

Role of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church (PAG) in the Development of Education in Nyamira County, Kenya

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Abstract: This study is focused on the factors leading the PAG Church perform poorly in the development of education as compared to other Church denominations in the County. The research objectives were: to find out how the church has involved itself in socio-economic activities, factors for its minimal performance in the development of education and, how its teachings and beliefs have impacted on education development. The study was justified by the fact that the (PAG) church has been in the county long enough a period spanning almost a century just like the other denominations such as SDA, Roman Catholic and Lutheran, but there has not been any study done to find out the factors to that effect. The researcher used the theory of liberation/ salvation as expounded by Mugambi (1990) as a guide to this study. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used for data analysis. The target population of 115 respondents was selected to participate in this study. The result showed that PAG has performed minimally on development of education as well as socio economic activities in the Nyamira County.

Keywords: Pentecostal Assemblies, Development, Education, Social transformation, Salvation, Liberation, Neo-Pentecostalism, Sponsor.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents research findings carried out recently in Nyamira County-Kenya based on the role of the PAG church in the development of education compared to other major denominations such as Roman Catholic, SDA and Lutheran churches in the county.

Background to the study:

The P.A.G church has been in Nyamira for over a century and it is widely spread in the county. When compared with other denomination it is found that it has displayed a minimal performance in the development of education and other socio- economic activity

Statement of the problem:

In spite of the fact that the PAG Church has been in Nyamira for over a century evidence available shows that it has participated less in development of education compared to other denomination which have been there the same period namely: the Seventh Adventist Church, the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church. However there is no systematic study and documentation that has been done to explain this situation .so this paper is paste on the resent study in Nyamira County to fill this gap in knowledge

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a number of study about this subject under study for example, Bunnett (1960) Kavaya (2003), Mugambi (2009) and Parsitau (2013) have given an account of the origin of the PAG church missionary group as it spread from Akansas USA to Kenya .The Pentecostal Missionaries arrived in western Kenya as early as 1909 and settled in Nyang'ori establishing a mission station there . Wamugunda (2011) points out that the church should be present in the educational institution with an active role to teach and free people from ignorance to pave way for transformation of the societies. NCKK (1999) paper has also noted that the church has played a vital role in promotion of education by creating awareness on the importance of education as a liberating agent, although Keere (1999) observes that some independent churches which have sprung up from mainstream missionaries but don't prioritize development agenda.

Lamellas (1996), Burgman (1990), Baur (1990), Kobia (1986) observed that the church missionaries focused on establishment of three institutions; education, health and churches wherever they settled. On the same Gitari (1986) points out that WCC was formed in 1948 to spearhead development. Namwera (1990) points out that the church should be motivated if it meets the needs of the society it serves, whereas Njue (2008) observed that the church must re-examine its role in provision of quality education in educational institutions for ensuring holistic transformation in the society. Banstain (2008) points out that Pentecostals in South Africa have largely depended on spiritual empowerment where salvation regulates development rather than education. On the contrary Parsitau (2013) observed that despite their origin the CITAM, NPC, MMC and JIAM ministries have had a different approach on development issues though they sprung from PAG church. They have a positive approach on socio-economic and education development unlike the classical Pentecostals which have negative perspective to physical development. Mbiti (1975) observed that while the missionaries had a great impact on Africans' lives through their teaching; ideals, schools and hospitals, some of them had teaching that caused some societies they served lag behind others through their teachings and beliefs.

On the same Mugambi (1990) observed that the Christian missionaries focused salvation as their main objective in evangelism. He however, argues that there cannot be spiritual liberation when the physical liberation is assumed. Liberation is all about equality and salvation is all about spiritual hence one concept cannot do without the other. The study is revealing that PAG Church is over spiritualizing almost everything and not keen to address the physical e.g education which is an urgent of liberating people from poverty, ignorance, disease and operation of any type. Tadaro (2003) points out that the church should try to raise people's self esteem and increasing freedom (liberation) to enhance the range of their choice to realize transformation and development. On the other hand Samuel (1999) observes that the church has to bring transformation in terms actualizing God's vision in societies in all aspects, social, economic and spiritual. The reviewed literature confirmed there is apparent gap of knowledge that deserved filling: factors for PAG's minimal participation in development of education in Nyamira County has not been studied.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by the theory of liberation/salvation as proposed by Mugambi (1990). The theory operates on the premise that the church in Africa should address liberation from a practical perspective a long with the gospel of salvation. In his argument the Christian church that preaches salvation of the soul and deliberately ignores the physical aspect of those that the preaching is directed to is irrelevant and worst useless. The reality here is that the church should not only be pre-occupied with spirituality and sideline the physical aspect of life.

The church should not fail to address the physical suffering of those to who the preaching is directed. Oppressive situations that surround the people need to be addressed in the effort to those challenges to pave way for holistic salvation. The challenges include, poverty, famine, disease, ignorance, political oppressions the list is endless. The ministry of Jesus was not only spiritual but also educative and a liberative. Since education plays a key role to alleviate ignorance it has close connection with the concept liberation. For any society to be transformed evangelism, education and liberation should be approached from a practical perspective. This paper used this theory from the understanding that the PAG church in Nyamira County sidelined developments of education perceiving it as a world endeavor and for that matter sidelined it in its efforts to evangelize the County.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study used questionnaires, unstructured interviews, Focused Group Discussion (FGD) to collect data from 115 respondents who were selected to participate in the study. The collected data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative data analysis to summarize the data in order to draw valid conclusion in relation to the objectives of the study.

5. THE STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Minimal Participation in Development of Education in Nyamira County:

1. Church Doctrines:

The Pentecostal Assemblies of God PAG church is founded on the doctrine of infilling of the holy spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). Kavaya (2003) has observed that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in 1927 in Kaimosi and Nyang'ori regions of Western Kenya led many spirit filled people to abandon their normal routines for the sake of witnessing from one place to another with a hope that the experience they had had was a signal to the end of the present world and so discouraged engagement in development was not necessary. It is on this basis that many PAG early converts abandoned schools and went to evangelize, while others proceeded to Bible College to train as pastors. Putting up of institutions such as schools, health facilities and involvement in other socio-economic activities were irrelevant to them. Parsitau (2013) has observed that the issue of theological training has generated tension in Kenya because of doctrinal basis that underline the theological teaching. Pastors originate from the same training but in the field they teach and preach the theology in their own understanding with a claim of the guidance of the Holy Spirit by revelation. Hence they spread un-uniform understanding among believers of the same doctrine causing confusion among believers.

Adeboye, (2003) has also observed that, while some Pentecostal preachers may be educated some of them lack professionalism and claim to have divine call in a form of a dream, vision and prophesy. They claim that, being spirit filled is more important than the formal training that they attained hence contribute to confusion among followers. Parsitau (2013) observes that those Pentecostal preachers without theological formal training lack, history, philosophy, theology and culture, that most ecumenist find useful. On the same, she has observed that Neo-Pentecostal leaders criticize theologically trained pastors as cold and lack spiritual anointing. In matters of theological doctrine these preachers are the same except that the Neo-Pentecostal leaders are younger than those of 1980s and they attract all classes of people. This paper, argues that the doctrine of the PAG church though based on the infilling of Holy Spirit does not lead people to see need of participation in vital activities such as education, medical, economic empowerment in the contemporary society.

2. Teachings and beliefs:

The teachings that were given to the followers disvalued education to a level that its vital role had no place in the PAG faithfuls. It was perceived as worldly. These teachings include the understanding of the infilling of the Holy Spirit and His relevant gifts; speaking in tongues, prophesy, evangelism, teaching, miracles works and healing (1 Cor 9:1-). The other teachings include; eschatology (last events) dominated by sudden return of Christ the second time and rupture of saints before millennium era. Many young converts Christ Ambassadors (CA) abandoned schools, jobs and routine work for the sake of evangelism. They considered the world as sinful and unworthy for development as it was among to a sudden end.

Mwaura (2005) the spirit filled (saved), sanctified themselves by holding prolonged prayers throughout and abandoned even their daily activities going round preaching and witnessing. They regarded themselves worthless in order to be like Christ in character, attitude and speech in order to guard for their salvation on this basis putting up of schools was irrelevant. The paper argues that the church teachings are divine and offer divine message of liberation to the believers but not to captivate them. While the teachings and beliefs held the PAG saved believers spiritual captives by denouncing the physical world in which they live and ignoring to find ways of addressing the challenges they face. This paper argues PAG church that the teachings and beliefs should be adjusted to create relevance of the spiritual reality with the present dynamic society where God is continually revealing his knowledge through man as his co-creator for the sake of man for man (Gen 3:1-). On the basis of this argument education and technology have been used to avail God's knowledge to mankind as an eye opener of societies understanding about God and his work among the people on earth.

3. Level of education of PAG church leaders:

Many of the early church leaders did not take education serious as they lacked schools that favored their spiritual understanding as desired their doctrine at conversion. They claimed forced by the spiritual influence to abandon education at low levels and went for evangelism or Bible College to train as pastors since their level of education qualified them for admission at bible college provided they professed as spirit filled which was paramount for admission. Some of these leaders with low levels of education automatically saw no need for emphasizing education development among believers as it was taken literally as earthly endeavor and unnecessary for Christian life.

Parsitau (2013) observes that Neo- Pentecostals highly educated leaders encourage active participation of its members in education, socio-economic involvement in the civil society contrary to classical Pentecostal churches where PAG is one of them with low educated leaders. This paper therefore argues that since leadership is the core element in social transformation in any society. Leaders should value and strive to attain more knowledge in order to lead the society to higher levels of development by example. The PAG church leaders should seek to know the will of God in the society they lead and strive to attain high levels of knowledge so that they lead their congregation to focus development in social matters more so in education in the society the church is serving.

4. PAG Church leadership:

PAG church leadership appears to have little concern on how development of education in Nyamira County the leadership does not access how far they have achieved educational objectives. Furthermore the leadership has not clearly shown the church vision, mission for education for its membership which is necessary for strategic leadership. The argument here is that since leaders are the vision bearers in any society should formulate in their leadership, strategies to achieve their vision in the society they serve. Parsitau (2013) observes that leadership in the Neo-Pentecostal churches have played a key role in focusing their adherents to spiritual matters and encouraged them to engage in economic activities and education as ways of addressing physical challenges they undergo here on earth unlike classical Pentecostal. Human resource development Canada (2000) observes that effective leadership requires qualities of communication, analysis, judgment, coaching, trust building and team work. This observation show how vital leadership is in focusing any society. The paper argues that PAG leadership should take total responsibility to focus its adherence to view education as an a liberating agent in the society and so lead it to strive for it.

5. Less emphasis on economic empowerment of its people:

The scriptures that were the basis of the Pentecostal understanding were based on end time and staying away from the world riches claiming it as evil. (Luke 18:18-29, Mathew 19:16-30, Mark 7:31) Jesus is taken literally as if he condemned riches and therefore not in favor of economic material stability. The understanding of what Jesus meant actually lingered around the way riches were used in social setting but not getting rich. This literal understanding led PAG believers to be discouraged in engaging in economic activities such as farming, business, education, employment in public and private sectors since they preserved it as worldly. Converts withdrawal from such activities were evident during the field study. Many of the Pentecostal believers preferred working on voluntary basis in spreading the gospel. Anderson (1977), and Burnett (1960) Pentecostal missionaries came on self sponsorship.

Mugambi (2009), Parsitau (2013) have observed that Neo Pentecostals have given the economic focus quite a different approach away from classical Pentecostals. They have encouraged entrepreneurship and business development to address the socio-economic needs of the followers. Leaders lead by example inspiring their members to follow suit. Parsitau has cited Wanjiru's ministry in Kenya having programs for economic empowerment in her church following themes of kingdom economics, grow and serve the Lord with your money. She gives seminars using experts to import relevant knowledge to the followers, contrary to the focus the classical Pentecostals have given economic approach. It is from this basis that the researcher argues that PAG church leadership should focus economic growth for without which development of any type will not take place.

6. Scriptural interpretation (Hermeneutics):

This is the backbone of Pentecostal Evangelism movements. How Pentecostals read, the scriptures how they interpreted the scriptures that under lie the Pentecostal theology to expound the Pentecostal doctrines mattered a lot on response to physical and spiritual development. Being a spiritual based church, Pentecostals claimed liberty of interpretation of the scriptures on own understanding and claim it as spiritual revelation. Hence, many biblical verses were literally focusing

their practical perception in matters of development and education. (Daniel 2:6). Interpreted the phrase as “*last days*” is taken literally and therefore perceived as if there was no need for striving for knowledge since it was taken to be last days. It was perceived as if no time was left to pursue knowledge or any development as the end was just about. (Rev 22-) *look I come; soon; soon* is taken literary to mean very short time. How *soon* used here needed more revelation in order to come to the right understanding of what Jesus meant as he was addressing the persecuted John at island of Patimos. This was literally interpreted by Pentecostal believers that there was no time was left for any earthly involvement hence education development. This is the basic teachings maintained in the Pentecostal Bible College to instill and teach Pentecostalism to the believers.

Parsitau (2013) has observed that Neo-Pentecostals have countered classical Pentecostals in matters of approach to the social world through their biblical interpretation. It is an undisputable fact that such liberty to interpret the bible verses may be used dynamically as a tool to destroy or build the society since the interpreter may be dynamic in nature (preacher), using undynammic tool (the word). This paper argues that the PAG church should use the bible verses to liberate its followers. Otherwise may in the final analysis create confusion and mislead the whole society served by the church.

7. The PAG Missionaries:

In Nyamira County the missionaries however did not start many educational development project except one secondary school (Manga Girls) build in 1974 Nyamira-Kenya. Education agenda did not feature despite the notorious notion that education was a missionary activity. At this point education development came into dilemma when the pioneer missionaries left. Leadership was handed over to African pastors to co-ordinate evangelism and education without a clear vision. This affected education most since most of the African leaders did not value education from the evangelism point of view and there were no grants to run educational activities in the area. This paper argues that the notorious African notion that education was missionary drastically affected education development in all aspects since the Pentecostal believers withdrawal was almost instant. The African leadership (PAG) did not see the deeper value of education in the society they were serving and therefore they did not give education priority hence it was sidelined by evangelism leading the church to participate minimally in education development.

8. Influence of PAG Teachings and beliefs:

(a) The concept of salvation:

Salvation as understood from the Pentecostal perspective was taken as being set free from the earthly things which were taken to hinder believers from entering the kingdom of heaven. The spirit filled PAG believed that since they were saved they had nothing to do with this sinful world. This kind of understanding led many to live a life of social dissociation with others who had not reached the same understanding leave a lone family members or at worst couples. Many of the school pupils and teachers who came to this kind of understanding were not easy to go with. This caused them to abandon schools to go out witnessing for Christ as they claimed to be led and dictated by the Holy Spirit. This paper argues that salvation as a concept is spiritual and should not be mistaken to captivate the believers to sideline physical liberation which is paramount in the teaching of Jesus (Luke 4:18-) *I have come to set the captives free*. Adayemo (1979) observes that salvation today is understood as setting people free from economic political and social bondage.

(b) Eschatology, (last events):

Education being an ongoing, long term process yet the bible (Revelation 22:1-) Jesus promises that “*I am coming soon*” Revelation 9:11-20 is understood literally that Christ was to come and establish his kingdom different from this earth very soon there was no need to develop or pursue things of his present world that was kept for sudden destruction. The most scaring event was the concept of rapture-sudden disappearance of the saints. This concept kept the PAG believers alert and in prayer awaiting the sudden return of Christ in (this age) this understanding discouraged many believers from engaging in development including pursuing education or putting up education related institutions. This influence created negative impact to education development contrary to Todaro (2003) who has argued that development is aimed at improving quality of human life and raising peoples self esteem and increasing their freedom (liberation) to enhance range of choice. The argument here is that not only does education help to transform the society but also opens up the mind in order to understand the bible in the right way as it is put into practical application in the present dynamic human society using the prophecy and bible teachings.

(c) Beliefs of the Church in Relation to Education Development:

This paper argues that the beliefs of the PAG church strongly affected development and further affected education development. These beliefs included in the PAG church doctrines teaching and leadership took a leading role in determining the focus that the PAG church gave education development. Followers believed that their doctrine contained the final message to the people prior to the end of the world. The teachings offered captivated the believers' mind to trust and follow their spiritual leaders. They nearly understood that leadership and leaders were next to God and so what they tell them was spiritual and Godly even if it was affecting the present life.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion the PAG church has participated minimally in the development of education and social-activities in Nyamira County due to, church doctrines, teachings held by the church, level of education of church leaders, church leadership, church economic focus, scriptural interpretation and PAG church missionaries, further the concept of salvation, eschatology and church beliefs have influenced the church to focus on education negatively hence causing it to participate minimally. The church has put emphasis on salvation (spiritual) and has sidelined material liberation which is essential in the physical reality. The paper proposes a review of the PAG church doctrine and its teachings in relation to their implication in the contemporary society in order to be involved in transformation of the society the church is serving.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends that due to the changing society the PAG Church should re-assess its place in development of education. It should seek to increase its participation in the development of educational institution, involvement in socio-economic activities as it carries out its role in the society. The PAG Church should address in equal terms the physical and spiritual liberation to its membership.

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