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THE SPREAD OF THE AKURINU RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Akurinu community demonstrates the resoluteness and innovative originality of an African religious movement that in the context of a congested and contested religious space, where western Christianity has, with immense success, obliterated African cultural and religious beliefs to substitute them with foreign ones, this church remains stable. The general objective of the study was to examine the spread of the Akurinu religious movement

Methodology: The paper used a desk study review methodology where relevant empirical literature was reviewed to identify main themes and to extract knowledge gaps.

Findings*:* The study concludes that transformation changed the Akurinu way of life and practices such that they relaxed their dietary rules and could now eat in hotels, took active roles in politics, started seeking medical attention in hospitals and embraced formal education. Indeed, Akurinu became a church with well-organized leadership structures and operations. In this transformation, the Akurinu church conformed to a modernization crisis that demanded a search for new social adjustments and identities outside their traditional world mileu. However, there were sections of Akurinu who remained conservative and could not for instance visit hospital or seek medical attention from a doctor, as they believed in faith healing, while others could not participate in any political activity, like voting or vying for elective posts.

Recommendations: The study recommends that the Akurinu church will have to rediscover their prophetic calling which dares to anticipate the future and step out towards it by faith. There is an urgent need to rediscover a refinement of what it means to be a Mukurinu in the context of a global world of change.

Keywords: *spread, Akurinu ,religious movement*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The study of African religions has consistently been enjoying serious publicity and attention from several scholars of religion and social sciences. These academic specialists are no less divided about the meaning of the term religion than are members of the public. Norbeck (1961) posits that their search sometimes revealed the curious philosophy that "religion has an inherent and unchanging meaning." It is for this reason that different scholars have offered varied definitions for the term religion. Russels (1995) defined religion as humanity‟s sensitivity to ultimate meaning of existence, which derives from his relationship to a transcendent or super-empirical plane of reality. Yinger (1946) opines that religion is a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggle with the ultimate problem of human life. For Smith (1978), religion is the attitude or active relationship and actions growing out of that attitude and reality or relationship, towards whatever or whomever an individual and or group of persons take to be of greater value and reality. Many scholars generally agree that religion comprises of beliefs, practices, and rituals that relate to the sacred, God and the mystical or the supernatural (Harold Koenig, 2009:284). Religion is therefore of integral importance as it concerns the deepest root of human existence and integrates human life into a coherent whole (Schuurman, 2011).

In the light of the above, it suffices to say that there lacks an acceptable universal definition of religion as people view it from different perspectives based on their beliefs, occupations, experiences and academic backgrounds. African traditional religion is part of the religious heritage of humankind and refers to the indigenous beliefs and practices that give ultimate meaning to human existence and enhance the quality of life (Mbiti, 1990). In this religion, one is born into it as a way of life with its cultural implications. It is the religion, which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present generation of Africans passed from generation to generation, and still practiced today in various shades and intensities by a large number of Africans (Awolalu, 1991). It is a religion that „is not merely a matter of facts, but mainly a matter of meaning‟ (Gimode, 1993), denoting that Africans are not converted into it, but each person is born into it, lives in it, practices it and is proud to make it his own. This religion has no written literature or sacred scripture or creedal forms, but is essentially transmitted through "oral traditions; myths and legends, stories and folktales, songs and dances, liturgies and rituals, proverbs and pithsayings, adages and riddles" (Depamo,1978), passed down from one generation to another and thus written in people‟s hearts, minds and oral history. In African thinking, there is no division between religion and life, body and soul, natural and supernatural.

This serves to illuminate our understanding that in African religion, humankind is viewed as a life force interacting harmoniously with forces in the universe namely; God, the deities and ancestors. For Mbiti, "It is religion, more than anything else, which colours their understanding of the universe and their empirical participation in that universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious universe" (Mbiti, 1969). The main features of African indigenous religions revolved around the ways of worship, symbols, and myths among many other lifestyle details. Worship consisted in large parts attempts to express reverence and perhaps to enter into communion with that which is worshiped or to request help for problems such as ill health, disharmony, or poverty (Mbiti, 1962). Rituals and spiritual prayers formed part of

African worship and were used to create a sacred atmosphere necessary to convey request for help and to sanctify and explain the meaning of life stages such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Divinities or intermediaries between man and the Supreme Being held a special place in African society (Kenyatta, 1939). They were used as channels through which sacrifices, prayers, and offerings were presented to God. Religion therefore had fundamental influence in the traditional life of Africans.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There have been numerous studies on religious independency in Kenya today. The Akurinu religious movement has been in existence for several years, having emerged at about the same period with other independents, yet adequate information on the movement remain scarce. Available studies tend to consider all Akurinu groups as virtually identical. (Waigwa, 2007; Macharia, 2012; Kenyatta, 1938). The Akurinu religious beliefs and practices have been characterized by a unique way of syncretic merger of Agikuyu traditions with Christianity. This has occasioned the movement to be the object of contempt and ridicule by many who view their practices as religious fantasies and obstacles to national development, yet, it has continued attracting large following in various parts of the country, although they draw heavily from the Kikuyu community (Macharia, 2012). Changing trends in a society in transition has prompted the Akurinu movement to undertake transformational changes in areas such health, education, diet to mention a few. This change has affected positively to a fast changing Kenyan society and despite the transformation, there seems to be a clear neglect in scholarship on its nature, responses and impact to the larger society. A historical study on the Akurinu movement has been lacking. This lack of study and adequate information on one of the oldest religious movement in Kenya is the topic worthy of study.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to examine the spread of the Akurinu religious movement

1.4 Justification and Significance of the Study

Christianity. Over time, this religious movement has undergone transformational changes that have affected its members and the society in general. Therefore, there is need to examine the history and the transformation of the Akurinu County and the impact it had on the society then and now, and a challenge to Akurinu community to contribute positively to a fast changing Kenyan society. The choice of 1920 is justified by the fact that it marks the period in which the movement emerged in Kikuyu land. The year 2000 is crucial in the movement's history as it marked the pinnacle of reforms within the movement as witnessed in the transformation process (Macharia 2012). The study therefore reconstructed the history of Akurinu movement and established factors for its emergence and the changes that have occurred in various aspects of the movement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical review

Two theories were found to be relevant in examining the spread of the Akurinu religious movement. The theories that were found to best inform the research constructs are the social movement theory (Sidney, 1994) and modernization theory (Lenin, 1964).

2.1.1 Social Movement Theory

Social movement theory can be understood as a complex set of many actions by many different collective actors all oriented towards some very broad issue or goal. These interconnections between events are directly tied to cycles of protest. It therefore refers to the study of social mobilization including its social, cultural, and political manifestations and consequences (Sidney, 1994 and Tilly, 2004). Many social movements throughout history have emerged and dramatically changed the societies in which they occurred. Tilly (2004) argues that social movements are triggered by incentives created by political opportunities, combining conventional and challenging forms of actions and building on social networks and cultural frames. In social movements, large groups of people who are usually without political power and influence decide to promote or resist social change through unconventional means. According to Sidney (1994) and Tilly (2004), Social Movement Theory has three main concepts, namely; Relative Deprivation, Collective Behaviour and Resource Mobilization. Proponents of this theory view social movements as large- scale informal groupings of individuals or organizations, which are connected through their shared interests to focus on specific political or social issues, in order to carry out social change. Relative Deprivation in its rudimentary form explains the emergence of new sects and denominations in western Christianity.

It postulates a correlation between the rise of new religious movements and condition of deprivation. Morrison (1971) affirms that Relative deprivation is generally considered the central variable in the explanation of social movements and is used to explain quest for social change that inspires social movements; social movements emerge from collective feelings of relative deprivation. It asserts that new religious movements recruit their followers from the deprived, who feel that they are not receiving a fair share of what seems to be available. New religious movements therefore constitute not only dissent but also socially deprived persons. For Relative Deprivation to occur individuals have to perceive their expectations as legitimate and if these expectations are blocked, individuals will experience discontent and frustrations. Social movements therefore have their foundations among people who feel deprived of some resources. These characteristics are generally associated with sects or religious protest movements, and the Akurinu movement easily fits into that characterization. The first characterization as noted by Scroggs (1999) is that of protest against relative deprivation.

The Akurinu came together not only to express their desire to get rid of relative deprivation but also form a new world order where they could find acceptance and value among themselves. This movement was born in protest to economic oppression, exploitation and political dominance by the colonialists. The Agikuyu community in the face of colonial rule experienced differential distribution of highly regarded attributes such as power, prestige, status and opportunities for social participation where by individuals or groups like Akurinu felt disadvantaged in comparison to others and thus formed socio-religious groups. Consequently, the Akurinu movement emerged to offer spiritual chaplaincy that addressed the deprivation challenge. Collective Behavior refers to the actions of groups of people in unusual circumstances.

Social movements are the most organized forms of collective behaviour and tend to be most sustained. Blumer (1939) argues collective behaviour occur when large numbers of people fail to accept some of the dominant values, norms and leaders in a society. People faced with unusual

situations can create meanings that define and direct the situation. Under such circumstances unconstrained social and political movements can develop. The emergence of the Akurinu movement in Central Kenya was a result of cultural and religious conflict with European missionaries. This group of believers were working together to positively change and transform social, political and economic realities to improve on their living conditions. Resource Mobilization refers to the process by which a discontented group assembles and invests resources for the pursuit of the group goals. The resource mobilization perspective conceives of collective actions in terms of the mobilizing, converting and transferring of resources from one group and one arena of actions to other groups and actions (Tilly, 1978; Gamson, 1975). The theory argues that social movements develop when individuals with grievances are able to mobilize sufficient resources to take action. Resources are understood to include knowledge, time, individuals, leaders, finance, solidarity and legitimacy. The key factor in social movement‟s success or failure is its capacity to mobilize and efficiently manage resources. Akurinu leaders led the oppressed by arousing feelings of discontent in Kikuyu land against the colonial government. These feelings generated strains or tension creating a sense of relative deprivation, which culminated to birth, and development of the Akurinu movement in Central Kenya. This theory is more accommodative in explaining the historical factors that led to the emergence of the Akurinu movement.

2.1.2 Modernization Theory

Modernization theory is a description and explanation of the process of transformation from traditional or underdeveloped societies to modern ones. Hussain et al (1981) and Lenin (1964) assert that the concept of modernization incorporates the full spectrum of transition and drastic transformation that a traditional society has to undergo to become modern. This theory explains the process of change towards social, economic and political systems resulting to economic growth and change in the socio-political and cultural structures of the society. Modernization theory helps raise for this study critical factors in explaining the process of transformation and its impact within the Akurinu movement. This movement had witnessed the progressive transition from the old practices that had either been modified or changed into modern ones. Their beliefs, practices and way of life have been transformed through adoption of modern values such as formal education, health care and positive social integration resulting to improved standards of living. Modernization is about the readiness to accommodate the process of transformation resulting from changes (Coetzee et al, 2007). The gradual transformation process undertaken by the Akurinu after independence had great impact on their socio-economic and political life. The Akurinu movement was simply conforming to a modernization process that demanded a search for new identities and adjustment outside the Kikuyu traditional world.

2.2 Empirical Review

Muthuri,(2020) conducted a study to explore participative leadership in relation to SDA Church‟s growth in Magarini Sub-county, Kilifi County, Kenya. Part of SDA‟s policy recognizes that authority rests in the entire membership. However, the situation on the ground is different since ordinary members are not allowed to participate in leadership. The research sought first, to examine the extent of members‟ inclusivity in leadership to enhance growth; second, to explore the causes and analyze the effects of lack of participatory leadership thus correlating members‟ involvement in leadership and church growth. SDA leadership style is exposed to forces and is

affected by factors that undermine church growth. Team Leadership Model was considered an appropriate theoretical orientation for this study in order to highlight constant team analysis and improvement to cultivate church growth. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. To generate data, questionnaires were administered, besides FGD Guide and observation schedule. Nine SDA Churches took part in the study out of which 287 respondents satisfactorily participated. Data generated from field research were presented and analyzed as per the research objectives. It was observed that few members involved themselves in evangelism and opening of Sabbath schools respectively. However, not all Churches had up to date registers. Churches lacked serious Bible study divisions. Members and leaders lacked knowledge on team management. Obstacles to effective communication and socio-economic factors related to gender and family issues were prevalent. Leaders should work in groups by clarifying group roles and initiating more team independence, by taking actions that are goal-focused and which satisfy needs. They should resist forces that lead to exclusive leadership. Further, they should use a combination of various practices of leadership such as prayer life, Bible study, seminars/workshops, conducting time-frame schedules, visitation of members and attending revivals. Participative leadership motivates people and encourages them to be involved in activities; it engages in decision- making necessary for the growth of the church. It calls for team effectiveness where members manage activities corporately, respect church‟s beliefs and counsels, share information, deliberate on issues and agree before implementation of activities to enhance church growth.

Kariuki ,(2016) conducted a study to investigate the role of the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) in peace-building in Mathare Informal Settlement (MIS), Nairobi County. The ACK mandate in peace building is contained in the Provincial Synod resolutions of 1982. The synod resolved to spearhead peace-building in Kenya and fight evils that hamper cohesion in the society. ACK‟s commitment to peace and conflict resolution is widespread and clearly articulated in the Provincial Strategic Plan adopted in September 2000. Despite the ACK peace building mandate MIS had continually suffered adversely from conflicts linked to political differences, scramble for resources, militia groupings, illegal economic activities and negative ethnicity, among others. The study was based on the premise that ACK play an important role in peace-building and as such examined the role the ACK had played in peace building especially with the establishment of the Justice and Peace commission (JPC). This study was guided by the biblical paradigm of peace and tranquility that underscores harmony in any given community. Data for the study was drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Field research was carried out in MIS by use of self-administered questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs) and oral interviews (OIs). In this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling and snow ball methods to select respondents. The researcher targeted a sample size of 128. Qualitative method of data analysis was used; data was synthesized thematically according to the study objectives and envisaged chapters. The study revealed multiple forms and causes of conflict in MIS. It also indicated that conflicts adversely affect MIS and particularly women and children. The study also established that ACK played a key role in peace building in MIS. The study indicated that re-organization of ACK‟s JPC as a fully-fledged department with adequate staffing would help address the perennial conflicts in MIS. JPC would help in developing peace building strategies, policies, monitoring peace processes and evaluation. The study has concluded that the ACK is capable of cascading peace in MIS owing to her high presence and large membership in MIS. The position of the church in the society as a

trusted local institution, source of hope, reconciliation, love and forgiveness enhances her mission in peace building

Thiongo,(2016) conducted a study on focusing on print media portrayal of Islam and Muslims and its influence on Christian-Muslim relations in Nairobi County. Islam has been accused of encouraging violence and Muslims perceived as people who thrive in violence. Islam enjoins its members to embrace peace and harmonious inter- faith coexistence. Print media as a powerful source of Christians' knowledge about Islam and Muslims could have led to shaping of the opinion. The objectives of the study are: to evaluate the Islamic teachings on peace and harmonious Christian- Muslim relations; to establish how Islam and Muslims are portrayed in the print media in Kenya; to assess how portrayal of Islam by the print media affects the Christian-Muslim relations in Nairobi County and to provide strategies for the print media to present a more objective image of Islam and Muslims to enhance Christian- Muslim relations. The study has been guided by semiotic theory in particular Representamen and Intepretant concepts. Representamen means something that does a representing while Intepretant denotes meaning. The study uses Descriptive Survey Design as it is qualitative in nature. Primary data collection has been through self-administered questionnaires and scheduled interviews. Data presentation and analysis was in form of narrations and simple descriptive statistics like tables, percentages and graphs. The study found that Islam is a religion of peace and Muslims are supposed to be pacifists. Peace is made to be a key part of Islamic culture through such fundamental elements like the name Islam and the greetings. Muslims are enjoined to practice compassion, forgiveness, moderation and interfaith tolerance as key pillars of peace. However, the reported cases of radicalism practiced by some few members in Nairobi North District and all over the world cause Islam to appear violent and intolerant. The print media in Kenya portrays Islam and Muslims to be warlike. Mainstream newspapers misreport the personalities of both Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Allah where they are portrayed as encouraging intolerance. Violence is seen as core teachings in Islam taught by the sheikhs in the mosques. This study established that print media influences Christians perceptions on Islam and Muslims contributing to Islamophobia and sometimes tension. The ideologies of radical Islamists which are reported in media and their use of Islam to justify their aggression make it difficult for the Christians to distinguish between militancy and Islam. Christians think that Islam teaches its adherents to hate non- Muslims and fight them. The Christian- Muslims relations tend to be tense. The study has recommended the media to adopt sensitive reporting to promote positive coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Nairobi County. Media practitioners need to exercise peace journalism to help in enhancing interfaith pluralism despite the existence of radical Islamism. This will promote Christian- Muslim dialogue in the efforts to build peace rather than creating diversit

Adongo,(2015) conducted a study to investigates the history, beliefs and practices of the Voice of Salvation and Healing Church (VOSHC), an African Initiated Church (AIC) which emerged in the 1950s. It is closely associated with the East African Revival Movement of the 1930s in terms of its beliefs and practices. The study is significant because it explored the various factors that led to the formation and establishment of VOSHC during the pre-independence period of Kenyan history. The study explored the uniqueness in the one-man leadership of VOSHC since 1954. The study also addressed the beliefs and practices of VOSHC that have brought coherence to its adherents as it has remained relevant to the present. The study was guided by a historico-

anthropological-analytical design. This involved the use of a descriptive approach in examining the objectives of the study. Primary data was mainly from field research which relied on oral interviews (OIs), participant observations (POs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The study sample comprised leaders and members of VOSHC. They were selected on the basis of gender, age, position in the church and length of membership. The instruments used to collect data were interview schedules, observation schedule and interview guide for FGDs. A total of sixty informants were interviewed. From the data analysis, the study has shown that VOSHC was founded under the influential African leaders led by Silas Owiti. VOSHC emerged from a mainstream church, now the Anglican Church of Kenya. It is evident from the study that both sociological and theological factors were clearly central in the formation of VOSHC. In particular, the church was founded on the emphasis on teachings about salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ, divine healing and the in-filling of the Holy Spirit evident in the speaking in tongues as was on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). For the VOSHC adherents, understanding of the roles and manifestations of the Holy Spirit is central to the Christian faith. The study has shown that VOSHC has developed and grown amidst challenges over the years. This has been evident in its leadership organizational structure and spatial advancement into other areas outside the Luo Nyanza region where it was first established. From the findings, the study notes that: VOSHC could have made more impact in the society if it were not for some misunderstandings over certain sociological, theological, integrity and doctrinal issues which led to two major schisms in a span of ten years. Moreover, VOSHC could have spread all over Kenya and other parts of Africa, if the leaders could have been dynamic and ready to accommodate universal strategies of empowerment such as formal education, theological training of its ministers, among others

2.3 Research gaps

Geographical gap is a knowledge gap that considers, the untapped potential or missing/limited research literature, in the geographical area that has not yet been explored or is under-explored. For instance Muthuri,(2020) conducted a study to explore participative leadership in relation to SDA Church‟s growth in Magarini Sub-county, Kilifi County, Kenya.The study adopted the descriptive survey design. To generate data, questionnaires were administered, besides FGD Guide and observation schedule.Leaders should work in groups by clarifying group roles and initiating more team independence, by taking actions that are goal-focused and which satisfy needs. They should resist forces that lead to exclusive leadership. The studies presented a geographical gap as they were conducted in Kilifi County while our current study focus on examining the spread of the Akurinu religious movement.

Methodological gap is the gap that is presented as a result in limitations in the methods and techniques used in the research (explains the situation as it is, avoids bias, positivism, etc.). Thiongo, (2016) conducted a study on focusing on print media portrayal of Islam and Muslims and its influence on Christian-Muslim relations in Nairobi County. The study uses Descriptive Survey Design as it is qualitative in nature. Primary data collection has been through self-administered questionnaires and scheduled interviews. Data presentation and analysis was in form of narrations and simple descriptive statistics like tables, percentages and graphs. The study found that Islam is a religion of peace and Muslims are supposed to be pacifists. Peace is made to be a key part of Islamic culture through such fundamental elements like the name Islam and the

greetings. The studies presented a methodological gap as it used descriptive survey design while our current study adopted a desktop literature review method

Conceptual gap arises because of some difference between the user's mental model of the application and how the application actually works. Adongo,(2015) conducted a study to investigates the history, beliefs and practices of the Voice of Salvation and Healing Church (VOSHC), an African Initiated Church (AIC) which emerged in the 1950s.The study was guided by a historico-anthropological-analytical design. This involved the use of a descriptive approach in examining the objectives of the study. Primary data was mainly from field research which relied on oral interviews (OIs), participant observations (POs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). .It is evident from the study that both sociological and theological factors were clearly central in the formation of VOSHC. In particular, the church was founded on the emphasis on teachings about salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ, divine healing and the in-filling of the Holy Spirit evident in the speaking in tongues as was on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The study focused on investigates the history, beliefs and practices of the Voice of Salvation and Healing Church (VOSHC), an African Initiated Church (AIC) which emerged in the 1950s, while the current study focus on examining the spread of the Akurinu religious movement.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop literature review method (desk study). This involved an in-depth review of studies related to examining the spread of the Akurinu religious movement. Three sorting stages were implemented on the subject under study in order to determine the viability of the subject for research. This is the first stage that comprised the initial identification of all articles that were based on the spread of the Akurinu religious movement from various data bases. The search was done generally by searching the articles in the article title, abstract, keywords. A second search involved fully available publications on the subject on the spread of the Akurinu religious movement. The third step involved the selection of fully accessible publications. Reduction of the literature to only fully accessible publications yielded specificity and allowed the researcher to focus on the articles that related to the spread of the Akurinu religious movement which was split into top key words. After an in-depth search into the top key words (the spread of the Akurinu religious movement), the researcher arrived at 4 articles that were suitable for analysis. The 4 articles were findings from Muthuri,(2020) who conducted a study to explore participative leadership in relation to SDA Church‟s growth in Magarini Sub-county, Kilifi County, Kenya.The study adopted the descriptive survey design. To generate data, questionnaires were administered, besides FGD Guide and observation schedule.Leaders should work in groups by clarifying group roles and initiating more team independence, by taking actions that are goal-focused and which satisfy needs. They should resist forces that lead to exclusive leadership.

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4.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATION FOR FURTHER STUDY

4.1 Summary

A number found employment in the civil service, teaching and theology and thus actively participated in the economic life of the nation. It is against this backdrop that the Akurinu Warriors Women Convention (Ngwataniro ya Mahoya ma Atumia) was formed which brought together women from different Akurinu churches for prayers These conventions held every month have been very successful in unifying women from various Counties and have even attracted men converts.

4.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that transformation changed the Akurinu way of life and practices such that they relaxed their dietary rules and could now eat in hotels, took active roles in politics, started seeking medical attention in hospitals and embraced formal education. Indeed, Akurinu became a church with well-organized leadership structures and operations. In this transformation, the Akurinu church conformed to a modernization crisis that demanded a search for new social adjustments and identities outside their traditional world mileu. However, there were sections of Akurinu who remained conservative and could not for instance visit hospital or seek medical attention from a doctor, as they believed in faith healing, while others could not participate in any political activity, like voting or vying for elective posts..

4.3 Recommendations

The study recommends that the Akurinu church will have to rediscover their prophetic calling which dares to anticipate the future and step out towards it by faith. There is an urgent need to rediscover a refinement of what it means to be a Mukurinu in the context of a global world of change.

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