

THEO-POLITICAL DOMINANCE OF AFRO-PENTECOSTALISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY: LESSONS FROM THE KENYAN SOCIO-ECCLESIAL CONTEXT

Julius Gathogo*

The article seeks to build the case for the rise of afro-Pentecostalism, as the dominant ecclesiastical paradigm in the Kenya of the 21st century; which has now surpassed the traditional ecclesiological axis (refer to Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterian and other mainline churches). Their social influence can no longer be underestimated as they have also abandoned their traditional exclusivist approach to inclusive and holistic approaches in dispensing their spirituality discourses. Following Kenya's independence from the British, in 1963, the mission churches continued with their holistic and socially influential ministries to the last half of the 20th century. In the twenty-first century however, the article argues, Pentecostalism, which has repackaged itself as the "real" guardians of the African heritage and spirituality has however taken over some of the critical socio-political roles previously dominated by some of the mainline churches. In its methodology, the article surveys the changing patterns of Pentecostalism wherein its ability to capture African ethos of wholeness where religion provides solution to every life problem, such as disunity, health and economy among others—is now manifest. Does afro-Pentecostalism have any relevance in the post August 2010 Kenyan national referendum which ushered in a new socio-political dynamics following the promulgation of the new constitution? Addressing cutting-edge issues facing the African society, without necessarily losing their gospel constituency makes the emerging Christianities become afro-Pentecostalism. The article covers a wide range of issues, scholarly literature and reports (including newspaper articles and blogs etc.), and other background materials. Formal methods employed focused on short surveys and semi-structured interviews; informal observations and meetings that complemented these methods.

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* Julius Gathogo, Dr., Senior lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, of Kenyatta University, Kenya. Research fields: New Religious Movements, Political Theology, Religion and Social Discourses, Key Contributors in Religious Histories; and Religion and Its Contribution to the Modern Society.

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INTRODUCTION

In this article, the phrases “emerging Christianities” and “Afro-Pentecostalism” are treated as synonymous terms. They refer to the brand of Christianity that goes beyond the traditional understanding of Pentecostal model—a phenomenon where Pentecostalism incorporates some elements of African culture that are compatible with the gospel of Christ. Though not openly or consciously proclaimed, afro-Pentecostalism incorporates African models of concern for the “other”, caring, listening, and general hospitality. It finds itself at home with African idioms, proverbs, riddles, rhythms and metaphors among other enriching elements of African culture. Despite failure to confess this, their headship represents the true face of African leadership as they clearly capture African ethos of wholeness. Indeed, a leader attempts to address all problems facing the society holistically. For example, sickness is not only physical but spiritual. Other challenges may include barrenness, witchcraft, inter-clan or/and inter-ethnic rivalries and so forth. In blending African ethos of wholeness with Pentecostal experience, as seen in Acts 2, the emerging Christianity in the 21st century Africa can therefore be described as afro-Pentecostalism. It is also referred to as “emerging African Christianities” due to the plural nature of the African society.¹

As will be noted, emerging African Christianities, otherwise called afro-Pentecostalism, in Kenya as in other parts of the tropical Africa, are characterised by an emphasis on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for salvation, speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*), miracle working, witnessing, spontaneous singing and prayer, discerning and healing which extends to HIV and AIDS, and more importantly prophesying. What is critically unique is the emergency of youthful, conspicuous and charismatic leadership which almost equates church leaders to new messiahs or new liberators. A case in point is the self-proclaimed “prophet” and televangelist, Joseph Mukungubila Mutombo (1947 -),² DR Congo. Despite being branded a terrorist leader by Joseph Kabila’s government for his military

¹ See also Julius Gathogo, *The Challenge of Money and Wealth in Some East African Pentecostal Churches*, 37 (2) *STUDIA HISTORIAE ECCLESIASTICAE* 133-151 (September 2011).

² Pastor Joseph Mukungubila Mutombo is one of the candidates who challenged Joseph Kabila during the 2006 presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Mukungubila’s spiritual date of birth is said to be 1959—a year before Congolese independence—in a “rebirth” obviously timed to enhance his messianic and nationalistic appeal. “God and patriotism” appear to be Mukungubila’s twin populist themes in a vast, weak nation that has been open to manipulation by smaller, stronger neighboring states since the 1997 ouster of longtime Congolese autocrat Mobutu Sese Seko.

offensives against the “evil government forces”, faithful of his *Ministry of Restoration from Black Africa* (MORFBA) regard him as God’s “last envoy to humanity after Jesus Christ and Paul of Tarsus”.³ His military offensives against the duly elected government of Joseph Kabila is out of the perception that Kabila has strayed from the ways of God by being close to the “evil and meddlesome Rwanda” who subtly wants to auction DRC; and that it is ungodly to have a foreigner ruling DRC. Referring to claims by Kabila’s foes that he is Rwandan, the “prophet” says, “It is unacceptable that a foreigner should be the head of state. This is unacceptable.”⁴ The former soldier-turned Congolese presidential candidate-turned-televangelist-turned-prophet, Mukungubila Mutombo, thus approaches his theological discourses by not just appealing to the unrealized eschatology. Like other afro-Pentecostals, he also puts much emphasis on realized eschatology—a phenomenon that religion pragmatically addresses contemporary issues facing the society, as in the case African religious heritage.

In Nigeria, Prophet TB Joshua of the *Synagogue Church of All Nations* (SCOAN) International has also played a prominent role in afro-Pentecostalism. SCOAN has three pillars: healing, prophesy and deliverance. Based in Nigeria but with branches in Greece, the United Kingdom and Ghana, the church is said to have millions of members. From the eye-witness account, when he visits a country for a crusade, at least tens of thousands of people turn up. When he raises his hand during a sermon, some people fall down.⁵ Arguably, he is in that league of religious leaders in Africa who have somehow managed to mix their religious work with politics. Of interest to note is that afro-Pentecostal leadership does not appear to avoid the press and its resultant coverage. Prophet Joshua in particular has constantly received African leaders such as the former Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, Morgan Tsvangirai, and the immediate former Malawian President, Joyce Banda (who lost presidential elections in May 2014 elections to wa Mutharika’s brother, Peter), among others, who come for socio-spiritual guidance from time to time. Prophet TB Joshua came into the limelight after predicting the death of President Bingu wa Mutharika

³ See Peter Oduor, *A Clever Mix of Religion and Politics*, DAILY NATION. Available at <http://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/DN2/A-clever-mix-of-religion-and-politics/-/957860/2158356/-/5pgltd/-/index.html> (last visited May 16, 2014).

⁴ See Peter Oduor, *A Clever Mix of Religion and Politics*, DAILY NATION. Available at <http://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/DN2/A-clever-mix-of-religion-and-politics/-/957860/2158356/-/5pgltd/-/index.html> (last visited May 16, 2014).

⁵ See Peter Oduor, *A Clever Mix of Religion and Politics*, DAILY NATION. Available at <http://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/DN2/A-clever-mix-of-religion-and-politics/-/957860/2158356/-/5pgltd/-/index.html> (last visited May 16, 2014).

(1934-2012) who died of a heart attack in Lilongwe, Malawi, on April 5, 2012.⁶ Clad in a black suit, red tie and white pocket square, he histrionically conducts his vivacious television sermons where at some point he will loosely close his eyes slightly, stretch out his right hand towards the congregation and camera for those watching at home and say: “Distance is not a barrier. I can see you being saved, healed and delivered in Jesus name.”⁷

A critical characteristic that defines the emerging African Christianities in Kenya is the uniqueness of the names of their religious outfits. Interestingly, their choice of names is done with intent to pointing out their respective key missions. Such names include: *Kisima cha Neema* (the Well of God’s grace) Church, *Jesus Is Alive Ministries* (JIAM-Nairobi), *Jesus Celebration Centre* (JCC), *Neno* (word of God) *Evangelism Ministries* (NEM), *Deliverance Church of Kenya* (DCK), *The Happy Churches* (THP), *Repentance and Holiness Ministries* (RHM), *Faith Evangelistic Ministries* (FEM), *Jubilee Christian Centre* (JCC) and *Christ is the Answer Ministries* (CITAM), and the *Winners Chapel International Ministries*, among others. Their ministries are generally televised, put in CDs, VCDs, DVDs, YouTube, and websites opened for it. During the Sunday services, the use of projector screens and powerful public address systems is a common occurrence. Hence, the use of science and technology is given prominence.

Roy Wallis’s typology classifies new religious movements (NRMs) in general into three categories: a) world-denying or world-rejecting; b) world-indifferent, and c) world-affirming.⁸ In the Kenyans case, afro-Pentecostalism, as the emerging theological trajectory is a blending of all the three categories. Indeed, some can be categorised as world rejecting as they tend to denounce the hypocrisy of modern people including church leaders. Some also portrays word-indifference particularly when they insist on “not following the crowd” but curving their own refined ways. To a large extent, most of the emerging Christianities are characteristically world-affirming types as they respond well to the contemporary challenges in modern Kenya and in the long run seek to be world-transforming.

As will be demonstrated, the nature of activities, its fast spread, and the zealousness with which is being received and its ready acceptance by the masses of people in the 21st century Africa shows that afro-Pentecostal

⁶ Raphael Tenthani (10 August 2007), *Profile: Bingu wa Mutharika*, *BBC News* (last visited April 26, 2010).

⁷ See Peter Oduor, *A Clever Mix of Religion and Politics*, DAILY NATION. Available at <http://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/DN2/A-clever-mix-of-religion-and-politics/-/957860/2158356/-/5pgltd/-/index.html> (last visited May 16, 2014).

⁸ ROY WALLIS, *THE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF THE NEW RELIGIOUS LIFE* (Taylor & Francis 1984).

paradigm cannot be gainsaid.

I. JUSTIFICATION

A study of shifts of ecclesiastical paradigms is essential particularly after considering the critical mass that the church commands. Second, the 2005 Gallup International (an association of research institutions) research in African religious consciousness where three quarters of those polled across the continent said they trusted religious leaders more than the political leadership and institutions of governance⁹ drives us to agree with Paul Tillich that religion is our ultimate concern. Nothing is more ultimate.¹⁰ In Nigeria, for instance, the figure was 85%, with respondents saying that they were willing to give religious leaders more power.¹¹ Paul Knitter has noted that nothing comes before people's religious identity and convictions: "If this identity is threatened, everything must be sacrificed or ventured in order to preserve it."¹²

Indeed, the significance of religion in the African society, for example, should not be downplayed, especially when we consider that there are resilient values and changing practices in the African heritage—a fact that is seen clearly when we consider that culture is never static. Religion is indeed vital for humanity. It comes first in real life situations. Again, as Hans Küng has written: "No world peace without peace between the religions. No peace between the religions without dialogue between the religions."¹³ Furthermore, "We need a more intensive philosophical and theological dialogue of theologians and specialists in religion which takes religious plurality seriously in theological terms, accepts the challenge of the other religions, and investigates their significance for each person's own religion."¹⁴ A study on afro-Pentecostalism is a big step forward towards a religious dialogue.

⁹ See Peter Oduor, *A Clever Mix of Religion and Politics*, DAILY NATION. Available at <http://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/DN2/A-clever-mix-of-religion-and-politics/-/957860/2158356/-/5pgltd/-/index.html> (last visited May 16, 2014).

¹⁰ Quoted in Paul F. Knitter, *Religion, Power, Dialogue*, 93 (1) SWEDISH MISSIOLOGICAL THEMES 30 (2005).

¹¹ See Peter Oduor, *A Clever Mix of Religion and Politics*, DAILY NATION. Available at <http://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/DN2/A-clever-mix-of-religion-and-politics/-/957860/2158356/-/5pgltd/-/index.html> (last visited May 16, 2014).

¹² Paul F. Knitter, *Religion, Power, Dialogue*, 93 (1) SWEDISH MISSIOLOGICAL THEMES 30 (2005).

¹³ HANS KÜNG, GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY: IN SEARCH OF A NEW WORLD ETHIC xv (John Bowden trans., New York: Crossroad 1991 [orig.: PROJEKT WELTETHOS (Munich: Piper, 1990)]); cf. LAURENTI MAGESA, AFRICAN RELIGION: THE MORAL TRADITIONS OF ABUNDANT LIFE 4–5 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

¹⁴ KÜNG, GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY 138.

II. AFRO-PENTECOSTALISM VIS-À-VIS OTHER ECCLESIASTICAL STRUCTURES

Afro-Pentecostalism compares well with the five ecclesiastical structures that emerged after the 16th century reformation in Europe. Among these structures are: the Episcopal model where power and authority are vested in the bishop; the Presbyterian model which is based on references in the New Testament to the elders who provided guidance and leadership in the apostolic Christian communities; the Congregational model where power and authority are vested in the entire congregation; the Pentecostal model where emphasis is on possession by the Holy Spirit, particularly as evidenced by speaking in tongues, rather than to individuals and councils; and the Charismatic model where the emphasis is on charismatic gifts (1 Cor. 12:1ff) such as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues and so forth.¹⁵ Of course there is a very thin line between the latter two.

During the struggle for the second liberation in the 1980s and early 90s, Kenya was used to stinging remarks against the government of the day and the so-called controversial sermons from the likes of the Anglican Bishops such as Alexander Muge,¹⁶ Henry Okullu, David Gitari and Archbishop Manases Kuria; Catholic leaders such as Archbishop John Njue, and Archbishop Raphael Mwana'a Nzeki; the Methodist church leaders such as Bishop Prof. Zablon Nthamburi and Rev. Dr. Julius Kobia; plus Presbyterian church cleric Rev. Dr. Timothy Njoya. But when afro-Pentecostal leadership teamed up with the opposition leaders against the government-driven constitution during the 2005 Kenyan referendum, the ecclesiastical dominance of the afro-Pentecostals began to be noticed. In the 2005 Kenya's national referendum, the government was floored by a combination of church and opposition (43% versus 57%).

This was followed by the indulgence of afro-Pentecostal leaders into elective politics, two years later, a phenomenon that caught Kenyans by surprise. In particular, Bishop Pius Muiro, one of the leading afro-Pentecostal leaders, made an announcement in Nairobi on Wednesday, the January 17th, 2007, that he too wanted to be not only the member of parliament (MP) for Kamukunji (in the capital city of Nairobi), but more importantly as the president of Kenya, thereby replacing Hon. Mwai Kibaki.

¹⁵ See JESSE MUGAMBI, *LIBERATION TO RECONSTRUCTION: AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AFTER THE COLD WAR* 115-121 (Nairobi: EAEP, 1995).

¹⁶ The vocal Bishop Muge was later killed, in early 1990, in a mysterious road accident, which was blamed on some government functionaries.

In so doing, ecclesiastical paradigms appeared to have experienced a renaissance (or is it a shift?). Bishop Muiru however lost in both cases.

Another afro-Pentecostal leader who made a political impact is Bishop Margaret Wanjiru. Like Muiru, she contested the Starehe (in the capital city of Nairobi) parliamentary seat in December 27, 2007 general elections and won. She however lost narrowly in her bid for Nairobi County senatorial bid, in the March 4, 2013 general elections, despite garnering over 500,000 votes, while Senator Mike Mbuvi Sonko won with about 800, 000 votes. Some of afro-Pentecostal clergy who successfully contested and won political seats in 2007 included: Moses Akaranga (Vihiga constituency, currently the Governor of Vihiga County), Morris Dzoro (Kaloleni), Margaret Wanjiru (Starehe), and Mutava Musyimi though nominally an Anglican but a practicing Baptist (Gachoka, now Mbeere South) among others. Others remained in the background but with huge influence on the society. Such include Prophet Owuor, Bishop Mary Kagendo, Rev Teresa Wairimu Kinyanjui, Bishop Wilfred Lai and Bishop David Oginde among others.

As a seeming departure from the past where the leadership of the mainline churches, who were crusading in 1980s for a multi-party democratic society (refer to David Gitari, Timothy Njoya, Henry Okullu, and Alexander Muge among others), drew huge crowds in their ordinary church services, afro-Pentecostal leadership is conversely doing the same. A case in point is the self proclaimed prophet, Dr Owuor.

During the April 18-20, 2014 rally, in Eldoret Sports Club, the Prophet Dr. David Owuor attracted a crowd of about half a million worshippers, drawn across the various Kenyan denominations. It had over 6,000 ushers and a 1,000 strong police presence which punctuated Day One and Two of Prophet Dr. David Owuor's "Mega National Thanks-Giving Meeting". Not even the Kenyan politicians or leaders of the mainline churches could draw such huge crowds. In seeking to control the crowd, the Uasin Gishu County police commander, Nelson Taliti, ensured that police kept vigil as the self-proclaimed prophet and miracle worker attracted followers from all parts of Kenya and neighboring countries.

From a participant observer, one could gather that the crowds were driven to Eldoret in over 500 buses and many more vans and saloon cars that turned the Eldoret Sports Club's Langas neighbourhood into a massive parking lot while thousands more trekked in or came by public means. In view of this, Dr. Owuor told the congregation: "Tomorrow (Sunday) there will be no standing space here because there are more buses coming.... This is what the people of Kenya want—they want the Lord!" Interestingly, as the rallies continued in the Eldoret Sports Club, faithful from South Korea and USA were spotted

in the crowd, waving their countries' miniature flags as they joined other worshippers from Dr Owuor's *Repentance and Holiness Ministry*.

As prophet Owuor passed through the busy Eldoret city streets, thousands lined up the route, as his motorcade took from the Boma Hotel to the Eldoret Sports Club, waving white handkerchiefs and chanting peace slogans. Characteristically, his arrival reduced the city to a ghost town where most businesses were closed, streets deserted, as others relocated their businesses and moved near the venue of the rally and thereby celebrated brisk Easter business selling foodstuff and second-hand clothes. It is critical to note that before the rally began on April 2014, the local county administration had voluntarily organized for a cleanup exercise for the city of Eldoret. Hence, as Dr Owuor's "train of the Lord" and "river of healing" hit the city in the subsequent week (in April 2014), the environment had been thoroughly cleaned—a fact which points towards the changing perceptions regarding the way the emerging Christianities are viewed in Kenya of the 21st century.

In his addresses-cum-prayer meeting, Dr Owuor criticized immorality in the present day society urging leaders across the world to "unite and work together in solidarity". He also faulted a cross-section of Christian religious leaders who he alleged were oppressing the faithful. The Eldoret rally was attended by a-who-is-who in the political leadership of the city. That is, Kericho County Governor Prof Paul Chepkwony, Uasin Gishu County Deputy Governor Daniel Chemno, Nandi County Women Representative Hon. Zipporah Kering' and Kapseret MP Hon. Oscar Sudi among others. The prophet was officially invited to the town by the Uasin Gishu County government led by Governor Jackson Mandago and Deputy Governor Daniel Chemno.

Certainly, the overt acts of their leadership speak volumes of words that it will no longer be business as usual: "afro-Pentecostalism, as the new emerging and socially influential ecclesiastical paradigm in Kenya, has come of age. Watch this space!" Since December 30, 2002 when the former opposition leader, Mwai Kibaki, took over as the President, Kenyans have thus experienced overt influence of afro-Pentecostalism through the media, rallies and religious crusades. The climax of this was seen on April 9, 2013, when after the swearing-in of Uhuru Kenyatta as the fourth president of Kenya and after being given a sword to symbolize that he is the most powerful man in Kenya, Bishop Oginde, an Afro-Pentecostal, was called upon to pray for Uhuru and the Deputy President, William Ruto. Did that imply that it is these emerging Christianities who hold the national psyche? Can they be ignored any longer in our social discourses? The following day,

a commentator in the social media lamented, “if a president can kneel down after being sworn in, who else is bigger than these people [referring to the leaders of these emerging Christianities]?”¹⁷ While the President Uhuru Kenyatta displayed power, as he inspected the guard of honour mounted by the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF), Bishop Oginde of *Christ is the Answer Ministries* (CITAM), displayed another form of power hitherto unknown in Kenya’s political landscape. Of interest to note is that Uhuru and Ruto were not played for by their respective leaders of Catholic and African Inland Church—as this is where they respectively belong to.

After the swearing in ceremony, the Deputy President, William Ruto, found himself in the habit of attending the well televised services in some of the afro-Pentecostal churches. Curiously, Ruto once broke down several times during a thanksgiving church service in Karen, Nairobi, as faithful sang and danced. This took place on Sunday, March 10, 2013, in Rev Teresa Wairimu Kinyanjui’s *Faith Evangelistic Ministries* (FEM). When he was given the microphone to address the congregation, he broke down and was unable to make any statement. Efforts by his wife, Rachael, who was beside him at the dais, to calm him down proved futile as she got carried away and also wept alongside her husband, as they were both overcome by emotions. When he finally managed to deliver a short speech before Rev Teresa Wairimu and the congregation, he admitted, thus:

I have not cried like this for many years. The only time I remember crying like this was when I was a little boy and my mother is here to attest to that. My wife knew me as a strong man because she had never seen me emotional like this. ... The same God who gave us victory against all odds will do more exceedingly and abundantly for us. It will be more than the people of Kenya want. God is going to do great things for this country.¹⁸

The dominance of afro-Pentecostalism in the ecclesiastical scene can thus be seen in the cases that national leadership attends their Sunday worship services regularly. From the above, afro-Pentecostals can be seen to be playing the nurturing roles of an African mother as political leadership becomes the “crying babies” who need care and socio-spiritual attention. Is afro-Pentecostalism the best set model to comfort and encourage the modern Kenya in the 21st century? Indeed, Ruto’s example speaks volumes, as cases of political leadership seeking solace in the new religious outfits are now common. Indeed, the case of the erstwhile Kenyan Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, an Anglican Christian, attending Prophet Dr. David Owuor’s

¹⁷ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRyoY0anG9w&feature=youtube_gdata.

¹⁸ Allan Kisia, *Ruto Weeps in Church As He Savours Jubilee Win*, STANDARD (March 11, 2013). Available at <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000079076> (last visited April 19, 2013).

crusades and eventually getting baptised for the second time in his life time, now through immersion, in 2009, is not lost to scholars of religion in Kenya.¹⁹ Undeniably, this is the dominant theo-social paradigm in the contemporary Kenya. Will it die out after power probably gets into the heads of the emerging political leadership? That can be a major concern; but as things stand out, the influence and dominance of Afro-Pentecostalism in contemporary Kenya.

Again, as Bishop David Oginde prayed for the newly sworn in President and Deputy on April 9, 2013, it was not lost on scholars of religion in Kenya that another leader of the emerging Christianities, “Prophet” Dr David Owuor had in February 2013 invited all the eight presidential candidates; and who in turn knelt down before him for prayer and healing session. In the prayer and healing sessions held on Sunday, the February 24th, 2013, people from all walks of life gathered at the famous Uhuru Park grounds in Nairobi. Six of the eight presidential candidates attended: that is, the then Prime Minister Raila Odinga; the then Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta with his running mate William Ruto; Martha Karua with her running mate Francis Lotodo; Muhamed Dida; Peter Kenneth with his running mate Ronald Osumba; and Professor James Ole Kiyiapi with his running mate Winnie Kaburu Kinyua. The event came after Prophet Dr. David Edward Owuor’s prediction that Kenya would experience yet more general election violence after the vote on March 4, 2013; than it was after the post December 27, 2007 election violence that killed about 1,500 people and displaced over 350,000 people. Nevertheless, Dr Owuor’s alert spread throughout the country like bush fire and practically triggered the national psyche to abhor violence. Interviewed on national television, he warned: “People are now armed with illicit firearms and well organized for [post-election violence].”²⁰ Dr Owuor assured the crowd during the rally on February 24, 2013, thus: “Kenyans will never rise against one another again. Six presidential candidates have made a public declaration of peace. Church leaders, different communities and Mungiki [previously a violent militant group] have repented before the Lord and before millions. Shalom Kenya!”²¹ Thus, the Prophet’s prediction, as is the case with other prophecies of other leaders of the emerging Christianities in

¹⁹ John Ngirachu, *Doomsday Preacher Who “Saved” Raila*, *DAILY NATION* (May 5, 2009). Available at <http://www.nation.co.ke/News/-/1056/594462/-/u670ij/-/index.html>.

²⁰ Henry Owino, *Kenya Votes: Seeking God’s Help for Peace*, *THE NEW INTERNATIONALIST*. Available at <http://newint.org/blog/2013/02/28/kenya-election-prayer-repentance/> (last visited April 18, 2013).

²¹ Henry Owino, *Kenya Votes: Seeking God’s Help for Peace*, *THE NEW INTERNATIONALIST* (April 18, 2013).

Kenya, was not taken lightly. Consequently, his call for three days of national fasting, prayer and repentance attracted a huge crowd—much bigger than any drawn by religious crusaders in contemporary Kenya.

Regarding HIV and AIDS, Dr Owuor seemed to contradict himself when on one hand, agreed that there is no conventional cure for it; but on the other hand insisted that he could cure the disease. Indeed, this raised eyebrows particularly when the Rift Valley Kenya National Aids and STI Control Programme (NASCOP) provincial coordinator, Dr Toromo Kochei, at the end of 2012, confirmed having encountered several cases of these “faith healings”. Kochei noted, thus:

After examining more than five of my patients — people I have dealt with for years — and realising they seem healed, I couldn’t believe it. So I directed the regional Clinical Officer Ms Rahab Peenoi Lemarkoko to open investigations through thorough check-up of the patients, whom we tracked down to various regions in Rift Valley, Nyanza and Western Province.... As a medical practitioner, I first thought it was insane, but now I know faith cures are possible.²²

In post Moi era (2002 onwards), David Owuor comes out clearly as one of the most colourful and esoteric voice in Kenya’s growing legion of fire-and-brimstone evangelical preachers. His long dreadlocked beard lends him instant recognition, but there can be nothing that more vividly marks his acceptance into the mainstream society than his new standing as the “prophet” who rebaptised the former Prime Minister, Raila Odinga in 2009, as noted earlier. After becoming a household name for constantly predicting earthquakes, Owuor’s influence on the corridors of power came out clearly after this episode. Of course after March 4, 2013 peaceful general elections, he also gained credence for championing reconciliation and harmony. For leading the nation to a peaceful election, as evidenced by his summoning of Kenyan leaders into the stadium without fear, as he declared the sovereignty of God over creatures, Dr Owuor became the leading face of the emerging Christianities in Kenya. His earlier contentions that his prayers have power to avert doomsday now found more sympathetic audience.²³

²² Lilian Ochieng, *Prophet Owuor and His Odd Anti-Aids Crusade*, DAILY NATION (February 12, 2013). Available at <http://www.nation.co.ke/Features/DN2/Faith-healer-or-prophet-of-doom/-/957860/1690928/-/1m3pwez/-/index.html> (last visited April 19, 2013).

²³ On Saturday, April 13, 2013, prophet Owuor explained that he got a revelation from God in February 2013 that Uhuru Kenyatta and his team were going to win but avoided saying so in order to avoid violence. While addressing a wedding gathering, he told the audience that the nation will experience economic transformation and prosperity under them; hence Kenyans have a responsibility to pray for them. Of great interest is that he described Uhuru and Ruto as God fearing leaders who would be led by the Holy Spirit to lead in national prosperity. Available at <http://www.kenyan-post.com/2013/04/uhuru-kenyatta-and-william-ruto-were.html> (last visited April 20, 2013).

Notably, after Uhuru Kenyatta was declared the duly elected president of Kenya by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEBC) on March 9th, 2013, he flew to the coastal city of Mombasa the following Sunday, on March 10th, 2013, for a thanks giving service at the *Kisima cha Neema* (the Well of God's grace) Church in the coastal city of Mombasa under the leadership of Bishop Mary Kagendo Francis. Previously, in February 2013, Uhuru had worshipped in the same church where she prayed for his victory in the forthcoming elections then slated on March 4th, 2013. With his sweet victory, the president-elect could not resist the "power of emerging Christianities" in Kenya. Indeed, he had kind words for church leadership when he noted, thus:

Am happy to join you once again today for prayers to thank God for his blessings and for the peace he has given us. Am grateful for your prayers and I have come to fulfill the promise I made during the [political] campaigns that I will be back to give thanks to God when I emerge victorious.²⁴

In her sermon which was based on 1 Samuel 16:1-13, prophetess Kagendo, who was clad in her usual white attire and a white headscarf to signify purity before God, explained that leaders are chosen by God. She therefore called for the understanding that though people have preferences, it is God who ultimately appoints and anoints individuals to positions of leadership. She then held Kenyatta's hand and raised it up as she offered prayers for her. Such gestures demonstrate the changing patterns in ecclesiastical paradigms.

Apart from the political and social domain, the power of Afro-Pentecostalism is also manifest in the mainline churches. A casual visit to the Anglican Church shows that their worship has been influenced by afro-Pentecostalism. The system where, for instance, the Anglican Church insisted on order and strict use of the Golden Bells or simply singing from the Hymn books, has changed as the worship is characterised by choruses with melodies from the African religious heritage. In particular, the then Bishop of Kirinyaga Anglican Diocese, David Gitari, introduced, in early 1990s, a new hymn book with African ancestral melodies. This is after he called all the trained musicians from the locality and tasked them with the project of producing a hymn book that will cater for their spiritual needs through African ancestral melodies. The title of the hymn book is *Nyimbo Cia Gucanjamura Ngoro* (Songs to Warm the Heart). Certainly, the book was produced after Gitari's domain was challenged by the emerging Christianities in the locality which were making use of rich aspects of the

²⁴ <http://diasporamessenger.com/uphold-peace-president-elect-urges-kenyans/>.

African culture and blending it with Pentecostalism. In the end, traditional Anglicanism in the present day Kirinyaga County was replaced by Afro-Anglo-costalism. In so doing, Gitari was to an extent able to counter the Afro-Pentecostal waves sweeping across his jurisdiction, even though the Anglican Church was itself Pentecostalist. The situation obtains to date.

In author's book, *Mutira Mission: An African Church Comes of Age in Kirinyaga, Kenya (1912-2012)*, the author has noted that in late 1980s and early 1990s, when both the Pentecostal wave threatened Gitari's domain by working hard to fish from Gitari's pond, on one hand, and the suspected government agents, on the other hand, were releasing leaflets to discredit him and the Church in general as a way of containing his radical stand against the single party dictatorship and the general excesses of the government, he responded by coining a sloganeering song that was sung thus:

Ona ni kure mbura -----Even if it rains
Ona ya kiboboto -----Even if it is heavy flooding
Kana ya micumari -----Even if it rains Nails

Kanitha ndikoima -----I will never abandon the Church
Kanitha nii ndikoimai -----I vow never to ever abandon my church
Kanitha ndikoma ----- I will stick to my church

Ona ni kure mbura ----- Even if it rains
Ona ya kiboboto ----- Even if it is heavy flooding
Kana ya micumari ----- Even if it rains Nails
Kanitha ndikoima ----- I will never abandon the Church.²⁵

Such gestures to counter afro-Pentecostal waves point out the process that began in the last half of the 20th century but climaxed in the 21st century. The Kibaki era (2003-2012) climaxed the afro-Pentecostal hold in the Kenyan society, as civil liberties were greatly improved.

III. THE SEARCH FOR RELEVANCE WITHIN THE DEVOLVED GOVERNMENTS

An important concern thus is the influence of the emerging Christianities in light of the devolved governments in Kenya since August 27, 2010 when the new constitutional dispensation was ushered in after a

²⁵ JULIUS GATHOGO, *MUTIRA MISSION: AN AFRICAN CHURCH COMES OF AGE IN KIRINYAGA, KENYA (1912-2012)* 99-100 (Limuru: Zapf Chancery 2011).

successful national referendum. In voting for a new people driven constitution, 47 county governments were ushered in. The national government, which is the umbrella for all, was also ushered in. Clearly, the presence of these emerging Christianities is being felt in all the 47 counties. How? First, through their visible activities such as rallies, buildings, and in their business pursuits—one cannot fail to find their influence and relevance to society. In their healing services, the drama therein cannot escape the attention of the county members in the respective localities.

A case in point, in Mombasa County, is that of Bishop Dr. Wilfred Lai who runs the largest economically-oiled church in the Kenya's coastal region (*Jesus Celebration Centre—JCC*) with huge membership in various centres, for example Buxton and Bamburi. It is known for its philanthropic activities particularly in educating the destitute, the street children and other marginal of the society. Isn't this another government that operates unconsciously among the people, but powerful enough to be felt whenever the situation demands? Considering that the emerging Christianities are development conscious in the sense that they attempt to tackle complex issues facing the society, they are, in turn, a government unto themselves. In Bishop Rai's JCC case, a casual observation will show the big crowds they command, the schools they run, the kindergartens, the theological colleges, the proposed university under construction, the employment opportunities that they provide, their tall buildings whose architectural designs are enviable, their transport network systems—some transporting people from Mombasa county to Kitui County and so forth. Certainly, both the central and the devolved governments cannot afford to ignore to learn from the contributions of afro-Pentecostals and their resultant "ministerial" activities for God and humanity.

The same case scenario obtains in Kilifi, Lamu, Nakuru, Nairobi and virtually all the 47 counties that constitute Kenya. As wealth creation and national prosperity concern is devolved to the people, any county leadership will find it appropriate to liaise with them regardless of their religious affiliation. In any case, the relevance of the emerging Christianities will be seen as they attempt to exorcise witchcraft, insecurity, divisions, water, health and sanitation, secessionist threat, educational standards and poverty among others.

With the proliferation of small arms, or fire arms for that matter, for instance, the contribution of afro-Pentecostals will be significant in the devolved units. In 2012 alone, twenty-six Kenyan police officers were killed in Coast region in the past year. According to the Coast police boss Aggrey Adoli, most of these deaths were as a result of violent confrontations with

the secessionist Mombasa Republican Council (MRC).²⁶ According to the Coast Commissioner, Samuel Kilele, al-Shabaab and the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) collude to cause general insecurity in the region. On March 29, 2013, Kilele gave the two groups a one-week ultimatum to surrender or face consequences.²⁷ Another case of violence is the killing of two police officers in what was described as a suspected MRC raid on a police station in Malindi on March 28th, 2013. Coupled with this, the Al-Shabaab militia, from the two decades unstable neighbouring Somalia, remains a security threat. The situation is compounded by the fact that Al-Shabaab like al-Mujahedeen al-Muhajereen (migrant jihadists) work hand-in-hand with the dreaded al-Qaeda terrorist networks. With such general insecurity, which can the services of the leaders of the emerging Christianities, such as prophet David Owuor needed to urge the people, in “God’s name!” to surrender illegal weapons—as he did in areas that were affected by the post December 27, 2007, election violence, be useful? Indeed, guns, bows and arrows used during the 2007 post-election violence were surrendered during a repentance meeting held by the self-declared prophet Dr David Owuor in Molo District on July 18, 2013.²⁸

A visit to Pastor Robert Mbuvi of the newly established Rehoboth Covenant Centre (RCC) Ministries Church in Mathare slums, Changamwe district, Mombasa County (which began in 2010), demonstrated the same pattern with other Afro-Pentecostals (interview 17:05:14). In particular, the Pastor was quick to point out to me that the Church has its income generating project in the form of a kindergarten that has 57 children being tutored by two employed teachers. To avoid brushing with the Society Act (read law) which prohibits a church which is registered as non-profit making society, most afro-Pentecostal outfits prefer to refer their projects as ministries or as services to the society. Mbuvi’s church is no exception. Their envisaged projects include: opening up a dispensary/health clinic in the slums, building a permanent church structure, expanding the school from standard one to eight and purchase stronger public address systems that will strengthen their evangelistic work. In turn, the tendency to attend to the human concerns, coupled with their enthusiasm for healing prayers and zeal

²⁶ *Alphonse Munga’hu, Kenya: Two in Court Over Shabaab Ties*, THE NAIROBI STAR (Saturday, April 4, 2013). Available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/201304010620.html> (last visited April 22, 2013).

²⁷ See Peter Oduor, *A Clever Mix of Religion and Politics*, DAILY NATION. Available at <http://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/DN2/A-clever-mix-of-religion-and-politics/-/957860/2158356/-/5pgltd/-/index.html> (last visited May 16, 2014).

²⁸ Rita Damary, *Arms Surrendered in Prophet Owuor Repentance Meeting*, THE NAIROBI STAR. Available at <http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-86610/arms-surrendered-prophet-owuor-repentance-meeting> (last visited April 21, 2013).

for evangelism, in their respective localities makes them relevant to the particular audiences. Previously, Pentecostal outfits were seen to only focus on unrealized eschatology as opposed to realized eschatology which weakened their hold on society unlike the mainline churches.

In other words, in spite of the fact that most of their leadership is not highly educated, the new emphasis on physical development as opposed to “spiritual development only” resonates well with the African religious heritage; hence the shift in ecclesiastical paradigms. That is, their theological praxis stresses on both realised (present) and unrealised eschatology (future), as it values both culture and the gospel. As noted thus, their theology is both present and futuristic. Put it differently, while the promise of future reward (such as heaven) or punishments (hell) make little impact to one who is hungry, ragged and destitute, their theology also stresses on the ultimate prize—the heavenly. Hence, the emphasis on present and the future are well catered for in their theological discourses.

CONCLUSION

The article began by defining the phrase “emerging Christianities” as referring to the brand of Christianity that goes beyond the traditional understanding of Pentecostal model—a phenomenon where it incorporates some elements of African culture that are compatible to the gospel. It further went on to explain that though not openly or consciously proclaimed, afro-Pentecostalism incorporates African models of concern for the “other”, caring, listening, and general hospitality. And while the colonial government in Kenya (1895-1963), worked hand-in-hand with the mission churches (in particular, CMS, later called Anglicans), the Scottish mission (later called Presbyterians), African inland mission (later called African Inland Church), and the Roman Catholics among others, as the church and state complimented one another, the same did not necessarily happen under the post colonial governments. Nevertheless, the post independence governments under Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978) and Daniel Moi (1979-2002) saw the huge influence of the mainline churches. At the turn of the 21st century, and the Mwai Kibaki’s presidency (2003-2012) in particular, however saw a huge paradigm shift where the emerging Christianities otherwise called afro-Pentecostals managed to outdo the mainline churches eclipsing them completely.

In view of this, the influence of emerging Christianities in Kenya cannot be gainsaid as the political establishment at the national level has clearly demonstrated that they need their respective contributions. Similarly,

the same trend obtains in the 47 counties that constitute Kenya, a nation with over 80% as adherents of Christianity. In the counties, the influence of Afro-Pentecostalism is being felt particularly in areas where they have set out development projects such as care for the aged, elderly and the street children; and while the mainline churches may likewise have similar programmes, the former is being felt more strongly probably because of the zeal with which they address cutting-edge issues facing the society. Is it another Constantinean²⁹ gimmick to pacify the poor masses through nominal and/or pseudo-Christianity? For how long is this trajectory going to inform Kenyan Christianity? Scholars of religion will be keen to observe the influence of afro-Pentecostalism as Uhuru Kenyatta's government takes shape following the conclusion of March 4, 2013, general elections. Will it fade away or get strengthened? Indeed, as the county governments in the Kenya wrestles with international terrorism, the secession threats at the coastal region by the members of Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), the water and sewage challenge, the belief in witchcraft phenomenon, and the massive poverty among other tests, the contribution of the afro-Pentecostals will be needed. Certainly, the county governments will need to work closely with their leadership, as they appear keen on tackling teething and practical challenges facing the society.

²⁹ During the rule of Roman Emperor Constantine the Great (reigned 306–337), Christianity became a dominant religion of the Roman Empire. He stopped Christian persecution but again declared Christianity the state religion.