
African Christianity, Cultural Identity and Human Resources Development

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Abstract

African Christianity is today a transnational religion which has succeeded in traversing the African terrain to almost all part of the world. In doing so, it packages African cultural identity to all parts of the world and this has helped enormously in preserving African cultural heritage and at the same time, linked Africans in Diaspora to their home country and uniquely helped Africans to reconstruct, organize, and identify their religion both for themselves and for the non-Africans around them. The paper thus argues that African Christianity is involved in the globalization process, they have moved from local phenomenon to a global context. It also demonstrates how Africans Christianity has helped Africans in their self-assertion and self-insertion in the Diaspora. Through these processes, Africans in the Diaspora are creating a religious consciousness that attempts to assimilate notions of the global

while at the same time, maintaining their local identity which at the same time enhances human resources development.

Hervieu-Leger (2000) agreed that religion transcends the boundaries of time because it allows followers to feel part of a chain of memory connected to a past, a present, and a future. In this vein, transnationality of religion enhances immigrant member's ability to retain the contents of religion as was practiced in the original home land. By this, members even when outside their original home land, still use religion as a connecting link to home land. Beyer, Robertson, and Queen (2001) were of the view that religion should be studied more on a global spectrum instead of how it was studied in the past based on national level. These theorists emphasized the need to use the global system as the primary unit of analysis to understand contemporary social life. According to Beyer et al (2001) questions such as what are the cultural and religious consequences of "thick" contemporary globalization, with its increasing velocity? are answered within the context of religion and cultural identity. Thus, Beyer (2001) responded by noting that first, many religions have become multi-centred, which differs from their single-faced of the past.

Therefore, transformation becomes an essential ingredient in the transnational movement of religions. Also, profound mutual assimilation forms a special ingredient of transnationalism of religion. The sustainability of religious contents and forms in a multi-cultural society is also the concerns of global studies of religion. Beyer (1994) has stated that globalization is the ever changing state of mutability. This therefore poses serious problem for religion to maintain its beliefs and practices without mutability or assimilation. This is why Robertson (1991) explains "we no longer have the security of an ascribed or fixed sense of self".

Ebaugh (2000) in her book titled "*Religion and new immigrants continuities and adaptations in immigrant congregations*" noted that religion and ethnic identity form a special focus on the issue of the second generation, and becomes immediately apparent when discussing religion and immigrant communities. It is observed that at the heart of the lively debate over whether the new immigrant will follow the patterns of assimilation characteristic of earlier waves and subsequent generations, religious rituals, with their symbolic re-enactments and ties with tradition, often serves as primary mechanisms for the reproduction of culture. Because religious services among new immigrants are frequently performed in the native language, even when little of the language may be spoken at home or outside of religious spaces, they become a link with traditional culture and can also serve as a vehicle to produce ethnic identity among second generation members of religion in a host country or community. Thus, one can rightly say that ethnic identity and language cannot be removed when discussing globalization of religion.

Clarification of Terms

African Christianity: As the gospel spread into new regions of the world, there has proven to be need and opportunity for fresh conceptions and formulations of the faith. The process of inculturation begins when missionaries first arrives in a region in which Christianity does not exist and the instruction of converts (catechesis takes place), gradually after perhaps, experiencing more strongly initial rupture.

In this perspective, African Christianity as used in this paper is to describe African religious expression in the Christian religion, since the religion came in contact with the Africans. The prevalence of African new religious movement, the Pentecostals as well as the incorporation of African pattern of worship in the orthodox churches is a clear indication that Africans were not satisfied with the originally model in which Christian religion was brought by the European missionaries. In this vein, the emergence of inculturation between African culture and European Christian culture interplayed, thereby, leading to what may be described as African Christianity.

From the above, Jean – Marc (1995) posited that “the past must indeed shed light on the present, we need to rethink the Christian message today; otherwise it will become one more disturbing influence in Africa, at a time when Africans who refuse to, part with their cultural identity, confronted foreign civilization base on conquest. Questions such as how can we live and express our faith so that it becomes more than an alienating reflection of a foreign world which attacks our indigenous customs and beliefs aroused.

Human Resource Development: Human resource development is described as the part of management which concerns with people at work and with their relationships within an enterprise. Personnel development aims to achieve both efficiency and justice. It seeks to bring together and develop into an effective organization the men and women who make up the enterprise, enabling each to make his own best contribution to its success. It seeks to provide fair terms and conditions of employment and satisfying work for those employed (Cole, 2002).

Cole (2002) described personnel and human resource development activities as being carried out by all those in leadership roles in organizations. Every manager or team leader is necessarily involved in concerns about the way in which people are employed as well as about what they need to be doing, and how well. In most situations such leaders fulfil their personnel/ human resource responsibilities within a clear framework of human resource management policy. In this frame work, the paper establishes how African Christianity in the diaspora have been a vehicle through which Africans gain personnel management, development, spiritually, financial, economic, social and political development in connection to the home country.

African Christianity Tendencies towards Globalization

African Christianity cultivates every avenue to show they are transnational in nature. They employ the services of international members to help open new branches in their country. They also acclaimed to be international community by attaching international appellations to their title in order to give the impression that they are internationally inclined and are ready to evangelize the entire world.

In this vein, Adogame (2002) asserted that most Africans oriented Christianity have not only developed their own mission, evangelistic strategies and dynamics, but have charged themselves with the task of taking their vision beyond their immediate environment and context. African Christianity have over time, transformed drastically to meet the trend of globalization process, that is why they are dynamic, changing as time goes, developing new strategies day by day. One of such innovations is by sponsoring members to study in new and foreign environment. By doing so, the member gets to know the new environment and settles there and thereafter, funds are sent, where new branches are set up. Turner (1979) supporting this view noted that:

Some of the African churches have a sense of mission towards us (European)! They know how static and ineffective we are, and how little we share some of their own central convictions about prayers, fasting, healing, the power of the spirit and the joy of worship. They ride on the crest of a religion that works. They share also in the new found African convictions of having an important contribution to make to the nations of the world, especially in the realms of human relations and of the spiritual where we are increasingly desiccated and inadequate. One sign of the authenticity of their Christian faith is a desire to share their discoveries and open up to us again the dynamic of our mutual heritage (p. 291).

In the same vein, African Christian religion today see themselves as international organization and the world is seen as its area of evangelization. International flags are hung at their headquarters. Those flags depict or represent the international nature and world-wide scope of their organization and the flags represent the countries where there are found around the world. Adagome (2002) also observed this trend when he noted that: a new feature of some of these churches is the symbolic display of their global operational frameworks through the hoisting of flags (banners) at or near the pulpits as well as within the church vicinity. Each flag represents the country to which the church has branched out or where there is some form of religious affiliation, or with whom they already established ecumenical relations.

More so, a major tendency of the African Christianity towards globalization is evident in local groups embarking on missionary task to propagate their religious message to the wider world. These churches have established hundreds of branches

(parishes) in Europe aside from the thousands of branches in Africa. Their target audience in the new context is both Africans and non-Africans alike. Adogame (2002) largely corroborated the above when he aptly noted that the motivations for joining or engaging in intra-religious networks is complex and varies from one individual or group to another. Essentially, most of the African Christian communities will locate this phenomenon as a vital strategy for global mission and evangelism, or what they popularly refer to as “mission reversed” or the “remissionisation of heathen Europe”. He further maintained that what has led to this intra-religious engagement and disengagement is not so much emanating from doctrinal differences or leadership preferences but to the quest for spiritual satisfaction, religious identity, as place where they can feel at home and not as aliens, foreigners and strangers.

The drive or tendency towards globalization can also be observed in the fact that some foreign visitors to the religious organization are always given adequate attention and in fact, instantly advised to baptize into the organization. The aim here, is to automatically convert the foreign member and in the long run, cultivate his help by ensuring he helps the organization set up a new branch in his country when he/she returns back. This is why such members are made to make pledges to be dedication to God through the organization, that is, before he/she can be attended to or he/her problems can be solve spiritually, he or she will be asked such question as “are you ready to serve God” “will you repent and work solely for God” and once she/he says “yes”, then they are unconsciously made to pledge to be committed to the religious organization.

More so, what may be referred to as miracle transfer is another tendency through which African Christianity envisage globalization. In this case, when foreign members visit the headquarter in Africa, they are given spiritual objects like holy water, holy oil, emblems of the church, stickers, and pictures of the religious leader which is hoped will help promote miraculous display in the foreign territory and by this, when miracle occurs, it will certainly attract other foreign members to the religious organization.

International crusades are other strategies towards globalization by African Christianity. Here, African Christian religious leaders who are “miracle centred preachers”, travel from one country to another to evangelize the world through miracles. In this vein, Adogame (2002) noted that one remarkable feature of most of these movements is their addition of such labels as international, world-wide, global world, to their nomenclatures thus indicating their religiously inspired and promising access to transnational networks and the wide variety of their international linkages. These portray a great deal their intent to transcend local boundaries to global ones.

Adogame (2002) noted that it was this noticeable global dispersal of these churches that perhaps, informed Ter-Haar (1998) suggestion to “re-christen them (African international churches) retaining the old initials African Independent Church but assuming a new, contemporary meaning”. Ter-Haar noted that most churches in fact, label themselves as international churches, expressing their aspiration to be part of the international world in which they believe themselves to have a universal task. To further show their aim at globalization, the African Christianity cultivate the use of modern information technology, like radio, television, internet, world wide web, face book, fax, phone etc in disseminating messages about their organizations.

African Christianity and Cultural Identity in the Diaspora

Many religious institutions were founded on universal claim and have always been worldwide in scope. In this current period of globalization, however, religions universality and globalism often take precedence over its national forms. Religion, like capitalism, or politics, is no longer firmly rooted in a particular country or legal system (Vasquez and Marquardt 2003). Levitt (2007) lending words on the transnational nature of religion stated that religion is the ultimate boundaries crosser. She therefore maintained that God needs no passport because faith traditions gives their followers symbols, rituals and stories they use to create alternative sacred landscapes, marked by holy sites, shrines and places of worships. Emphasizing the transnational nature of religion, in this paper, the voices of Vasquez and Marquardt (2003) are here adopted, who have asserted that “religion is one of the main protagonists in the process of unbinding culture from its tradition, oral referents and boundaries and in its reattachment in new space time configurations”. Individuals use religion to create new spatiotemporal arrangements and invent new mental maps with which to locate themselves within terrains that globalization is constantly changing.

Also stressing the changeability of religion in a new environment where it migrates to, Beyer (1994) using the Buddhist religion in his illustration, posited that cultural and religious consequences of “thick” contemporary globalization, with its increasing velocity portrays first that many religions have become multicentre that is not concentrated in a particular locality, which differs from their localized concentration of the past. He further explained using Buddhist ideas and practices, for instance, now moves with unprecedented speed to non-Asian countries, but it’s not simply a move from the religion’s centre to periphery, but it’s about the emergence of multiple new centres, with regionalized Buddhist interpretations and practices that are socio-culturally particularized. In the same vein, Prebish and Baumann (2002) gave their words that because the centres are constantly in communication with each other, East and West as well as old and new infuse and transform one another. These changes in the Buddhist world-view form ritual encounter between Asia and the West, represent

an example of a “profound mutual assimilation,” displaying “hybridist” all the way down.

Members of African Christianity migrate to other part of the world, places such as the West African countries, South Africa, USA and Britain. The latest impact by African Christian organization is the funding of the migration of members to other countries of the world. This is seen in their continuous sponsorship of members to Western world either for further education or to man their branches in those parts of the world. To this effect, Nigerian immigrants draw from their homeland spiritual baggage to create religious communities through which they connect socially, network relationship and remember their homeland and reinforce their cultural identity. Ogunbile (2010) lending his words on the cultural affinity of the Nigerians in foreign countries, aptly stated that “Nigerian immigrants in a multicultural environment like America infuses and injects aspects of their culture into new generation of children born in the host land and the spouses with whom they intermarry”. He further asserted that Nigerian immigrants Christians thus provide a vehicle, a spiritual vehicle of sort-through reinforcement and globalization of identity conveyed. The different ethnic groups incorporate and participate in transnational practices that embody a sense of identity that is both cultural and transnational. Ogunbile (2010) affirmed that this cultural assertiveness and definition within multicultural America provides the basis for projecting what Olupona and Gemignani (2007) identified as the ideals of cultural and religious pluralism that have created a context in which immigrants are no longer expected to assimilate to an external norm other their own.

According to Ogunbile (2010), in an intense manner, for the immigrants, the practices of the religious communities becomes a coping mechanism for creating “a home away from home” which provides a paradigm for their cultural identity. What this implies is that Nigerian churches founded in foreign countries are founded by Nigerian who have migrated to this new environment, and thus this churches becomes the assimilation and relationship grounds for Nigerians found in that environment. Therefore, membership strength is purely based on cultural affinity and identity with Nigeria.

On the basis of cultural affinity and identity in foreign environment among Nigerian religious organizations, certain new religious impressions are likely to emanate, which is our major concern in this paper, that is, to discover this new religious impressions. This new impression may be:

- (1) Incorporating, negotiating and adapting to new environments and the implications of the expressions on the immigrants as well as host communities

- (2) Nigerian immigrant churches not only create a new dimensions of spirituality but also provide a new way of redefining social capital beyond the dimension of money economy.
- (3) Adaptation of cultural diversity in the new environment also adversely influences the religious practices and belief systems.
- (4) The religious sensibility of Nigerian immigrants also contributes to the diversity of new environment where the religious organization is sited and in turn, continues to alter and shape home land religious traditions in the host land.

Ebaugh (2000) adding to the economic advancement of immigrant churches in Houston, wrote in her book ‘Religion and the New immigrants’ that since the 1970s, high rates of immigrants helped to transform Houston into a cosmopolitan city. She further said:

As in other major cities across the world, immigrants provide major resources for strengthening of the area’s economy and expanding its global reach. Hispanic and Asian immigrants bring new capital and labour to fuel the area’s economy as well as new networks to help introduce Houston’s interest abroad (p.30).

What this means is that religions of immigrants not only introduces new religious impression to the new environment but also plays the role of economic development of the host country. However, these advantages do not completely rule out the fact that there will be presence of controversies and conflicts. To this, Ebaugh (2000) emphasised that established residents sometimes raise questions about the continued commitment of new immigrants to maintaining their ethnic cultures and traditions. New immigrants sometimes demonstrate more concern for maintaining transnational ties to the home countries than for working toward assimilation into the host countries mainstream. She further explained that the very presence of new immigrant populations mean the existence of new social and cultural boundaries. This is often characterized by intergroup relations. In other cases, low income native workers see immigrant as more job competitors.

More so, immigrant’s churches are often affected by the diversity of culture found in the host land, thus, they tend to abandon their ethnic, cultural heritage and traditions. Again, immigrant church members always tend to work towards national ties than working towards assimilation to the host country which often presents difficulties in relationship of the organization which is made up of multicultural entity. More so, the presence of new social and cultural order in a host country tends to present threat which make the host hostile to immigrant. The competitions in the labour market tend

to affect the religious organization. This is why a religious organization in new environment tend to be characterised by ethnic and cultural affinity, that is, membership is according to national boundaries, that is Nigerians in a foreign country tend to belong to church founded by a Nigerian. In this vein, Ebaugh (2000) postulated that:

All religious institutions exist within environment that includes a variety of features that they cannot control but which can, nonetheless, exert significant impacts on them. Environments proved both opportunities and constraint for congregations and their members (p. 31).

Implication for Human Resource Development

Communities of the African religious diaspora organise themselves in such a way as to reinforce and revalidate their sense of ethnic and religious identity, ensure and maintain security, seek solidarity as well as develop survival strategies that is, ways of negotiating a way through the hazards of the European society (Adogame, 2002). This of course, helps to package human resource development for the Africans far away from home; hence survival strategy becomes an easy task.

More so, many African Christians based abroad have gone a long way in establishing schools where many African second generation (youths) in the diaspora are impacted and inculcated the knowledge of the African religion, cultural heritage. Most importantly, it is in these schools that African younger generation learn African languages especially when those languages are not spoken at home, thus, African Christianity serves as a medium through which African youth in the diaspora are resourcefully impacted African ingredient for Africa.

Again, in those African-oriented schools, opportunities are given to the most available and suitable members of the religious organization, thus, it gives room for women to occupy positions formerly meant for men, especially where there are no men to occupy such position. In this vein, women are more often than not, made teachers and preachers in those religious organization. Akintunde (2007) gave a picture of this view when he noted that Christianity was inevitably adopted with an appropriate local framework and reshaped by indigenous genius, sagacity, world view and ethos. Therefore, for such women to function effectively in their duties as teachers and preachers they are often sent on training and re-training exercises which in turns, enhances their personnel resource development.

Also, by training African indigenes to inculcate African language, cultural heritage and patterns, African Christianity helps to impact the knowledge of Africa in those in the diasporas thereby, regenerating the love towards mother land. This also encourages those overseas to contribute immensely to the socio-economic and political

development of mother land. This is why developmental strides of Africans in the diaspora in the mother nations are often heard.

Adagome (2002) observed this, using the achievement of the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) that the church has demonstrated optimism and enthusiasm towards the realization of its global vision. The church is not only concerned with the local setting but what transpires beyond it, within so called developing and developed countries. This deliberate evangelistic strategy of the CCC is only an instance of a general tendency of many African Christianity to transcend local-global terrain in their effort at transmitting their ideologies and religious messages as well as recruitment of new members. By this means, African Christianity also help to guarantee spiritual development of Africans in the diasporas which they belief is the best form of human resource development without which every man is doomed.

Conclusion

Inspite of the unprecedented problems posited by Adegome (2002), such as language barrier, loud services (hostility of neighbour), transciency of membership, administrative matter, legal status of members, cultural barriers, understanding of host welfare system, finance, weather conditions, racism, discrimination, long duration of service encountered by this African Christians in the dioasporas. The religion remains a source of identity, security and continuity of African worldview. Therefore, it allows Africans to assimilate notion of the global world view and at the same time, continue to maintain to some extent, their local traditions, values and identity. More so, African Christianity thus is the best form of human resource development in the diasporas because it enables Africans to identify with the world and gain further knowledge for competition, competency, efficiency, and effectiveness with other part of the world and at the same time, remain authentically African.

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