is the measure of understanding of one's life purpose as a result of one's religion. Church is involvement in financial and social activities with the surrounding community. Five of the seven dimensions were used in the study as guided by this theoretical framework.

Critical review of Contextualization theories and gaps in theories

There are various models of contextualization of the Gospel advanced by different scholars on religious studies but the researcher found them wanting. Their inadequacies constitute gaps in theories discussed in this section. Anthropological models consider confronting what is wrong or sinful in a culture as 'countercultural' (Bevans, 1995, pp.117-124). Bevans proposes a synthetic model in which gospel is integrated with the culture. Evangelical model advocates that contextualization of the gospel has only one function, to transform non-Christian culture into a Christian culture by relating the gospel to the culture (Gilliland 1989; Hesselgrave 1999; Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989; Kraft 1999; Whiteman 1997). Of the two models, Bevans' model fell short of fulfilling the transformative function and it was not therefore suitable to guide the study because of this gap. Studies done in Congo and in other parts of contemporary Africa indicate that African traditional religions are influential in interpreting what happens. Notably, death in traditional communities in Congo is caused by witchcraft (Stabell 2005) (cf. Kombo 2003; Kunhiyop 2002; Mbuva 1992; Mukundi 1988). In such communities, the evangelical model is a relevant means of transformation of worldview. Model by Hilty, Morgan and Burns (1994) was suitable for religious communities in Congo, assuming that contextualization of the gospel would have been successful. On the other hand, an anthropological model would have affirmed a syncretic religious culture.

Six alternative models of contextualization advocated by Bevans (1992) and Stabell (2005) describe six different views of contextualization: which are translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental,

and countercultural. Translation model is good in that it offers the gospel in the language of the people. It has the tendency to result in cultural reductionism if not accurately translated, interpreted and practiced.

Anthropological model of Brevans advocates that people must see that God reveals Himself to them through their culture. The tendency is to confine biblical teachings to the culture of the people and have a cultural God instead of a universal, sovereign God who transforms cultures. Countercultural models (also called transformation models) recommend translation of the gospel into the culture of the people in order to confront sinful elements of the receiving culture by allowing people to hear God speak to them in their own language. Praxis model developed by Schreiter (1985) insists that the gospel contextualization use liberation approaches. It ignores anything godly that predated the introduction of the gospel. This model is not adequate because it ignores the fact that God has provided a measure of who He is in different ways to different cultures through His general revelation (Romans 1:18-20). On a positive note, liberation approaches are more holistic (looking at the gospel as liberating receiving culture from social injustices, political and economic oppression and any other kind). If used for this purpose, caution is needed so that it does not ignore the core mission of God in Jesus Christ (Luke 19:10) as salvation from sin nature, choice and practice with godly indicators as a measure.

According to Pals (1996), Tylor's model of religion as animism, Frazer (religion as magic), psychological models of Freud, sociological models of Durkheim, economic models of Karl Marx, anthropological models of Eliade and cultural models of Geertz, religious studies should be done as a reaction to the existence of God. The emerging religious trends are postmodern and are characterized by; first, that Christians should live their faith by being missional in their neighbor, should be concerned narrative presentation of their faith and the Bible, Christ-likeness through worship while not minimizing the study of the scriptures, authenticity because postmodern culture emphasizes authentic religious experiences instead of scripted experiences. Prosperity Gospel is another current trend in Kenyan society and it has penetrated our schools as well. In the words of Bawks (2011), "there is another side to the biblical story about riches. Jesus was almost completely negative in his teachings on wealth: see Matt. 13:22 – the deceitfulness of wealth choke the seed; Matt. 19:22 – the rich young ruler; Luke 19:2-10 – story of Zacchaeus. He warned against storing up treasure on earth, and did not ever promise material benefits for following him (Matt. 6:19)". This comment indicated that

doctrines being contextualized by some Christian teachers in secondary schools needed Biblical scholars to check whether they were Biblically sound.

A case in Empirical literature

The challenges of contextualization in a multi-religious community demonstrated in a case study.

A study was conducted in Western Asia in 1995 involving 72 influential converts from Islam to Christianity, called Messianic Muslims (Lifel, 1995). The table below summarizes the key findings of the indicators of challenges of contextualization of the gospel in a multi-religious community and success levels were indicated in Table1.

Religious variable, findings from participants	Success levels, % of N (72).	Religious variable, findings from participants	Challenges, syncreticism
Meet once a week for biblical worship.	76%, practice.	Continue to meet in the mosque on Fridays	50%, practice.
Meet more than once a week for Biblical worship.	16%, practice.	Attend mosque more than once a day, affirming Muhammad as God's prophet.	31%, practice.
Listen to the gospel daily	66%, doctrine	Say there are 4 heavenly books	96%, doctrine
Affirmation that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.	55%, doctrine	Do not affirm God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit	45%, doctrine
Jesus is the only way to salvation	97%, faith	Feel peace from Allah when listening to Quran.	45%, affective
Mohammed's prayers do not save them	97%, means	Faith in Jesus saves from spirits	100%, means

Table 1. Success levels against challenges of contextualization of the gospel in multi-religious communities

Discussion

Comparing success with syncretic tendencies in the summary table above, success levels were on a higher side. Based on findings from participants, 76% of the converts participated in devotional Christian practice once a week against 50% of the same attending the mosque, 66% of 72 converts listened to gospels being read against 45% of the same converts who heard the Quran being read and 97% agreeing that Jesus alone saves and prayers of Muhammad do not save.

Methodology

The study used survey method and naturalistic designs. Survey design refers to the study of different groups of people are studied at one point in time in order to complete observations needed quickly (Lerner, 2002; Mugenda, 2008). The design was naturalistic in that it was carried out within the natural settings of the teachers, in the school communities where they taught. The main purpose of the study was to find out how teachers who believed in God from a biblical perspective, here called Christians, were applying the Christian doctrines, beliefs and practices in reference to five dimensions religiosity identified as doctrines, church membership, evangelism, community service and prayer. The target population was the teachers in randomly selected schools in Nyandarua County, Kenya. The schools selected were sixty eight (68). The instruments used were self-administered questionnaire for 68 teachers and interview guide for 10 teachers. The data collected was primarily narrative and factual in nature (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006).

Summary, analysis and interpretation of findings

The data collected was summarized and analyzed using SPSS version 21.0 software package and outputs interpreted accordingly to explain possible reasons behind the findings, significance and applications. The four parts that follow attempted to answer the research questions of the study.

Doctrines that Exist in Primary and Secondary Schools in Nyandarua County

In the schools surveyed in Nyandarua County, contextualization of the gospel yielded similar results as those of Western Asia (see Table 2 below, **SPSS output**)

Likert	f	%	Trend indicated as outcomes from participants in Nyandarua County	Implications on gospel contextualization in schools
SD=1	19	27.9	Evangelical Christians and particularistic religious groups. High on fundamentalism scale.	With highest potential to contextualize their faith in their school communities.
D=2	6	8.8	Closer to fundamentalism but with Puritan worldview of moderate Christianity.	Non-evangelizing Christians
SWA=3	9	13.2	Can be evangelized by any religious group.	Mild pluralism. Fairly resistant to the gospel, syncretic
A=4	15	22.1	Strong leaning towards religious pluralism	Resistivity to the gospel higher than receptivity to the gospel
SA=5	19	27.9	Strong indicator of religious pluralism and syncretism. Post moderns are okay with whatever works for the individual and circumstance one is in.	High percentage practicing secular religion, highly syncretic and highly pluralistic
Total	68	100.		

Table 2. Diversity of participants' responses on their acceptance of postmodern pluralism

Discussion

According to SPSS output on statement, 'I do not mind practicing different faiths since they all lead to God', a likert scale of five yielded frequencies as; SA=19 (27.9%), A=15 (22.1%), SWA=9 (13.2%), D=6 (8.8%) and SD=19 (27.9%). The extent of gospel contextualization by participants in school communities was reflected by percentages as a measure of divergence of opinions regarding religious pluralism. Taking SD as the highest indicator of evangelical position, then syncretism increased towards SA. Since syncretism is one of the indicators of postmodern religion, the table reflects a continuum of pure postmodern religious worldview to evangelical Christian worldview. The 28% of participants who indicated they were evangelicals were considered to be the practicing Christian and the other participants postmodern (pluralistic) Christians.

The influence of emerging doctrines on the faith and practices of Christian teachers in primary and secondary schools in Nyandarua County

Religious trends emerging in school communities as top five mentioned by teachers and possible outcomes on students taught by the teachers who participated (see table 3)

Emerging religious teaching, N=68 teachers	Influence on students' life	Dimension of religion applied and proponent of model	Challenges presented to contextualization of Biblical Christianity	Recommended solutions
Different prayer styles (f=28, 41%)	Spiritual differences (f=32, 47%)	Consequential, Glock	Confusion, division and divided prayer groups.	Teach Biblical orthodoxy in devotional dimension
Different means of salvation (f=16, 24%)	Ambiguity on way to heaven (f=8, 12%)	Soteriological dimension	Religious pluralism at micro level	Christian religious education to be relational and intellectual
Prosperity Gospel (f=16, 24%)	Misunderstanding of godly stewardship (f=24, 36%)	Lenski Material dimension	Misunderstanding of church mission and nature of God	Biblical orthodoxy regarding material things
Different interpretations of the Bible (f=12, 18%)	Apparent differences in what God says (f=32, 47%)	Ninian Smart Intellectual Dimension, Glock	Different spiritual authorities	Training of CRE teachers by Christian Bible scholars
Character Christians wanting (f=41, 60%)	Conflict between orthodoxy and orthopraxy (f=20, 29%)	Ethical Dimension Ninian Smart	Lack of a godly and attractive walk with God	Encourage of first three levels of Bloom's taxonomy

Discussion

The emerging trends in the school communities; different prayer styles, different means of obtaining God's salvation, prosperity gospel by gospel peddlers, different interpretations of the Bible, and variation in Christian character were all indicative of differences in churches the teachers represented. It was evidence that various denominations differed in those characteristics that surfaced during data collection.

Contextualization of Christian doctrines, beliefs and practices by teachers in their respective school communities was challenged by their differences. What did this imply in reference to contextualization?

Harmonization of the differences was needed first before they could contextualize the Christian doctrines, beliefs and practices. A harmonization programme was proposed and its viability is discussed later in this study. The African missionary is now defined in terms of need, context, availability, awareness, and commitment to the task of contextualization. The African Christian is a missionary, not in terms of cultures

strangely foreign to him or her but to neighboring community that does not know Jesus Christ. This then is what constitutes the call to redefine and rethink contextualization.

Challenges teachers faced in trying to contextualize doctrines, faith and practices of one’s religion within school community

Asked to cite four top challenges teachers faced in trying to contextualize doctrines, faith and practices of one’s religion, the responses were as indicated in the table 4 below (SPSS output 4). The challenges were encountered in different ways by different teachers in the same school community and in different communities. It was therefore necessary to consider different solutions that would be customized to individual teachers and apply to all teachers the solutions to common challenges.

Table 4. Four top challenges teachers faced in trying to contextualize doctrines, faith and practices of one’s religion

Main challenge	Contextualization of orthodoxy	Contextualization of orthocardia	Contextualization of orthopraxy
Language barrier (40%)	Conflict in meanings	Diversity of beliefs	Disabled communication
Religious apathy (58%)	Different worldviews	Diversity of beliefs	Resistance to the gospel
Denominational differences (82%)	Different meanings of some verses	Diversity of beliefs	Different Christian practices
Relating gospel to culture (70%)	Conflict between African regions’ teaching and Christian doctrines	Diversity of beliefs	Weak in contextualization of Christianity

Discussion

Challenges presented by participants concerning contextualization of personal faith in a school community included; Inability to translate biblical terms into daily language (40%), many people lack of interest in Biblical spirituality (20%), denominational differences (82%), weak doctrinal commitment (18%), lack of commitment to church membership (23%), lack of commitment to evangelism (40%), Lack of commitment to community service (70%), weak commitment to daily personal prayer (20%). Commenting on the importance of

translating the Bible into the language people can understand, the contribution made by John Wycliffe, a leading precursor of reformation is still relevant. Wycliffe initiated a missiological activity of translating the Bible in people's own language in order to enable them to hear God speak to them in their own language as God who contextualizes Himself among humanity without compromising His truth, character and nature. Lack of interest in spirituality among some participants (20%) was an indicator of prevalence of secularism or different spiritualities among staff members. The school communities were a Christian mission field. Lack of commitment to evangelism reflected weakness in the missionary activity by the teachers in their school communities.

Denominational differences weakened the capacity for Christians to contextualize their doctrine, faith and practice unlike the account in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:41-47) where unity among Christians created fertile multidimensional soil for contextualization of Christianity in Jerusalem. Weak doctrinal commitment (18% of participants) did not differ much from those who indicated they did not mind which religion they belonged to because all religions were means to God and heaven (27.9%). The same argument was valid for lack of commitment to church membership. Lack of commitment to community service (70%) may have been due to lack of school wide involvement in community service as a drive by school leadership. It was a strong indicator of challenge for influence of Christianity by Christian teachers to their surrounding communities. The importance of prayer in having God's power to share the Gospel and live spiritually strong lives is taught in scriptures as doctrine and testimonies recorded in various accounts such as Daniel 1:8 and 6 where Daniel's character and his daily prayer life were high on the scale.

Viable religious strategies being used to minimize challenges to contextualization of particularistic doctrines, faith and practices within school communities in Nyandarua County

The investigation concerning viable strategies to minimize challenges that faced the teachers in their efforts to contextualize their particularistic faiths made resourceful contributions to the study. The questionnaires made seven recommendations as follows: First, Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers needed to live what they taught so that other teachers and students they learn from the examples. In the words of one participant, "not teaching water and drinking wine". Second, ability to contextualize one's faith depended on

personal commitment to God and His call to the great commission (Mathew 28:18-20). Third, religious tolerance was needed in denomination-sponsored schools. The general observation was that the denominational leadership attempted to absorb everyone into their denomination, assimilation instead of contextualization. Fourth, The Church needed to promote contextualization of Christianity in schools by sending local church missionaries to schools more frequently than was happening. Fifth, the teachers of CRE needed to be more involved with God, other teachers and students in the contextualization process. Sixth, the church needed to partner with schools in developing contextualization programmes that concentrate on shared Christian doctrines, beliefs and practices in order to minimize the challenge of denominational differences. Seventh, CRE teachers needed to work with school leaders on strategies of making CRE life transforming to students rather than being merely an examination subject.

Findings from in-depth interviews on contextualization of the five dimensions

In-depth interviews were conducted in ten schools using phone interviews due to the challenge of unavailability of teachers for face to face interviews during school hours. Of the ten teachers interviewed using convenience sampling, five were men and five women. Fifty percent (50%) of them were Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers. They had more opportunities to contextualize Christianity through their involvement with teachers and students as patrons of religious clubs in their respective schools. Two of them were in charge of counseling services in their schools. Those teaching other subjects were also able to contextualize their Christianity but with more challenges. Some teachers suggested that a kind of a contextualization programme was needed in schools to promote contextualization of Christian doctrines, beliefs and practices, especially those in the CRE curriculum. Their key contributions made included but not limited to the following: That a viable integrated Christian program would work better towards contextualization of the five selected dimensions of Christianity in schools guided by five steps. First, churches and school leadership needed to carry out needs assessment among the staff and students. Second, the identified needs in each school needed to be categorized in order to cluster those which Christian programme was best placed to meet directly. Third, leadership team composed of teachers from various denominations was needed in each school so that it would come up with logistics of implementing

the contextualization programme. Fourth, the programme leadership needed to determine the levels of participation among the relevant stakeholders, such as parents, school leadership, churches and ministry of education. Fifth, the contextualization leadership needed to work on SMART objectives of implementing the five selected dimensions of religion in order to evaluate levels of success with time, based on shared doctrines, beliefs and practices.

Recommendations, summary, conclusions and areas for further research

Recommendations

The study and relevant literature review called for key recommendations. First, the African Christians needed to understand contextualization of the Gospel in their religiously dynamic contexts called for ongoing and innovative strategies for the church to keep growing numerically and spiritually as an African church. Second, for the gospel to be expressed in African language, values and in other relevant ways, the scriptures needed to be translated, studied and interpreted in ways that allow holistic applications to take place. Third, contextualization must be done under the illuminating guidance of the Holy Spirit to aid the change in methodology without changing God's timeless truth. Fourth, contextualization must be done by Christians who live transformed and contagious lives in their communities. The gospel is more caught than taught and proclamations by godly lifestyles must receive stronger emphasis than verbalized evangelistic activities. Fifth, more research-based and Spirit guided strategies must be applied in the process of contextualization in order to increase relevance of the gospel to the non-Christian mission fields.

Summary and conclusions

Contextualization is done by Christians who interact with each other across denominations in order to demonstrate love, unity and singleness of mind and godly purpose for their communities. The people of God are effective in the task of contextualization when they interpret and express the Gospel in the language and thought forms of the communities they live in. Contextualization is done effectively through the study of the scriptures (Col.2:1-8). Contextualization is a dynamic process in that cultures are dynamic. It involves

changing behavior patterns without changing the Biblical truths being applied differently in different communities. The Christians must be committed and conscious of the ongoing mission and a God-given mandate in the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Among the theories of religious research discussed in this study, Hilty, Morgan and Burns have presented dimensional model that best guided the study from a Christian perspective. Findings of the study were valuable to various users, including, CRE teachers, head teachers, parents, education officials and researchers. Contextualization of the Christianity should occur mainly through verbal communication.

Areas for further research

The contextualization programme is an area of study as an action research which was not done in Kenya yet. More dimensions of religion could be included in the contextualization process. The level of achievement of national educational goal of teaching CRE in schools can be investigated as one way of development of value-based society through education system in Kenya.

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