HOLINESS
THE JOURNAL OF WESLEY HOUSE CAMBRIDGE



Holiness• 7(2) • 2021
DOI: 10.2478/holiness-2021-0008

sciendo

Changing Religious Affiliations: Factors Affecting Denominational Changes In Nyambene Synod, Kenya

Bishop Alice Mwila*

Methodist Church in Kenya

Abstract: This paper explores the interaction between the Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK) and the neo-Pentecostal churches in the Nyambene Synod, Kenya, together with the influence of this interaction on the religious landscape. It examines changes in denominational affiliations affecting the Methodist Church, where a substantial number of (particularly young) members have moved to Pentecostal churches and movements in the region. This identifies factors affecting religious affiliation in the Nyambene Synod and the impact that changing affiliation has on the Methodist Church. Through qualitative empirical research, the study identifies three main factors that increasingly influence movements of Christians between churches: the contemporary consumer culture that emphasises personal choice, the understanding of ecclesial identity, and the relevance of the church to contemporary (Kenyan) society. The research challenges the MCK to reassess its offer within the contemporary religious marketplace, not by imitating Pentecostal churches, but by rediscovering its Wesleyan social holiness heritage.

Keywords: *Kenya • Methodist • Pentecostal • African spirituality*

Introduction

The Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK) started in 1862 at the coast of Kenya, where the first European missionaries arrived, and proceeded to Meru, where the Nyambene Synod is situated, in 1912 (Nthamburi 2000). The Methodist Church has thirteen synods with two of them in Uganda and Tanzania as mission synods. The Nyambene Synod is one of the five synods in Meru County.

While the Church has expanded its boundaries and increased in number since its inception, this development has been minimal in more than a hundred years of its existence in Kenya as recorded in the world Christian database (Johnson and Gina 2015). The MCK shows a membership of about 300,000, representing 0.65% of 46 million Kenyans in 2015. The Nyambene Synod reflects this slow growth, as it merely has about 28,000 members in a synod that has about 552,375 people, according to the Kenya Population and Housing Census of 2019.

The Methodist Church, like most traditional churches in Kenya today, is experiencing a movement of members, especially among young people, to Pentecostal churches and movements. This phenomenon, however, started as early as 1912 in Kisumu, western Kenya, when the popular *Roho* (Spirit) movement started among the Anglican youth who claimed to be infilled by the Holy Spirit (Anderson 2004, 112). Either these youths left their churches on their own volition or they were expelled, having become unacceptable due to their outbursts and other spiritual manifestations. However, these newfound movements and churches took a low profile until the 1970s, when

* *E-mail: muthonialicemutuma@yahoo.com*

Open Access. © 2021 Mwila, published by Sciendo. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License

Pentecostalism started gaining momentum in Kenya (Parsitau 2011). Since then, Pentecostal churches and ministries have attracted members from mainline churches and experienced tremendous growth (Lindhardt 2015).

The purpose of the research was to better understand changes that are taking place within the Methodist Church as it engages with the influence of Pentecostalism and the social changes affecting the general population in the Nyambene Synod. This study explores the factors influencing changes in religious affiliations and how they affect the Methodist Church in the Nyambene Synod, Kenya. It involves investigating how Pentecostalism has interfaced with Methodism in Nyambene and helped to change religious reality in the synod, particularly the Methodist Church practices and perceptions. The research was based on a context of first, the increasing movement of young people from the traditional mission churches into the increasingly popular Pentecostal churches and movements in the region. Secondly, the Methodist Church notably bowing to the pressure to adopt some changes in an attempt to remain relevant and retain its members. This argument is supported by Parsitau: 'mainline churches are increasingly appropriating Pentecostal and charismatic spirituality, ethos, practices, styles and manners in a bid to survive its impact as well as curtail the exodus of the youth to newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches' (2011, 131).

Third, Pentecostalism has been growing quickly, as demonstrated by the Kenyan Christian population statistics from 2015 that show that the growth of Pentecostal-oriented churches in Kenya has shot up, steadily overtaking the older traditional churches that started much earlier (Gitau 2017). In 2015, 81 percent (37,275,000) of the Kenyan population of 46 million were Christians. The biggest single denomination was the Pentecostals, with 30.7 percent (14,153,000) and with the highest growth rate of 5.6% between 1970 and 2015 (Gitau 2017, 107). Anglicans and Protestants grew at 5.2 percent, and 4.76 percent, respectively, in the same period. According to Pew Research Forum 2010, seven out of ten Protestants in Kenya are Pentecostals.

Factors Affecting Denominational Affiliation Changes

Spiritual Consumerism

Spiritual consumerism implies religious practices in which an individual Christian plays the role of a buyer who makes a decision whether or not to consume or make use of the services provided. Using the concept of spiritual consumerism, this section explores how this capitalistic Western lifestyle is reshaping religion by influencing the contemporary worshipper in making choices they deem essential to them. Husemann and Eckhardt define consumer spirituality as 'the interrelated practices and processes that people engage in when consuming market offerings (products, services, places) that yield spiritual utility' (2019, 393). The consumer who is looking for a fulfilling spiritual experience now becomes key in determining the quality of services offered in the religious marketplace. Consumerism is not unique to Christianity but is widespread in contemporary society in general; since Christians are part of society, agents of social change tend to affect them. Social life is filled with consumer tendencies, such that publicity and branding is seen everywhere, including in the Pentecostal churches who make every effort to advertise their churches (Gauthier 2017). Spiritual consumerism stands on three key elements. These are the consumer/believer who is seeking a fulfilling spiritual experience, the provider/seller who is offering the service, and the marketplace/church where the two (buyer and seller) meet for the transaction to take place (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019). This has been much influenced by capitalism, which originates from a Western perspective that favours privatization and competitive markets where wealthy individuals make key decisions.

This concept is not only foreign to Kenya but is also in contrast with the communal kind of life that was originally African. I use the spiritual/religious marketplace to represent a scenario where religion/churches/denominations are perceived as displaying products or goods in a marketplace for sale. In his work on *Sociological Narratives and the Sociology of Pentecostalism*, Wilkinson offers an argument for a religious market model, or rational choice theory, where he argues that changes taking place in society and in religion are not necessarily indications of a decline in Christianity but of a shift in religious providers, which in effect triggers a demand for a paradigm revision. He further maintains that the demand for religion in society is always high but that providers change (2014, 224); he is applying the concept of supply and demand, where demand controls supply. Depending on the demand, a shift is witnessed from the old providers (institutionalised mainline churches) to the contemporary self-styled churches that, according to Droz, display 'self-fashioned beliefs and individual religious makeup' (2018, 36). Flexibility, which is a feature of Pentecostal churches, allows them to change in response to the demands of their targeted clients, and this implies a kind of a temporary attitude to religion. Thus, consumers shape the kind of religion they want, while on the other hand, they are affected and shaped by contemporary consumer culture.

The responses to my research interviews confirm the argument of Bonsu and Belk that 'the diversity of religious options allow for a quasi-market where consumers may fashion religion into any combination of values and doctrines' (2010, 310). Since the purpose of the market is to satisfy consumers' expectations, providers may have to comply as they seek sustainability of their churches. Services, as Husemann and Eckhardt contend, 'are purposely designed to enhance consumers' spiritual wellbeing and actualize their spiritual experience' (2019, 392). There is, then, an interplay between the market and consumption, where mixing spiritual and material products becomes inevitable. Husemann and Eckhardt emphasise the need to note 'how marketers sacralise their products and brands with spiritual meanings to increase attractiveness' (2019, 392); this in return attracts customer/consumers as in a spiritual business setting, what is commonly referred to as 'religious commercialization' in Kenya (Gez 2019). Although the MCK has traditionally been resistant to such commercialization, there is an increased indication that it might need to consider adaptation, since its contemporary worshippers are not only young and modernized but are constantly calling for change, as revealed by empirical research. Bowen argues that 'Christianity in Africa has to adapt or perish' (2007, 140). Consumerism has thus influenced change in religious institutions and practices as it instigates freedom and authority to choose as demonstrated by empirical research participants. 'I feel, personally, I feel I need some backup. Spiritual backup from somewhere else. That is where you realize now you find one attending meetings outside the church' (IP06 2019. 2).

Evaluating Consumerism

Other than affecting the changes in religious affiliations, the novel spiritual consumerism has also transformed the religious field in terms of practice, beliefs, and attitudes. However, here I highlight considerations for the potential challenges as well as the impact of consumerism in religion in Kenya. First, spiritual consumerism locates the person of the believer at the centre of all that is done. This risks compromising the Christocentric practice of Christianity. It does not only put the needs of the individual above all else, but it can also ignore the institution of the church and why the church exists. While contemporary churchgoers increasingly question the supremacy and hegemony of traditional church leaders and structures, there is need to practise church democracy with caution. In his research in urban Kenya, Gez discovered that for the survival and progress of some Pentecostal churches and movements, pastors have started consulting congregants in the form of questionnaires about what kind of messages they would like to hear (2018, 124). Thus, church members determine the 'good news' they need to hear. When going to church aims at affirming one's self-actualization, this overrules the theological purpose of the church and promotes individual interests above the call of God to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Such an attitude may not foster genuine worship, which, in addition to attending to the worshippers' needs, should promote a dialogue between the individual and the understanding of faith (Schreiter 1985).

Secondly, the over-commercialized religious marketplace may hinder a genuine spiritual experience (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019, 392). This is perhaps the reason why, though acknowledging the exponential growth of Pentecostalism, Parsitau (2011) cautions that this enthusiasm does not necessarily translate into growth in spirituality and transformation in Kenya. Pentecostal pastors have also been accused of using unethical means to satisfy their followers' clamour for miracles (see Gitau 2017), while some mainline church leaders and pastors have given a blind eye to wrong practices to ensure member retention (Gez 2018, 50). These individualistic drives run contrary to a church institution that is not conceived as a means of achieving individual satisfaction. The temporary structures of Pentecostalism do not promote the moral social cohesiveness that characterise the traditional churches and provided a strong foundation that can withstand forces of damaging change (Gauthier 2017).

Criticism of particular churches and members and spirited efforts to outdo one another bring about competition that poses a serious challenge to the unity of the church as the body of Christ. This hinders one from noticing the good practices and qualities of a church and tends to put emphasis on what he/she perceives as a weakness in that particular church. It could contribute to many denominations disassociating themselves from ecumenism, especially the Pentecostal-oriented Christians in Kenya. The fourth century Nicene Creed described the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic (British Methodist Church 1999, 4), a foundational tradition that the church holds key even today. The Pentecostal practice of spiritual consumerism, which puts an individual over and above other Christian values, clearly stands in tension with the essence of Christian faith: the unity and oneness of the church. The church needs to be one as it serves and worships one God, and if it is not united, it cannot reflect the oneness of God who also is the source and basis of its holiness. Similarly, the catholicity of the church reflects the very

nature of God who created and loves all without partiality, a virtue Christians need to exhibit in faithfulness to Christ and scriptures. With self-preferences influencing decisions, it obliterates the position of Christ and others in one's Christian practice. Individual-centred faith means individuals speak to the church rather than the church speaking salvation to the individual (Gez 2018, 124), so that the church itself becomes subsidiary to individual satisfaction.

On the other hand, this spiritual consumerism has revitalised the service delivery of the older churches as they get in touch with the reality of their lost monopoly and the existence of an open market (Gez 2018). The Methodist Church is challenged to consider softening her stance, especially on rigid observance of traditional church laws, and to allow space for Christians to experience and express faith the way they understand. While I do not propose compromise, these seem to be some of the features (goods) consumers may be looking for, to which MCK needs to offer a response. Additionally, if the Methodist Church has to serve effectively in the midst of a contemporary consumer society that piles demands on the church, it has to distinguish between the voice of God and the voice of the world, it has to 'evaluate the voices and discern the spirit' (Beck 2017). This is because the church must not conform to contemporary demands, but rather it has to maintain its holy distance while perpetuating the kingdom of God in the world.

As revealed above, spiritual consumerism is one of the characteristics of the Pentecostal churches that accounts for much of their success, since it appeals to the young contemporary generation. Additionally, it has triggered changes in affiliation because those who focus on their own preferences and requirements tend to join the Pentecostal churches that provide their needs. However, I note that, since churches are social institutions, personal desires are not sufficient reasons for ecclesial belonging. Therefore, in the next section, we turn to further issues pertaining to ecclesial identity and contextual factors influencing ecclesial affiliations that featured in the empirical research.

Ecclesial Identity

Ecclesial identity here refers to how the church sees itself on the basis of scripture and tradition (its self-understanding), in relation to how it is understood by others who are outside it (Avis 2018), the characteristics that distinguish it, and also its position or the image it portrays within the culture and society where it is situated. The question of the identity of the Methodist Church has arisen because of the experienced mobility that has raised issues regarding its perception as a church. My research interviewees often seem to be questioning the performance of MCK using evaluation tools that they have set for themselves, such that they move away when the church (according to them) fails to meet their expectations. This means that MCK has to examine itself in the light of how it presents itself and what it stands for in light of the perceptions and expectations of others. In turn, though, we must ask how others judge a church's performance and what they understand as the key purpose of a church. Is their understanding based on their expectations, and do their expectations shape the characteristics of a church? This seems to be the case, as we have seen above, that the consumer may determine the service provided and Pentecostal churches tend to seek to please worshippers. My research interviews also revealed that my participants' understanding of what a church is and their expectations about a church affected the decisions and choices they make. Therefore, I reflect here on the appropriate sources of ecclesial identity. Research participants seem to have tagged the church with their specifications of what it should be and offer. The understanding of what a church is from the Methodist point of view differs from a Pentecostal perception of what church is, particularly in modern society, which is undergoing significant social changes.

Church identity could be discussed from several perspectives, including its origin, mission, governance and authority, unity and diversity, liturgy and sacraments, as Avis (2018 p4)) argues. For the purposes of this research, I chose to emphasise those that are relevant to my research question: what contributes to the changes in religious affiliation in relation to the interaction between Methodism and Pentecostalism in the Nyambene Synod. The key features of identity that answer the research question and are of interest to the Nyambene community of faith as the two denominations interact are: the four marks of the church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic traditions), Christian fellowship and community, connexionalism, and church organization. Before I discuss the nature of the Methodist Church in Kenya under the features above, I need to build a foundation upon which these characteristics are based. My reflection is, of course, upon the Methodist Church and the Pentecostal churches and how the two are perceived and how they have interacted and influenced one another in the Nyambene Synod. It would be insufficient to discuss the identity of the Methodist Church in Kenya without making reference to the origins of Methodism in

Britain in the eighteenth century, from where MCK originated. This helps in understanding the Methodist origin and heritage, which is traced to the Wesleyan movement of the eighteenth century. I also draw on substantial literature from European authors in this aspect because there is little written literature about MCK that is independent of the British Methodist Church (BMC) literature and history. Thus, the MCK still maintains considerable dependence on its mother church. However, as I draw much of the MCK identity from the BMC, I still acknowledge MCK's practices and interpretations of its valued and observed identity characteristics from an insider's point of view as a researcher and a practitioner. This research therefore will benefit from my heuristic knowledge and experience (Bennett et al. 2018; Denscombe 2007).

MCK Origin and Identity

The Methodist Church is a mission church that was started in Kenya in 1862 by BMC missionaries, while the Pentecostal churches and movements, particularly the most recent form of Pentecostals (the neo-Pentecostals that I researched) are less than thirty years old in the region. Methodist Church traditions and governance structures were inherited from the mother church in Britain. Today, there is considerable continuity and uniformity, as the MCK faithfully adheres to these inherited traditions. From its inception, the Methodist Church in Kenya was run and managed by missionaries as an overseas District of the British Conference until 1967, when it gained autonomy (Nthamburi 1982). As one of the missionary churches in Kenya, the Methodist Church imitated most aspects of its home churches, their traditions, liturgy, and polity. This imitation did not end with the achievements of autonomy but, rather, church leaders have continued to perpetuate the same characteristics to date. As discussed in the next section, this is one of the reasons these churches are losing their relevance in the societies where they are established. Missionary influence still lives within the Kenyan mainline churches, and this has not only contributed to the increasing charge of irrelevance, but also their slow growth and expansion. This is not only because they keep the structures inherited from the missionaries, but also because they have not developed contextual spiritual and social perspectives that would give meaning to those structures in contemporary society. MCK has also not been innovative in continuing to develop and upgrade the structures to meet the current missional needs of its people. The Methodist Church still maintains the status quo, failing to use its autonomy to initiate changes and adaptations that would serve its people well in fulfilment of its mission mandate. Some research participants expressed their understanding that MCK resists change, although they still feel it can offer better theologically articulated direction if it were willing to do so. While MCK holds unto its traditions to protect its identity, its dissatisfied members seek alternatives in the Pentecostal churches that are less traditional and structured.

The MCK's identity can be understood from the church's doctrinal standards. The MCK understands itself to be part of the wider church of Christ in the world—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic**.** It plays its role of mission in the fulfilment of the great commission 'to make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19). According to the Methodist Standing Orders, the MCK is understood as 'a communion of believers called and ordained by God to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ holistically in order to transform people's lives in Kenya and throughout the world' (MCK 2015, 3). This is in line with the understanding of John Wesley, who regarded his movement as 'raised by God to spread scriptural Holiness throughout the land' (MCB 1999, 34). The nature of the Methodist Church as seen around the world 'has been shaped by its origins in the Church of England as a holiness movement with a universal missionary horizon' as Chapman (2018, 317) contends. To achieve this mission**,** the MCK uses scripture and tradition as its theological framework but also acknowledges its role in connecting believers into a fellowship within the body of Christ. This is reflected in the MCK doctrinal standards recorded in its Standing Orders and Agenda (2015). A combination of characteristics may provide an attempt to define the MCK, though most of these elements are shared with other Methodists throughout the world (Abraham 2019).

Relevance to Host Society

The third factor that contributes to the movement of young people from MCK to the Pentecostal churches is that of the relationship between church and society, which affects how relevant a church is to the society it is living in. I have argued that a church can only be relevant to a people if it identifies with them where they are and gets involved in their daily life encounters. It should be able to answer questions asked by the society it is living in and

respond to their situation. For a church to be relevant to people in Kenya, and Nyambene in particular, the gospel must speak to the whole person in a way that the believer can fully identify with his/her faith. Christians must live their faith in their difficult and distressing conditions of poverty, disease, tribal conflicts, political upheavals and exploitation, economic depression, and many other circumstances that threaten the very core of their existence (Nthamburi 2000). At the same time, Christians must feel the comfort of their faith as they celebrate blessings and other life achievements in line with their African worldview—not separating faith and other spheres of life.

In its pursuit of faithfulness to Christianity as presented by missionaries, the Methodist Church has found itself facing the prospect of irrelevance because it has not been able to integrate itself with the society whose ethos and practices it condemned at the beginning. African rituals were replaced with Christian rituals that do not perform the same functions as those they replaced (Nthamburi 2000). African singing and dancing were replaced by the Western/Christian way of singing, while other aspects of their spiritual worldview were condemned as demonic or superstitious. Mission/Western-oriented governance structures replaced African traditional ones that were highly respected and effective (Oduyoye 2017). While Pentecostal hallmarks include salvation and baptism of the Holy Spirit and manifesting spiritual gifts such as tongues, healing exorcism, exorbitant outbursts, one of the strengths of Pentecostalism is its ability to adopt the language, music, cultural artifacts, and other features of the context where it lives (Cox 1996). It seems to understand, appreciate, and acknowledge the underlying cultural and spiritual aspects that are part of its believers, and, instead of trying to uproot them, Pentecostal Christianity provides some continuity as well as transformation. It allows Christian faith to integrate with those African deep-seated world views to produce a Kenyan-made Christianity. These factors have contributed to the changes in religious affiliations in the Nyambene Synod, and consequently, the movements triggered by these factors benefit the Pentecostal churches.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it has been shown that Christians move from one denomination to another, and in this case from the Methodist Church to the Pentecostal churches and movements. A small number move back, while still others continue moving from church to church doing what has been called ‘church shopping’ (Oduyoye 2017). Some may settle once they get a church that they feel comfortable in, while others may keep ‘shopping’ for a long time. In seeking to interpret my respondents’ experiences, this research has identified three main factors that trigger these movements and thus contribute to the changes in religious affiliations taking place in the Nyambene Synod: personal needs, ecclesial identity, and contextual relevance.

It is clear that respondents in my research have a mental picture of the kind of church they would like to belong to, and they feel it is appropriate to keep looking for this due to the contemporary culture of freedom of choice and authority that keeps Christians or would-be Christians constantly searching. It is also to be noted that the social change that is affecting the entire world has also impacted perspectives held within the church. The findings of this study show an inclination among younger people towards a dynamic church that is flexible, accommodating and adaptive, innovative, responding to the realities of lived experience and speaking to the people in their contemporary setting. This is a church that not only preaches salvation from sin and damnation, but also preaches a gospel that transforms and uplifts people’s lives, giving them a strong faith foundation and responding to their needs in their context.

My research therefore raises the important theological question of what it means to be church in the twenty-first century and, more specifically, what it means to be the MCK in the twenty-first century. How does the MCK compare with the Pentecostal churches in being a church faithful to its inheritance and yet still satisfying the religious and social-economic needs of the contemporary worshiper? My interpretation of movements in church affiliation challenges the MCK to think of ways in which we may reconceive what it is to be church and how to carry out the mission of God in the contemporary generation. This study has pointed to key areas that I have broadly categorised and discussed as personal needs, ecclesial identity, and relevance to the context.

Importantly, the determining factor for affiliating with any church seems to be based on the individual desires and specifications of each believer, so that personal needs are instrumental in the kind of church a person chooses to belong to. A person has his/her priorities that in most cases are focused on individual preference and well-being, rather than strict interpretation of the word of God, or appreciation for the theological characteristics of a church. Churches themselves are faced with a choice: maintaining theological and historical integrity on the one

hand, or satisfying the demands of individuals on the other. This brings into sharp focus the culture of religious consumerism, with its notion of the religious marketplace. Churches and denominations are forced to promote their best characteristics, the best physical appearance of both their buildings and pastors, use the best communication and technological tactics and employ the best personnel in an attempt to satisfy the 'customer'. This can be likened to how businesses use the best salesmen/women to make sure their product sells faster and in large quantities. The focus thus becomes the consumer, and the gospel has to be packaged in a way that suits the taste of the consumers/'buyers'. This consumer Christianity consciously or unconsciously endeavours to change the gospel and the church rather than the gospel transforming the believer. An interview done by Gez in Kenya reveals that the mainline churches are experiencing changes that are caused by the need to respond to the growing fascination of young Christians by Pentecostal practices (2018, 8). This is an attempt by the mainline church to retain young people in their churches and curb the trend of young people moving to the Pentecostal churches. Additionally, the consumerist spirit threatens the unity that is one of the core hallmarks of the church, promoting competition amongst churches and believers as they engage in different measures to outdo their perceived 'opponents' in order to attract and keep more believers in their fold.

Secondly, Christians, particularly youth, have become increasingly mobile in search of a church of their taste. My findings indicate that one of the reasons for this is that their perception of church and what they are seeking differs from the Methodist Church's perception of its own being and purpose. While ecclesial identity is critical for a church to engage in any meaningful proclamation of the gospel to its people, the ecclesiology of the MCK is not fully developed or understood by people on the ground. The Methodist Church has continued to hold onto missionary structures and concepts even though these are not effective in the African context. The church universally shares and continues the work of its Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (Colberg 2018), and therefore it needs to develop structures and systems that are useful in enabling it to achieve this purpose.

The third issue that is instrumental in changing affiliations is the perception that a church is expected to attend to the public and social issues that face the particular community where it is based, in addition to preaching the gospel of love and salvation. Thus, the relevance of the MCK is increasingly challenged, since the Western missionary concepts and practices generally fail to respond to the contextual and existential issues facing its congregants. There is a strong desire for a church *made* in Kenya *for* Kenyans. By this, I mean a church that interacts with and understands the Kenyan socioeconomic, religious, and political setting; the Kenyan (African) world view, values, and practices that are integral to all people including Christians; and which speaks the Kenyan language. The Methodist Church, I note from my research, has not integrated itself fully within its community to be able to walk the journey of life with its congregants. It is perceived as remaining aloof from the plight of the community, and so it faces the danger of being seen as foreign and abstract many decades after being introduced in the country.

The church in Africa lives among people who are faced with myriads of challenges, some life-threatening, including diseases, poverty, insecurity, illiteracy, joblessness, violence, drug abuse, high child mortality, ethnic and political wars, and many others. However, the gospel is not restricted by time, space, or personality. It speaks to all generations at all times and places and an African Christian desires to hear the gospel addressing their situation. While I am cautious to claim that Pentecostal churches provide solutions to these challenges, my research shows that people feel that they are aware of the issues, preach hope to their congregants, and promise them a God who gives them victory. They have effectively preached an omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient God, whom every believer needs to put their hope in, especially when life challenges are overwhelming. Some respondents feel that the Pentecostal churches and movements satisfy their perception and need of a church better than MCK. While others still hold on the belief that the Methodist Church is better placed to be an ecclesial presence in Kenya longer term, they also agree that the current performance of Methodism is not satisfactory. One important question for the Pentecostal church is whether it will change substantially as the demographic of its membership changes, following the same trajectory of improved economic status that impacted the Methodist Church many years ago.

A key outcome from the research is the need for the MCK to look back, re-evaluate its performance in the last 158 years of existence in Kenya, and take deliberate action to address the contemporary phenomenon of youth migrating away from the church. The inability of the church to sustain its youths only serves to deny it not only the expected growth and progress but also the fulfilment of its mission. The absence of young people in a church or the continuous outflow as is now evident may promise a dim future for the church.

Bibliography

Abraham, J. W. 2019. *Methodism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Anderson, A. 2004. *An Introduction to Pentecostalism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Atieno, W. 2019. "The Church Struggles to Find Its Way in Fast-Changing World." *The Daily Nation,* December 24, 2019. https://www.nation.co.ke/news/The-Church-struggles-to-find-its-way-in-fast-changing-world/1056-5397612-e9pg4x/index.html.

Avis, P. 2018. "Introduction to Ecclesiology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, edited by Paul Avis. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp 1-32

Beck, B. E. 2018. *Methodist Heritage and Identity.* New York: Routledge.

Bennett, Z., E. Graham, S. Pattison, and H. Walton. 2018. *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology.* New York: Routledge.

Bevans, S. B. 2002. *Models of Contextual Theology, Faith and Cultures.* 2nd ed. New York: Orbis Books.

Bittlinger, A. 1981. *The Church Is Charismatic.* Geneva: World Council of Churches.

Bonsu, K. S., and R. W. Belk. 2010. "Marketing a New African God: Pentecostalism and Material Salvation in Ghana." *International Journal of Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Marketing International* 15: 305–23.

Bosch, D. J. 1998. *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shift in Theology of Mission.* New York: Orbis Books.

Bowen, R. 2007. *So I Send You, A Study Guide to Mission.* 2nd ed. London: SPCK.

British Methodist Church. 1999. "Called to Love and Praise: Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice." https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1993/fo-statement-called-to-love-and-praise-1999.pdf.

Bryman, A. 2008. *Social Research Methods.* 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Chapman, D. M. 2018. "Methodism and the Church." In *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, edited by P. Davis, 317–34. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

City Girl. 2014. "Embattled Pastor Has No Apologies Despite TV Furore." *Nation,* updated July 2, 2020. https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Victor Kanyari-churches-eat-seed/1056-2511152-dtfidy/index.html.

Colberg, K. 2018. "Ecclesiology Today and Its Potential To Serve a Missionary Church." *Missiology: An International Review* 46(1): 23–36. https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0091829617739842.

Counted, V. 2012. "Youth in Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches and Factors Accounting for their Attraction to Pentecostalism." Paper presented at Pentecostal and Charismatic Research (NPCRC)-Abuja.

Cox, H. 1996. *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century.* London: Cassel.

Cox, L. J., and G. T. Haar, eds. 2003. *Uniquely African? African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives.* Asamara: Africa World Press.

Denscombe, M. 1998. *The Good Research Guide for Small-Scale Social Research Projects.* 3rd ed. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Dion, A. F. 2019. "Revival Revolution and Reform in Global Methodism: An Understanding of Christian Perfection As African Christian Humanism in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa." *Black Theology: An International Journal* 17(1): 22–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/14769948.2018.1554328.

Evans, E. 2016. "How an African Worldview Encounters the Teachings of the Prosperity Gospel in Nairobi, Kenya. PhD diss.

Gatu, J. G. 2006. *Joyfully Christian Truly African.* Nairobi: Action Publishers.

Gauthier F. 2017. "Religion Is Not What It Used To Be: Consumerism, Neoliberalism and the Global Reshaping of Religion." *Religion and Global Society*, October 6, 2017. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2017/10/religion-is-not-what-it-used-to-be-consumerism-neoliberalism-and-the-global-reshaping-of-religion/.**E**Getui, M. N. 2017. "Faith and Culture." In *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, edited by K. R. Ross. J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu. and T. M. Johnson, 329–39. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.**E**Gez, Y. N. 2018. *Traditional Churches, Born Again Christianity and Pentecostalism: Religious Mobility and Religious Repertoires in Urban Kenya.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gez, Y. N., and Y. Droz. 2019. "'Its All Under Christianity:' Religious Territories in Kenya." *Journal of Africana Religions* 7(1): 37–61. https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/715862.

Gifford, P. 2009. *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya.* London: C. Hurst and Co.

Gifford, P. 2015. *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa.* London: C. Hurst & Co.

Gitau, W. M. 2017. “Christianity in Kenya.” In *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*,. edited by K. R. Ross. J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, and T. M. Johnson, 107–15. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Haley, J. M., and J. L. Francis. 2006. *British Methodism: What Circuit Ministers Really Think*. Werrington: Epworth Press.

Husemann, K. C., and G. M. Eckhardt. 2019. “Consumer Spirituality.” *Journal of Marketing Management* 35: 391–406. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2019.1588558.

IP06. 2019. “Factors That Affect Religious Affiliations and Their Impact on the Methodist Church Nyambene Synod.” Interview by August 28, 2019.

Kagema, N. D., and M. W. Maina. 2014. “Causes of the New Charismatic Movements in Kenya.” *Global Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2(2): 35–44.

Kangwa, J. 2017. *Pentecostalism, Mainline Churches, and Theological Education in Africa.* Dallas: Saint Paul Press.

Kuhn, M. 2008. *Prophetic Christianity in Western Kenya.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Kuipers, J. S. 2011. “Charismatic Renewal: Lessons in Missions from the Kenyan Church.” In *Jesus and Ubuntu: Exploring the Social Impact of Christianity in Africa*, edited by M. Ntarangwi, 81–99. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Kumar, R. 2014. *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners.* 4th ed. London: Sage.

Langford, T. A. 1989. *Exploring Methodism: Methodist Theology.* Peterborough: Epworth Press.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. 2005. “Reflections on Portraiture: A Dialogue between Art and Science.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 11(1): 3–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800404270955.

Lindhardt, M. 2015. *Presence and Impact of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Africa.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Martin, D. 2002. *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Mbiti, J. S. 1969. *African Religions and Philosophy.* London: Heinemann.

Methodist Church in Kenya. 2008. *Minutes of the 43rd Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Kenya.* Nairobi: s.n.

Methodist Church in Kenya. 2014–2018. *MCK Nyambene Synod Statistical Returns.* Maua, Kenya: Nyambene Synod.

Methodist Church in Kenya. 2015. *Standing Orders and Agenda.* 7th ed. Nairobi:

Moltmann, J. 1974. *The Crucified God*. London: SCM Press.

Mombo, E. 2017. “Mission and Evangelism.” In *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, edited by K. R. Ross, J. K. Asamoah Gyadu, and T. M. Johnson, 376–85. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Moreau, A. S. 2012. *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

Mugambi, J. 1989a. *African Christian Theology, An Introduction.* Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Ltd.

Mugambi, J. 1989b. *The Biblical Basis for Evangelization: Theological Reflections Based on African Experience.* Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

Mwaine, N. J. 2013. “MCK Meru Region Leaders Meeting.*”* Unpublished conference paper, Meru, Kenya.

Nash, S. 2011. *Youth Ministry: A Multifaceted Approach.* London: SPCK.

Ngaruiya, D. K. (2017. “Characteristics of Influential African Christian Leaders.” In *African Christian Leadership: Realities, Opportunities, and Impact,* edited by P. J. Robert and B. A. Kirimi, 32–40. New York: Orbis Books.

Ntarangwi, M., ed. 2011. *Jesus and Ubuntu: Exploring the Social Impact of Christianity in Africa.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Nthamburi, Z. 1982. *A History of the Methodist Church in Kenya.* Nairobi: Uzima Press.

Nthamburi, Z. 2000. *The Pilgrimage of the African Church in the Twenty-First Century.* Nairobi: Act Print Ltd.

Nyabwari, B. C., and D. N. Kagema. 2014. “Charismatic Pentecostal Churches in Kenya: Growth Culture and Orality.” *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education* 1(3): 27–33. https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/123456789/13155/Charismatic%20Pentecostal%20Churches….pdf?sequence=1.

Oduyoye, M. A. 2003. *“*Christian Engagement with African Culture: Religious Challenges.” In*Uniquely African? African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives,* edited by L. J. Cox and G. T. Haar, 89–108. Asmara: Africa World Press.

Oduyoye, M. A. 2017. “The Future of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa.” In *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, edited by K. R. Ross, J. K. Asamoah Gyadu, and T. M. Johnson, 461–77. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ogbu, K. 2008. *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Omenyo, C. 2006. *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism.* Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Publishing House.

Omenyo, C. N. 2014. “African Pentecostalism.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism,* edited by C. M. J. Robeck and A. Yong, 132-51. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Orobator, A. E. 2010. “Contextual Theological Methodologies.” In *African Theology on the Way*, edited by D. B. Stinton, 3–11. London: SPCK.

Parsitau, D. S. 2011. “From the Fringes to the Centre: Pentecostal Christianity in the Public Sphere in Kenya (1970-2009).” In *Jesus and Ubuntu: Exploring the Social Impact of Christianity in Africa,* edited by M. Ntarangwi, 123–45. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Parsitau, D. S. 2014. “The Civic and Public Roles of Neo-Pentecostal Churches in Kenya (1970-2010). PhD diss., Kenyatta University.

Pew Research Center. 2010. “Historical Overview of Pentecostalism in Kenya: Origins and Growth, August 5, 2010. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2010/08/05/historical-overview-of-pentecostalism-in-kenya/#:~:text=Historical%20Overview%20of%20Pentecostalism%20in%20Kenya%20Origins%20and,as%20Roho%20%28%E2%80%9CSpirit%E2%80%9D%29%20emerges%20in%20the%20Anglican%20Church.

Schreiter, R. J. 1985. *Constructing Local Theologies.* New York: Orbis Books.

Tambiyi, G. Y. 2014. “The Influence of Pentecostal Movements on Youths in Mainline Churches: Throneroom Trust Ministry Unveiled.” Unpublished conference paper, Abuja, Nigeria.