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# Regaining the values and Appealing to Religious Resources for Social Transformation in Kenya: A Critical and Appreciative Perspective

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**ABSTRACT**

Religion creates a complex part of Kenya as a country. In Kenya, almost all aspects of life; social, political, and commercial life are punctuated with religious lexes and rituals. Whereas Kenya and Africa as a whole are immersed in religiosity, poverty, ethnic politics, tribalism, and bribery are prevalent in African countries and the list cannot be complete without mentioning them. The inquiry thus arises as to whether African religiosity gives inducement to corruption and poverty or religion contributes to people's involvement in corruption, poverty, and tribalism and how can religion be used to transform the country? By using the concept of religion, this paper will explore in what sense religion can be said to be a way of life for Africans; investigate why there is a loss of religious morals in the contemporary Kenyan society. Thereafter, the study will sort to appreciate the role religion can perform in the social change in Kenya and how resources of religion can be reclaimed and involved in the change of the Kenyan society. The paper will argue that even though religion seems to be a predicament to social disharmony expressed in issues such as corruption, conflict, and poverty in Kenya, it remains a vital constituent of 'Africanness' and may well contribute to social transformation by permeating the economic, political, and social life of the people.

## INTRODUCTION

Religion permeates all parts of African society to the extent that almost all political, economic, and social activities are punctuated with religious activities. But even though religion is booming in Africa, many sub-Saharan African countries are among the world's poorest, corrupt, and politically unstable nations. According to New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), nine states in sub-Saharan Africa were ranked among the seventeen most corrupt states in the world (NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency *et al.,* 2012). Kenya is among these states named in the report.

In reply to the encounters of poverty, bribery, political instability, and slow rate of development experienced in the African content, Deng (1998) suggested the use of African history to guide an appropriate development framework to integrate African social values for development theories. In similar thought, Omosegbon (2010) recommended that African historical and cultural study may perhaps offer direction for coming African growth. Religions in Africa consequently create a vast landscape that overlays the social, political, and economic scopes in sub-Saharan Africa and Kenya to be specific. This paper suggests the necessity to regain religious values and resources to transform society on the issues of corruption, political instability, and underdevelopment. The regaining of religious values is key because religion has been accused to be a source of disharmony in society. This paper desires to re-evaluate the role religion can play in social transformation by exterminating corruption and poverty and contributing to both commercial and Kenyan political life. By using the perception of religion (African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam), the paper pursues

responses to the following questions: What constitutes African religiosity, what has led to the loss of religious values in the society, and how the values can be regained and its resources mobilized to transform the society.

## RELIGION PERMEATES AFRICAN LIFE

Though secularism seems to have thrived in isolating religion from commercial, political, and social affairs in most countries in the world, the issue is different in Africa and especially in Kenya. However, notwithstanding the impact of secularism and modernization in Africa, such isolation has not left a permanent watermark as far as the African community is concerned. Mbiti, (1999) postulates that an African is notoriously religious. From this, we can conclude that, in Africa, religion remains to play a substantial function in all aspects of human interaction in terms of politics, economy, and social life.

Mbiti emphasizes that Africans are infamously religious, that is religion pervades all facet of their life to an extent that it is not easy to discrete religious life and social life. It is difficult to isolate religion from Africans (Mbiti, 1999). Though the African religious mindfulness was primarily a result of traditional religion, Christianity and Islam have reinforced this religious consciousness. Equally, however, as the re-counting of a natural cultural process, both Christianity and Islam have in turn been prejudiced by indigenous religions (Muzorewa 1985). This is seen in cases where Christians and Muslims still respect indigenous rituals and practices.

In African indigenous life, the person is absorbed in religious involvement that begins sometimes before even birth and continues until death or even after

death. For the African, "to live is to be caught up in a religious drama" (Mbiti 1999). Religion is undeniably essential for Africans since humanity lives in a religious cosmos. Both the cosmos and a person's events in the world are experienced and seen from a religious perception. This means that the entire being is a religious marvel. This made Prof. Mbiti to conclude that in the African perception, to be is to be religious in a religious world. In this logic, an African cannot live outside religion. This religious perception enlightens the logical thoughtful of African mythologies, duties, civilizations, views, morals, activities, and social relationships (Mbiti, 1999). According to Kalu, this same perception also contributes to Mbiti's political and economic life (Kalu, 2010). Religion therefore, informs all African life and decision. When an African act, think, or politicizes, he does so religiously.

Whereas the African indigenous religious inheritance persists as a force to reckon within influencing the values, identity, and thinking, Christianity and Islam become a great source of influence in Kenya. Christianity is a reality in Kenya for more than two thousand years and its impact is irrefutable. Indication of such impact can be seen in, for example, the number of Christian churches, rehabilitation centres, schools, and hospitals established in Kenya. Likewise, Islam has also been in Kenya for a long period. This has made Mbiti (1999) argue that both Christianity and Islam can claim to be indigenous. The two religions succeeded to convert Africans, but the African beliefs and rituals remain in the life of the people.

Undoubtedly, just as religion impacts the socio-political and economic domains, so is religion also impacted by these domains (Kalu, 2010). Kenyan political and economic elite have frequently resorted to religion in their forceful race for the waning possessions of higher status such as in search of political power, and economic and social respect. In societies in Africa such as Kenya, the government delivers a foundation of capital and power, more so than any other institute in society. The wealth and power availed by the state are usually contested with massive viciousness. Religion is used in this competition as both a contested arena and as a device of struggle. The religious breadth of political and economic

controversy in Africa and Kenya in our case could be said to be inescapable and multifaceted (Kalu, 2010). Kalu maintains that the imposition of spirituality in modern political undercurrents is, firstly, given stimulus by the prerogative of African politicians that African political integrity is engrained in an African indigenous perception. Secondly, religion is hired by politicians who wish to legitimize their power by pleasing ritual foundations to be found in indigenous culture and religion. These two factors "enable outlawed secret societies such as Mungiki, Taliban, and Ten brothers in Nyalenda Kisumu, Gor Mahia fans to be used by politicians to serve as an instrument for mobilizing both economic and political power in Kenya as observed in various political campaigns. However, if religion is so ingrained in all aspects of life in Kenyan, it is unthinkable that it lacks a vivacious function to play in the revolution of the country.

**Religious Role in Political and Social Development**

Though secularism seems to have thrived in isolating religion, in Kenya, the situation seems to be unique. However, notwithstanding the impact of secularism and modernism in Africa, such separation has not left a permanent watermark on African societies, where religion remains to play a significant role in both the social, political, and economic life of the people. In Kenya, African indigenous religious inheritance persists as a force to reckon with. It is observed in the practices of people to permeates all life from birth to death.

In the developed countries, the forces of insight and secularism have dissociated religion from social, economic, and political life, placing it to the level of a private affair. To deliver a philosophical and conceptual foundation for the civilization program, "reason and faith were built as conflicting, reciprocally discordant domains" (Clarke et al., 2008). Within the same period, religion was perceived as anti-development. It was supposed that religious perception was unbending and inflexible in the face of both political and social transformation (Clarke et al., 2008). Nevertheless, towards the end of the 20th century, a drive changed from separation to a close relationship between faith and development. Agbiji & Swart (2013), for

example, assert that faith-based organizations (FBOs) have been active in matters relating to development. This is because religion is trusted by donors more than government agencies. These movements aim at blending religion with development and civilization.

Unlike the developed world, where there was disunity between faith and development at some point in history, in African societies and in Kenya to be specific, religion has remained dominant in all facets of society (Kobia, 1978). For example, among most of the tribes in Kenya, traditional norms and values, still, inform the people and this ensures that there is attention for all community members. The concept of accumulation of material for individual prestige and gain is extraneous to Africans. To be well-off or rich means to be bound by many people who form a community. It also means being able to take care of the community. A poorer person could not be in charge of the community. The perception of integrity and disgrace was also of help in African societies as it prohibited individuals from theft for status or conquest praise from the public. Theft was taboo and trademarked thief and the whole of his close relatives and the community would suffer shame and stigmatization on account of such behaviour (Magesa, 2010).

Religion plays a vital role in nurturing principles such as honesty and integrity (Kalu, 2010). Such principles are vital for the progress of good commercial and democratic political structures. Even though Kenya like many countries in Africa are still economically and politically undeveloped, the subsidiary impact of religious principles on aspects of human life through the devolution of sacred standards to these domains could benefit commercial and political institutions in Kenya. In African Traditional Religion, the nurturing of principles in society is attained through the absorption of the person in the doings of culture through contribution to the community. The connection between morality and spirituality, and the procedures of absorption and ethical development in African Traditional Religion echo with African Christianity (Kalu, 2010). Agbiji & Swart (2013) assert that Christianity pays consideration to the moral formation through studying the word of God, reading the catechism,

and other means of publicizing sacred books within the family of Christians. Religious pieces of knowledge that are intended for moral development also contribute significantly to evolving hopefulness amid the disgraceful socio, political, and commercial surroundings in African civilizations.

In most African social orders, religion helps marshal resources that would not otherwise have been organized to solve societal problems. Religion is of great help in creating people's consciousness to think about those problems and think of a way of alleviating them. Religious groups such as churches offer assistance to various social groups with little influence. According to Adogame (2013), religious communities usually provide social capital. Some contributions of religion to the social order are evident in Kenya. In the past mainstream, churches have achieved the influence of building civil world and answering to both the state and the great societal provision problems (Kalu, 2010). In recent times, the Catholic Church, Anglican, and other main churches have for example outlawed politics in their churches to create unity among the people. (Christianity today, 2022). This is because Kenyan politics are essentially divisive and tribal while most of these churches are inclusive and metropolitan.

**Possible Causes of the Loss of Religious Values**

It is a phenomenon in Kenya that corruption, nepotism, and tribalism are on an upward trajectory despite the majority of Kenyans being either Christians or Muslims. This paper argues that it is possible that most Kenyans are nominally religious and their actions do not tally either their actions. This paper insinuates the actions to the loss of upholding religious values which may be due to the following:

Modernism and Compartmentalism: as it relates to religion, modernism is connected with Compartmentalism and individuality. These stress that our private lives have nothing to do with religious belief, life, and work. This Compartmentalism has instigated religion hence losing its core and basic role in the life of the people. Religion used to punctuate every aspect of African life from birth to death, but in contemporary society, this seems to be non-existent and each stage of our

life has diverse guiding establishments. This is because religion is a private. The secular government now rules law and education. In contemporary society, individuals now pick our employment, principles, and lifestyles largely independent of religion. Modernism has caused religion to capitulate to reason and open-mindedness: now, there is a free market for even beliefs and lifestyle.

Nationalism: this has detracted many from religion. The political institutions of the country have taken over many functions that systematized religion used to populate; now the state arranges almost everything. For example, it is the state to give marriage certificates, burial permits, and register religion in Kenya.

Individualism: there is a modern belief that religion is private and not public. There is an attitude of open-mindedness and restraint towards religious principles, so people are passionate to admit the most extreme alterations of belief as reflecting individual choice, not as in place with moral predicaments intervention of the church or the state. The era of individualism has placed religion to be considered by most people as a private choice, not communal as it used to be especially in the African traditional religion. People have freedom of choice from varieties that are available to them and no religion is capable of enforcing correct belief to the individual or the public. Belief has become co-opted in harmony with the way that the supremacy of personal judgment has come to control the non-existent idea of communal religious customs. In modern society, there is no public religion and individuals consider that there is no connection between one's character and religious identity. No religion in the world has the right to force its belief system on the public. "Religion is increasingly a private, rather than a public matter" (Partridge, 2004, pg. 640).

Empathy: empathy towards individuals with different belief systems has increased in contemporary societies. This could be due to a great emphasis being given to individual dignity more than communal dignity, individual honour, and choice rather than consensus. Society stresses intellectual freedom rather than social and religious freedom. Charismatic leaders, promoters of religious freedom, and evangelical preachers are now not appealing to the majority unless they promote some indication of secularism, academic merit, and organized faith is less tenable.

Multiculturalism: In the current society, globalization and multiculturalism have led us into a society where culture, secularism, religious ideas, philosophy, and atheistic principles intermingle. As a result of this globalization, it is difficult to force somebody to follow religious ideas as individuals are exposed to a variety of beliefs and philosophies. They choose what appeals to their situation. This situation offers a serious blow to the competence of religious values to flourish in society. Beliefs that once seemed special and safe to assume and ensure social transformation are now questioned and compared with other conflicting beliefs in society. Everything is now questionable and religious beliefs that were once held with the highest esteem and now placed on the same level as variant beliefs. They are unbearable and seen as unpleasing to the majority in society. It was typical for religious sets to claim moral pre-eminence as a result of their own beliefs, but now such entitlements are intolerable to uphold (Wallis & Bruce, 1992)

Science: freethinking and the rise in pure science have been one of the chief challenges to religion and religious values (Wallis & Bruce, 1992). However, they later postulates that, some scientists and scientific foundations have been religious. For example, Egyptian astrologers, Pythagoras who were maths geniuses and mystics, and Mendel the father of genetics who was a monk. But in contemporary society, science has proved to be a noxious desolation of monotheistic religions and their religious values. Some of the basic scientific information that has been a thorn in the side of religion include; the theory of evolution, geology, big bang theory that explains the origin of the earth, natural cause, and effect among others. It seems that as science advances, the assumed power of the Supreme Being reduces, to an extent that God only becomes 'God of the gaps". "…As human knowledge increases, the roles of gods seem to decrease" (Davies & Davies, 1984, pg. 256). This has resulted in science replacing religion hence religion losing public confidence and reliability. With religious beliefs going down, scientific beliefs and principles continue to thrive and God has

become much more abstract in comparison to the ancient era. Einstein et al. (1954) stated that scientific research can reduce fantasy and this can include religious beliefs, by inspiring people to reason and interpret things in terms of cause and effect. The contemporary culture has also lost religious beliefs since contemporary science conclusions have been held in high esteem and on many occasions have offered an intimidating light on many entrenched religious beliefs (Davies & Davies, 1984).

Intelligence and education: The historic conflicts between religious foundations and science indicate that there is something wrong with the religious approach to the phenomena. This has extended to a negative consequence on the individual intelligence of believers, and a correlated undesirable consequence on educational attainments. It is reported that none of the several Nobel Prize winners were scientists who were not Christians. It can be concluded that intelligence and education are inversely associated with religion. Larson and Witham (1999) states that more you know about religion itself, the less likely you are to be religious.

The internet: The Internet destabilizes religion and religious beliefs in numerous ways. It challenges religious values through revelation to various opposing and conflicting claims, granting ready access to opposing ideas and destroying the influence of good role models in society.

## REGAINING THE RELIGIOUS VALUES AND RESOURCES FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Most religious customs treasure moral principles such as love, impartiality, the sacredness of anthropological life, parity, and anthropological self-esteem. Most religions found in Kenya have also a belief in God to whom all beings are answerable. For example, in African indigenous cultures, most leaders were both religious leaders and political leaders. The signs of justice were cherished and credence in reinstating justice was essentially and very strong (Agi, 2008). This encouraged the well-being of African civilizations. Though African traditional religion seems to be dying off, the reality is that those people who convert to Christianity, Islam, and other major

religions in Kenya, essentially continue to respect and adhere to these traditions. This can be observed among Christians who respect paying of dowery before marriage, place of burial and building of homes among the Luo community. African traditional Religion still is likely to impact social, political, and economic progressions in Kenya. Religious positive impact can alleviate corruption and poverty and hence may assist in the economic and political transformation of the country. For this to happen in Kenya, the religious leaders and adherents must purposely return to the ideals of their much-unforgettable genuine religiosity. This is vital, as genuine religious ideals are an imperative source for religious societies in their expedition for social, political, and economic development in the county.

Regarding Christian religious values, it is detected that the test of African Christianity may be observed in terms of the correlation between an individual's Christian moral life and practice. It is a reality that there is a dichotomy between Christian life and his/her moral practice, a debate on morality touches all the religions in Kenya since ethics, morality, and practice ought to be intimately connected in religious practice. Kunhiyop blames the missionaries for this dichotomy between spirituality, morality, and practice. He argued that it was because the Christian message that was passed to the Africans was enveloped in a principle that was strange to Africans; the messenger treated both the message and the culture as one thing Kunhiyop (2008). For this reason, the African mind was supplanted with a western mindset which inculcated in the African mind unfamiliar values such as compartmentalization of life and emphasizes individualism in total neglect of the society. Kunhiyop (2008) upholds that it in this unpleasant status quo, on African Christians, leaving them with a moral attitude that is neither rooted in their traditional religion nor Christian morality. Christianity even made African to lose some essential practises like medicine, care of the sick and expectant women. He suggests that to recover African moral sanity, there is an imperative need to regain and reinstate some constructive moral nitty-gritty and principles which were the moral basis of African civilizations. This moral nitty-gritty and principles, renovated through thoughtful interface with the word of God and enculturated into African

Christianity, will save and reinforce the moral bearing of the Christian society and hence the country since a higher percentage of the Kenyan population is Christian adherents.

As a resolution to the African Christian moral predicament which gives incentive to corruption, poverty, and ethnic profiling, African Christians in particular Kenyan Christians and other religious groups in Kenya such as Islam, should holistically approach life, living with a concern for one another, recollecting the key impressions of disgrace and honour. African places of worship should also formulate theological and hermeneutical models that can be contextualized, and that support religious contextualized relevant religious study (Kunhiyop, 2008). This approach of contextualizing Christianity to be relevant to the African person is also applicable to other religions. The religious teachings should speak to the person in a language he/she understands better for it to have an impact on human life.

Kukah (1996) postulates that for religious cultures and their evangelizers to be capable of regaining their doctrinal superiority, they should unshackle themselves from the strongholds of regional loyalty, denominational superiority war, or doctrinal clatters, historical hatreds, uncertainties, ethnicity, and cultural biases. For example, in Kenya, religious groups and leaders are becoming more and more involved in the struggle for party-political power, societal standing, and other societal recompenses that culture can offer (Agi, 2008). Such attitudes are unbecoming in the life of religious leaders. Religious believers should therefore abstain from these discreditable acts, to execute their prophetic voice and role as the upholder of morals in the community.

The significance of religion in transforming society entails the element that religion is the basis from which the diverse divisions of life shoot and nurture and by which they are incessantly fostered. Religion concerns the earnest basis of anthropological survival and takes part of human life into comprehensible completeness (Schuurman, 2011). For this reason, religion significantly sustains the life of the community to its positive fullness.

Religion is about moral principles and virtue. These principles entail peace and love, the inviolability of human life, parity, self-esteem, impartiality in judgment, and communal concurrence. It is when religious groups regain and live in the mindfulness of these fundamental principles of religion, that religion can involve all its resources for a socially, politically, and economically transformed Kenya. Various religious adherents together with their leaders have a faithful and genuine religious obligation to engross with the standards and resources of religion through communalism. The community moral approach would positively transform society. The religious leaders should rediscover their prophetic voice and re-establish being the conscience of the society rather than be power brokers and '*tumbocrats' or* having '*table manners*', not talking when benefiting from those in political positions. Religious clusters must therefore propagate a philosophy of self-criticism and uphold a critical bearing on Kenyan economic, communal, and political foundations. Maluleke (2010) for example, used an example of the establishment of the South African Christian community, to engage the political leaders, on the foundation of the idea of "critical solidarity with the state", to contend that the church tainted her image in society by going on board on such an undertaking.

The church should be in solidarity with only the poor and the oppressed since the unity of the church and the state tolerates the evils of the state. Maluleke's key opinion ought to be taken utterly by African religious leaders, as most religious leaders and organizations in Kenya are habitually interested to turn out to be subject to political manipulation in African the social order.

The bearing of self-criticism and implementation of a critical disposition should also be in religious institutions and individuals. The religious section ought to be critical of the religious leaders' lifestyles and communal impresarios. A situation that has religious leaders living lavishly whereas most of their adherents are living in destitution is conflicting with the predictable bearing of the religious community, which should be sensitive and in commonality with the less fortunate and marginalized in the community. When religious leaders become conscious of their undesirable behaviour, they can relinquish the lavishness and ravenousness of commercial impresarios and

politicians who play such decisive roles in the impoverishment of Africans and African nations.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Religion is about moral principles. For this reason, religious sectors ought to be critical of the religious leaders, lifestyle, and communal impresarios. Religion and religious doctrines and practices are challenged by secularism, modernism, Compartmentalism, and science among others. Religion, therefore, should regain its principle's role and become the conscience of the society to transform the country.

The paper recommends the following:

- Religious leaders should rediscover their prophetic voice and re-establish being conscience of the society.

- The church should be in solidarity with only the poor and the oppressed since their unity with the state tolerates the evils of the state.

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