



New Wine in Old Wine Skins: Wesleyan Methodism within the Contemporary Religious Market Place in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This paper purposed to explore the impact and future of Methodism in the face of challenging trends in the Kenyan religious space. Through qualitative empirical research done in the Njia Circuit of Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK) Nyambene Synod, this study identified the main practices and trends that are challenging and influencing Methodism in Kenya. They include religious commodification that has been developing and infiltrating Christian churches in the last three decades, the Pentecostal spirituality, mass and social media influence, spiritual lethargy and “quick fix mentality,” Africanization of Christianity campaigns, and MCK structures. The study found that Christianity in Kenya has been forced to swiftly respond to the enlightenment brought about by modernity, socioeconomic currents, and political winds of change. Churches including MCK, are grappling to control the religious space in Kenya and that dictates that adaptation is necessary for survival. This paper addresses the gap in how to integrate eighteenth-century Methodism into the twenty-first-century church in Kenya. Consideration is based on the fact that since the inception of the MCK, other forms of churches, ministries, and social change have happened. This paper proposed a consideration for a paradigm shift in the way the Methodist Church carries out mission work in today’s society, and especially through its structural organization. Thus, acceptance and use of new wineskins to withstand the vigour of new wine to avoid tearing away in the form of loss of relevance and impact.

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INTRODUCTION

Looking at John Wesley, there is no doubt that he was a key eighteenth-century figure as far as Methodism is concerned, and during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Methodism spread to many countries and in different contexts. The question that needs to be asked and addressed is how far people can encounter Wesleyan Methodism today (twenty-first century), noting that changes have happened in the society since inception of Methodism. How impactful is the Methodist Church in Kenya, and what is its place in the midst of myriads of religious movements and ministries springing up in the country’s religious space? Brian Beck argues that, though being a key figure in Methodism, Wesleyan Methodism “cannot simply be transplanted into the twenty-first century as the oracle to

settle all our controversies or the pattern of life, to be slavishly followed.”¹ Additionally, research done on the cause of the movement of young people from the Methodist Church in Kenya to the Pentecostal Churches in Kenya, raises a theological question about what it means to be church in the twenty-first century and, more specifically, what it means to be a Methodist church in Kenya.²

As Beck argues, in modern society, there are Christians who do not just accept religion as it is preached without challenging it. Indeed, for them choice of a religion/denomination is “a matter of taste, choice and the inherited culture,”³ all of which to a big extent are influenced by modernity, and more so the economic status of the society. This sentiment can be understood more from Mugambi’s definition of theology as “a systematic articulation of human response to revelation within a particular situation and context.”⁴ This means religion has to address not only the spiritual issues but also the socioeconomic and political issues of its members such that they can hear and experience God in their daily life encounters.⁵ The Methodist Church in Kenya faces such issues daily, and the question becomes how to integrate eighteenth-century Methodism into the twenty-first-century needs and socio-religious desires of the church. In an attempt to fulfil these desires from their congregants, some churches and ministries in Kenya have commodified religion “by converting some aspects of religion into spiritual commodities through a near capitalistic exchange.”⁶

Jesse N.K. Mugambi, a professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi, argues that it is imperative for the church to remain relevant if it is to survive and serve its purpose in contemporary society. This calls for the church to adjust to the new social-religious and economic demands of the society to which its members belong.⁷ This study was motivated by the state of religion in Kenya where individually-owned ministries are increasing at an alarming rate, while the mainline (mission) churches seem not to be doing very well in terms of expansion. Despite being an inspiring and influential movement in the eighteenth century, Methodism in Kenya seems to be facing challenges that hinder it from making a strong impact. Like most mainline churches MCK is grappling to control the religious space and its impact in contemporary Kenya is not as outstanding as the upcoming ministries.⁸ It is with this background in mind that this paper endeavors to explore the future, impact, and place of Methodism in twenty-first-century Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research approach that puts emphasis on an individual’s views and personal experience.⁹ The author used document analysis to do an in-depth investigation on how the Methodist Church in Kenya would or would not integrate eighteenth-century Methodism into the twenty-first-century Kenyan Methodist Church. This would determine the future of MCK and its impact on the contemporary generation and the competitive religious marketplace in Kenya.

DISCUSSION

The various themes that emerged from the research are discussed subsequently.

a. Religious Commodification

Religious commodification is a recent term, referring to a practice where religion and its rituals, symbols, and artifacts are increasingly attracting commercial interest, both to its adherents and to non-

¹ Brian E. Beck, *Methodist Heritage and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 10.

² Alice M. Mwila, “Changing Religious Affiliations: The Impact of Pentecostal Spirituality on the Methodist Church in Nyambene Synod, Kenya” (PhD Thesis, Anglia Ruskin University, 2020), 87.

³ Beck, *Methodist Heritage and Identity*, 10.

⁴ Jesse N K Mugambi, *The Biblical Basis for Evangelization: Theological Reflections Based on an African Experience* (University of Nairobi, 1989), 19.

⁵ Mwila A. M., “Changing Religious Affiliations: The Impact of Pentecostal Spirituality on the Methodist Church in Nyambene Synod, Kenya,” 78.

⁶ Patrick M. Karanja, Josephine Khaemba, and Sammy Gachigua, “The Commodification of Religion: A Rhetorical Analysis Charismatic Programmes in Kenya,” *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, no. 6 (2019): 418–25.

⁷ Mugambi, *The Biblical Basis for Evangelization: Theological Reflections Based on an African Experience*, 17.

⁸ Mwila A. M., “Changing Religious Affiliations: The Impact of Pentecostal Spirituality on the Methodist Church in Nyambene Synod, Kenya,” 4.

⁹ M. Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide for Small-Scale Social Research Projects* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2014), 76.

adherents.¹⁰ A trend in religion that involves consumer, market, and commodity has developed where people are continuously searching for meaning and value addition in their lives without necessarily toiling for it. We are witnessing a growing generation of seekers who are exhibiting a deep sense of hunger for self-understanding and fulfilment from the church.¹¹ These seekers explore religion in their desire to connect with supernatural power, which is believed to influence the present and the future. Once the seekers find a church that seemingly propagates a teaching that satisfies them, they do not hesitate to “invest” in such a church. In the African context, people believe in the spiritual worldview, which determines their lives both now and later.¹² This is an aspect that is found in Christians and non-Christians alike, both the young and the old. Digital and social media forums that act as the medium of accessing such markets, provide exposure to modernized social-spiritual African culture and facilitate the seekers in fulfilling their desires. In the process, Husemann and Eckhardt claim, “[T]he spiritual and the material, the sacred and the profane are irreversibly intertwined.¹³ The religious market in Kenya today is as competitive as any other market where, in this case, the commodity on offer is Christianity. Contemporary media platforms, as Karanja and colleagues rightly argue, are used as avenues for preachers to subtly exploit audiences in making the spiritual experience appear as a product for sale.¹⁴ Additionally, Christianity has developed myriads of brands “purposefully designed to enhance consumers’ spiritual well-being and actualize a spiritual experience” that seeks to satisfy the desires and demands of prospective customers.¹⁵ “Hawking” of religion as well as promises of easy achievements through dubious miracles become irresistible to those seeking “fulfilling” spiritual experiences and quick solutions to their issues.

Contemporary individual Christians form their own religious perspectives and practices, based not on the normative practices and beliefs of their religious institutions, but by relying on a wide range of unofficial resources, some not even recognized by their institutions.¹⁶ How the Methodist Church makes itself the preferred church among myriads of denominations is a question that begs to be addressed. As Gez explains, pastors today do questionnaires that are filled out by their members to choose what they would like included in worship. While this is happening, the mainline churches, MCK¹⁷ included, use a fixed prearranged lectionary and liturgy, which, most of the time, is followed without any changes, even though it may not meet the expectations of the worshipper.

Religious commodification that happens in a religious marketplace is a novel concept where the involved churches have staged massive challenges to the older Christian churches. The Methodist Church in Kenya finds itself facing this same challenge, especially from its younger generation who are attracted by the new way of worship that is readily available in the “marketplace.” The concept is easily recognized and used by Pentecostal churches and movements, where the popularity of a church is determined by the attractiveness of its practices. As seen from the consumer’s perspective perceived and judged by the same consumer/worshipper, the scenario is that of commodity, seller and consumer, resulting in religious consumerism—a concept explored by Mwila in her research.¹⁸ Religious consumerism is an aspect of globalization and social change that leads to a break with institutionalized churches and to autonomy and freedom of choice.¹⁹ No doubt, the wind of change is blowing fast, and

¹⁰ Karanja, Khaemba, and Gachigua, “The Commodification of Religion: A Rhetorical Analysis Charismatic Programmes in Kenya,” 419.

¹¹ Katharina C. Husemann and Giana M. Eckhardt, “Consumer Spirituality,” *Journal of Marketing Management* 35, no. 5–6 (March 24, 2019): 391–406, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2019.1588558>.

¹² A. R. Mukaria, *A Religion with Gaps* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 2022).

¹³ Husemann and Eckhardt, “Consumer Spirituality,” 392.

¹⁴ Karanja, Khaemba, and Gachigua, “The Commodification of Religion: A Rhetorical Analysis Charismatic Programmes in Kenya,” 419.

¹⁵ Husemann and Eckhardt, “Consumer Spirituality,” 392.

¹⁶ Yonatan N Gez, *Traditional Churches Born Again Christianity and Pentecostalism: Religious Mobility and Religious Repertoires in Urban Kenya* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 3.

¹⁷ As noted, this article uses the Methodist Church in Kenya as a case study to explore this topic. The choice of this church is appropriate, as it represents the mainline churches in Africa, commonly referred to as “traditional churches” in the West.

¹⁸ Mwila, “Changing Religious Affiliations: The Impact of Pentecostal Spirituality on the Methodist Church in Nyambene Synod, Kenya.”

¹⁹ Echysttas. Axonn, “Consumerism as Religion,” Mentatul, 2017, <http://mentatul.com/2017/3/24/consumerism-as-religion>.

church members are not left behind. Indeed, traditional churches are slowly getting the label of “old school.”²⁰

One of the challenges facing Wesleyan Methodism in Kenya is the commodification of religion, where individual preferences override the spiritual drive or the scriptural holiness advanced by John Wesley. This practice involves individual choices to worship in a church that meets their taste and perception of Christianity. According to Karanja, the choice to worship in a certain congregation is determined by the level of affliction one is going through, including disease, poverty, fear of death, and belief in demonic oppression.²¹ This is because these congregations purport to offer solutions to these social afflictions. How MCK survives in such an environment should concern church leaders and clergy since it is imperative that an effective church speaks to people in their current situation.²² As an evangelistic body, the church needs not to lose focus on its essential role and, therefore, the need to strive to remain relevant. In the face of these novel beliefs and practices, MCK has remained firm with only a few adaptations here and there, forced by the fear of losing its relevance and membership. The challenge, however, is how to introduce the new into the old and expect the new practices to fit in and be contained within the structures of the host church.²³ These new practices that are embraced by contemporary Christians have caused remarkable confusion in the MCK since the structures have no provision for such changes. A single congregation or circuit cannot make changes that are not in line with the MCK procedures regardless of the need to accommodate a new practice or modify an existing one. One example is when a reverend in the Methodist church is confronted by members requesting the dedication of their children instead of baptism and at the same time carrying a monetary gift to the minister after the dedication, a practice that has been copied from the Pentecostal oriented churches. Thus, the response of the church to the new demands would no doubt determine its future in the religious marketplace. If its offer is alluring and in line with the consumers’ desires, it may attract more “customers,” while it would experience declining numbers if its services are not appealing to the worshippers. To continue to be competitive in the marketplace not only requires the introduction of the new into the old but also looking at the old structures that have propelled the church into its current position and reviewing them appropriately for better performance.

b. Rethinking Church Structures

The Methodist Church in Kenya has its age-long structures and is still organized in a methodical way that was set by John Wesley to serve the society at his time (and they actually achieved their purpose then). Through the British Church Statement that was accepted by the conference in 1999,²⁴ the church examined its structures and noted that many of the fundamental features of eighteenth-century Methodism were still in use. The conference adopted this statement that challenged the British Methodist Church to ask whether these structures were appropriate to carry forward the church into the twenty-first century. The church, it claims, should be structured for its mission and able to respond pragmatically when new needs or opportunities arise.²⁵ Just the way society changes with time, the church needs to be alive to this dynamism and respond appropriately so that structural review can breathe new life into the almost semi-redundant structures. K. Colberg also emphasizes that there is a need to rethink ecclesial structures in order to respond to the reality of a rapidly changing, thoroughly globalized, and highly technological world.

Although the church does not have to follow the world, it is necessary to learn some lessons from secular organizations, which have had to adjust their structural features in response to a changing

²⁰ “Old School” is a term popularly used by the Kenyan youth to refer to the older way of doing things, compared to modern and postmodern ways. People or institutions that subscribe to this older way (analogue) are also referred to as old school.

²¹ Karanja, Khaemba, and Gachigua, “The Commodification of Religion: A Rhetorical Analysis Charismatic Programmes in Kenya,” 422; Social afflictions experienced by an African/Kenyan Christian are most often interpreted to have a supernatural cause, which thus requires supernatural solutions. See Mukaria, *A Religion with Gaps*.

²² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “The Future of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa,” in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. K.R. Ross, J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu, and T.M. Johnson (Edinburgh University Press Edinburgh, 2017), 461–77.

²³ J. W. Abraham, *Methodism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

²⁴ British Methodist Church Statement, *Called to Love and Praise: Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice* UK, 1999, <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1993/fo-statement-called-to-love-and-praise>.

²⁵ British Methodist Church Statement, *Called to Love and Praise*.

world.²⁶ Since the main business of the church is to “sell” Christ in the prevailing market, appropriate structures are necessary to achieve this purpose. Thus, “the Christian community must consider what structures might be most responsive to the needs of today while being consistent with its theological commitments and the witness of tradition.”²⁷ In her research done in the Methodist Church in Kenya, A. M. Mwila discovered that Christians desire to hear a sermon that addresses their current issues, rather than following the lectionary readings, which display notable limitations in addressing current challenges facing members.²⁸ The Methodist Church in Kenya uses a lectionary that has readings for a whole year, following the church calendar. Church tradition requires that lay preachers²⁹ make use of the readings provided for every Sunday, and most preachers may not change the readings to address an emerging issue. This kind of preaching is challenged today as being insensitive to people’s plight, especially considering that religion to an African is inseparable from their daily lives. Indeed, African Christians expect religion to provide answers to their life challenges and, therefore, when services become a routine (like it happens in the MCK), they do not meet the expectations of worshippers.

In addition, the MCK meeting agendas that provide little space to discuss contemporary issues facing the church because of their rigid nature, may not fit worshippers’ expectations today nor may they be effective in the contemporary church. Looking at the MCK Standing Orders and Agenda³⁰ that govern the church, it is noticed that there is a limitation in what can be discussed in a Circuit Quarterly Meeting³¹ or a synod meeting. This means contemporary issues may be overlooked if leaders stick to the laid-down regulations, disciplines, and procedures, which may also be routinely repetitive. It is imperative that any growing church should not ignore its young people in the face of contemporary challenges, which include drug abuse, secularism, misleading doctrines and sects, technology, and many others. The guiding agenda of the Circuit Quarterly Meeting, for example, does not provide enough emphasis on such issues that are pertinent to young people today.

The Methodist system of lay preachers is also facing challenges today due to the rising practice among different churches and ministries to use pastors that are at the same level as MCK lay preachers. Most of these pastors have minimal or no theological training, and sometimes even their minimum basic education could be missing. Despite such pastors’ limitations, most contemporary Christians prefer them, because they are able to address their desires and current religious demands and offer hope in situations of hopelessness. They can relate the “gospel” with the lived experience of their congregants; and, more so, they fit in the same age bracket with most of their listeners. The Methodist Church in Kenya may need to take another look at its age-long lay preaching ministry in order to make it more effective in the present church. Maximizing the gifts possessed by the lay preachers and equipping them for the church’s current needs may revitalize their service delivery. In addition, repackaging the delivery of the gospel may be necessary, which calls for adjusted structures and systems without losing the Methodist identity or diluting key Christian doctrinal truths. Attached to the lay preachers’ ministry is the worship pattern/style, or how MCK conducts its worship services. The Methodist liturgical worship is a unique way and helps maintain traditions and identity. However, as a Methodist scholar and a former presiding bishop of the Methodist Church in Kenya, Zablon Nthamburi³² suggests, there is a need for reviewing the way we worship so as to be in line with the current generation who form the majority of the congregants in most churches in Kenya and Africa in

²⁶ Kristin Colberg, “Ecclesiology Today and Its Potential to Serve a Missionary Church,” *Missiology: An International Review* 46, no. 1 (January 19, 2018): 23–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829617739842>.

²⁷ Colberg, “Ecclesiology Today and Its Potential to Serve a Missionary Church,” 29.

²⁸ Mwila, “Changing Religious Affiliations: The Impact of Pentecostal Spirituality on the Methodist Church in Nyambene Synod, Kenya,” 112.

²⁹ Lay preachers in the Methodist Church tradition are un-ordained lay people who assist the ministers in preaching. Since the MCK is organized into circuits that are made up of a group of churches, one or two ministers in the circuit are unable to preach in all the congregations. As a result, a lay preacher is assigned to preach where the minister is not available.

³⁰ Standing Orders and Agenda of the Methodist Church in Kenya are the predestined set of rules and protocols that dictate the conduct, discussion, and decision-making process within the Methodist Church in Kenya.

³¹ Quarterly meeting refers to leaders’ meeting held every quarter at the circuit in the Methodist church to deliberate upon matters affecting the circuit and make decisions on them.

³² Z. Nthamburi, *The Pilgrimage of the African Church in the Twenty-First Century* (Nairobi: Act Print Ltd., 2000).

general.³³ It should be noted that the worship style is not part of Methodism, but carries elements of culture that dictate how certain people express and practice their faith.

The clergy of the Methodist Church in Kenya usually take care of several congregations, resulting in worshippers' desire for the services of a minister to remain unmet, as compared to churches that have a pastor for every congregation.³⁴ In fact, MCK congregants have become easy targets for people who start their own churches, one of the reasons being unmet spiritual and social needs. This has raised questions about the ministry of the lay preachers who are always preaching alongside the clergy and are more available for the congregations than the ministers. If a young lay preacher leaves the MCK and starts his/her own church, they seem to be more effective than when they are in the MCK. As Mwila argues, one of the reasons is the limitation brought about by the bureaucracy in the Methodist Church in Kenya.³⁵

c. Mass and Social Media Influence

The Methodist Church in Kenya is known for adhering to its traditions, structures, and liturgical ways of worship, which has kept its older folk comfortable and at home with the practice. Younger Christians, however, remain unresponsive to the word of God or get "bored." As J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu says, the traditional churches' inability to integrate charismatic renewal phenomena into worship distanced these churches from many ordinary Christians.³⁶ Being one of the traditional churches, MCK does not only lack charisma but also new strategies for church growth and expansion. Social-media evangelism, including Facebook, YouTube, and tele-evangelism, is highly embraced today by most contemporary generations, while the Methodist Church still uses the old strategies of preaching within the four walls of the church. It is not unusual to switch on a television set in Kenya and find many channels running services that reach most of the population who can access a TV set. While this is happening, the mainline churches are significantly missing in these forums. This leaves the upcoming churches to dominate the religious airspace and to almost push the older churches, like the Methodists, the Anglicans, the Presbyterians, and other mainline churches, "out of business" of selling Christ to the younger generation. Similarly, social media is overflowing with messages, sermons, music, and images that are all tailor-made to meet the perceived desires of their hearers. The danger of this is twofold: First, social media is largely unchecked, and heresies and wrong doctrines could be propagated without control measures. Secondly, some mainline church leaders and pastors have also condoned wrong practices in an attempt to ensure member retention and to appear accommodative to the new trends.³⁷ For example, the Kenyan government and the whole nation suffered a huge loss in April 2023, when a sect taught the wrong doctrine of fasting, which caused the deaths of over four hundred people. The Shakahola massacre,³⁸ as it is referred to, is an extremely sad incident that put the church in the limelight in the wrong way.³⁹ On the other hand, social media evangelism has caused laziness, apathy, and individualism—something John Wesley countered with his teachings on social and scriptural holiness. For Wesley, churches tended to emphasize individual conviction or personal holiness, while there was no solitary religion. For him, "no holiness but social holiness" meant that one would only practice spiritual holiness in sharing socially with others.⁴⁰

³³ Mwila, "Changing Religious Affiliations: The Impact of Pentecostal Spirituality on the Methodist Church in Nyambene Synod, Kenya," 122.

³⁴ Mwila, "Changing Religious Affiliations: The Impact of Pentecostal Spirituality on the Methodist Church in Nyambene Synod, Kenya," 122.

³⁵ Mwila, "Changing Religious Affiliations: The Impact of Pentecostal Spirituality on the Methodist Church in Nyambene Synod, Kenya," 131.

³⁶ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*, vol. 27 (Boston: Leiden Brill, 2005).

³⁷ Gez, *Traditional Churches Born Again Christianity and Pentecostalism: Religious Mobility and Religious Repertoires in Urban Kenya*.

³⁸ This incident shocked the nation. It involved a cult that had its shrine inside Shakahola forest in Kilifi county. This cult preached and convinced its followers to fast until death, as this would enable them to see God. Through this teaching, more than four-hundred people lost their lives, and their bodies were discovered buried in shallow graves in Shakahola forest. Before fasting to death to meet Jesus, these brainwashed victims were also convinced to sell all their earthly belongings and take the proceeds to their pastor, which they did faithfully.

³⁹ Kennedy Kimathi, "Shakahola Deaths: Blunders and How Cult Was Discovered," *The Daily Nation*, April 27, 2023.

⁴⁰ Roger L Walton, "Social Holiness and Social Justice," *Holiness* 5, no. 1 (2019): 25–36.

d. Africanization of Methodism

The relevance of the Methodist Church in Kenya is increasingly challenged since the western missionary concepts and practices generally failed to respond to the contextual and existential issues facing its congregants. There is a strong desire for a church made in Kenya for Kenyans. This desire is for a church that interacts with and understands the Kenyan socioeconomic, religious, and political atmosphere; the Kenyan (African) worldview, values, and practices that are integral to all people, including Christians; and one that speaks the Kenyan language.⁴¹ What MCK has not provided is found in the rising Pentecostal-oriented churches and African Independent/Indigenous Churches (AICs), which strongly appropriates African religiosity. Meanwhile, the mainline churches seem clueless or are adamant and unwilling to recognize the African religious heritage as worth considering in Christianity. In his book *Joyfully Christian, Truly African*, John Gatu, a cleric in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, called for a Christianity that takes into consideration those tenets of African life that may have been disregarded and uses them to build strong pillars for a Christian way of life for believers in their setting.⁴² Such values include, for example, the African leadership system that organized society such that everyone felt included. For example, in Meru, where there are currently six Methodist Synods, there used to be a council of elders called “Njuri Nceke.”⁴³ These elders held the community together in maintaining discipline, law, and order long before the coming of missionary Christianity. They also recognized the existence of a God worshipped by the community and coordinated prayers and sacrifices on behalf of the community. These rites are respected to date, but mission Christian churches dismissed and condemned them as demonic, putting the African Christian into confusion, especially when he or she seeks intervention of such elders in dispute resolutions. In noting that Christianity does not penetrate fully into the people’s lives and culture to solve all their issues, Mukaria, in his book *A Religion with Gaps*, argues that “where Christianity and modern science cannot explain spiritual issues within the Iembe⁴⁴ context, African Traditional Religion (ATR) or the Iembe spiritualism has been covering the gaps.”⁴⁵ He further argues correctly that “African spirituality also plays its role in the moments of the spiritual unconscious (when a person feels helpless in situations beyond their control)...many Iembe who claim not to be adherents of ATR may reflect their actions in an ATR faith perspective.”⁴⁶ The Methodist Church in Kenya currently finds itself having to intervene in cases of its members who go the Njuri Nceke elders’ way of resolving disputes. Integration of Christianity, in this case Methodism, with the people’s spirituality, practices, and lifestyle is critical for its effectiveness.

Methodism could be at home in Kenya if it would incline towards responding to challenging issues such as poverty; political, domestic, and gender violence; illiteracy; initiation rites; family life; joblessness; health issues; communal life and governance; and African religious beliefs (among others) in a contextual Kenyan Christian way.⁴⁷ Such a move would really be at home with the Wesleyan emphasis on connecting and caring for the poor. Unfortunately, for the Methodist Church in Kenya today, a department of Christian Social Responsibility (CSR) is not receiving the attention it deserves so as to make an impact in the community. This could be a strong evangelism arm of the church that would help extend the love of Christ and touch the beneficiaries’ hearts.

This indictment of the Methodist Church in Kenya failing to be relevant to contemporary society can be seen as a matter of the church having lost its founding emphasis, which actually happened before it was exported to Africa from Britain. As discussed earlier, Methodism was a revival movement that arose out of a desire to recapture the relevance and spiritual fervor of the Anglican

⁴¹ Mwila, “Changing Religious Affiliations: The Impact of Pentecostal Spirituality on the Methodist Church in Nyambene Synod, Kenya,” 193.

⁴² John G. Gatu, *Joyfully Christian, Truly African* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2006), 14.

⁴³ The Meru Council of Elders were used as community courts and custodian of traditions as well as discipline. They would therefore spell an action to be taken upon anyone who broke the societal laws and intervene in disputes of the community. They are still being used today by a large number of Meru people.

⁴⁴ Iembe is a name of a Meru subtribe that live on the slopes of the Nyambene ridges in Meru county.

⁴⁵ Mukaria, *A Religion with Gaps*, ix.

⁴⁶ Mukaria, *A Religion with Gaps*.

⁴⁷ Mwila, “Changing Religious Affiliations: The Impact of Pentecostal Spirituality on the Methodist Church in Nyambene Synod, Kenya,” 193.

Church, which John Wesley perceived as becoming ineffective in its time. It was a movement that targeted to transform not only the church but also the whole nation of Britain. John Wesley is considered to have made a great impact in making Methodism one of the widest-spread faiths in the world. However, in the twenty-first century, Methodism is no longer a revival movement, its spread has slowed down and it could be categorized among the institutionalized churches/denominations that may need revival just like the Anglican Church of Wesley's time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion has revealed that changes have occurred both in the religious and social arenas. The scramble for religious space by the myriads of churches and ministries in Kenya poses a challenge, mostly to the institutionalized churches. This calls for MCK to move out of its comfort zone and update its services accordingly, so as to be the church of the season. Since its old structures and organization may not be able to accommodate the new without adjustments, the church needs to consider changes that could serve the purpose of the church in the current generation. This paper therefore proposes that MCK needs to respond to the pressure to accommodate new strategies of doing mission. The foundations created by John Wesley are still strong and can take Methodism to the next level if only the contemporary church leaders would listen to the consumers of their services, learn their needs, and share Christ in response to their spiritual needs. It is also imperative that Methodism address the African/Kenyan Christian in their context by continuously being dynamic and listening church.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the impact and future of Methodism in the face of challenging trends in the Kenyan religious space. From the discussion, it can be concluded that while the Methodist Church in Kenya and other mainline churches have failed to pay close attention to the voices and spiritual desires of their congregants, the rising churches and ministries are loosening up the liturgical rigidity and offering a free and flexible system that accommodates a wide range of spiritual needs and demands in a competitive marketplace. The Methodist Church in Kenya is structured in the form in which it arrived from the British Methodist Church, and this research has found that MCK structures and organization need adjustments so as to serve the contemporary generation effectively. This would place the church in a position to address other trends that have played a significant role in checking its impact in Kenya. These include; religious commodification, the Pentecostal spirituality, mass and social media influence, spiritual lethargy and “quick fix mentality,” and Africanization of Christianity campaigns. Nevertheless, the study is of the view that, if the Methodist Church in Kenya seeks to serve effectively in the midst of a contemporary society that piles demands on the church, it has to distinguish between the voice of God and the voice of the world evaluate the voices and discern the spirit. This is because the church must not conform to the contemporary demands, but rather it has to maintain its holy space while perpetuating the kingdom of God in the world.

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