

The Use of Science and Technology Among Afro-Pentecostals: A Theo-Historical Perspective from the Kenyan Context

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Abstract

This research article sets out to explore the extent to which Afro-Pentecostalism, as an African Pentecostal movement, relies heavily on science and technology. It sets out on the premise that African Pentecostalism, as with the mainline churches (referring to the Roman Catholics, the Methodists, the Anglicans, the Presbyterians, the Lutherans, and the Reformed churches among others), has historically relied on science and technology since Kenya's colonial era (1895-1963) to the present moment. The 21st century has however witnessed a scientific explosion in a manner akin to the effects of the industrial revolution of 18th century Europe—that eventually spread over to the rest of the world. Through a theo-historical design, this research article has methodologically sampled some key areas that demonstrate Afro-Pentecostals' use of science and technology. Such samplings include the modern infrastructures that are by-products of the latter, industrially urbanised areas, televangelism, technological gadgets, biotechnology and environmental concerns among other areas. The findings in this research article are gathered through participant observation and an extensive review of relevant literature. Overall, it establishes that Afro-Pentecostals, like the mainline churches/missionaries, engage science and technology as a critical missiological tool, even though the former is largely mistaken with the New Religious Movements (NRMs)—whose wayward sections employ cultic and occultist trends that lead to religious dysfunctions, some of which shuns hospitals, schools and other forms of modern science and technology, and instead embrace mysticism.

Keywords: Afro-Pentecostalism; biotechnology; COVID-19; science and technology; Televangelism; urbanisation

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Introduction

Afro-Pentecostalism and/or African Pentecostalism is largely seen as the fastest growing ecclesiastical model in contrast to the five types of churches that emerged after the ground-breaking 16th century reformation in continental Europe. The five ecclesiastical models are first, the Episcopal model (Anglicans Eastern Orthodox, the Church of the East, Oriental Orthodox, some Lutherans, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, and Roman Catholics) where power revolves around the Bishop and the Congregational model where the power revolves around the congregation's Annual General Meetings. Originally, they descended from the Independent Reformed wing of the Anglo-American Puritan movement of the 17th century. As protestant churches in the Calvinist tradition, each congregation runs its own affairs autonomously and includes Quakers, Baptists, Congregational Methodist Church, Congregational churches and the Church of Christ among others. It is the members of each congregation, in the Congregation Church, who choose their respective leaders—the Deacons and Pastors. Uniquely, the Congregational churches, like some African Pentecostals employ Pauline's (Eph. 4:11) concept of the five-fold structuring in governance; where there are offices of Prophets, Apostles, Teachers, Pastors, and Evangelists (Mugambi 1995, 116–121).

The third ecclesiastical model that emerged after the 16th century reformation is the Presbyterian model of church governance (refers to the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church (AEPC), Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, the Presbyterian Church in America, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA) among others). In turn, Presbyterianism is the church model that utilises a conciliar method of governing; a phenomenon where Church Elders and the Ordained Clergy govern together as a team, hence the power of church elders is strongly felt through the assemblies of presbyters (elders). The fourth model is the Pentecostal model (the Full Gospel Churches, the Redeemed, Outreach, Assemblies and others), a model which uniquely emphasises the belief in post-conversion spiritual experience, otherwise called “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” and where speaking in tongues remains a critical landmark (Woodworth 1999). The fifth major post-reformation model is charismatic churches (the African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa, the Pentecostal Evangelistic Spiritual Ministries, the Akorino Churches and others), which emphasise individual charisma as in the case of spell-binding speakers, talented singers, extraordinary gift for a teacher, and prayer-warrior who stamps his or her authority strongly and so on (Mugambi 1995, 116–121).

As a dysfunction of religion, the NRMs have also emerged as the sixth force and/or religious model in post-reformation times. ‘Dysfunction of religion,’ refers to unorthodox ways, impaired or abnormal functioning, and other ways of waywardness in our religious consciousness (Gathogo 2011a). In this understanding, dysfunctions of religion among the NRMs have hindered some from accessing Western medicine and insisted on faith healing, blocked social and economic progress, which made some

remain too dogmatic and mystical, and at worst promoted religious persecution, mass suicides and terrorism. The Kenyan religio-social market is replete with such waywardness (Gathogo 2020). In Kenya, as in the rest of the tropics, NRMs are characteristically founded by a highly authoritarian and charismatic leader and are largely cultic, occultist, saintly, mutational, eclectic, unpredictable and erratic, heretical and freely combined doctrines and practices. As an alternative spirituality, they emerge from humans' innovative-creative ability for religio-spiritual manifestation. They strive to offer spiritual meaning and social relations among their adherents, just as the conventional religious groups do. In Africa, NRMs have emerged as a response to the historically unprecedented tempos of change in all dimensions of life, ranging from socio-cultural-economic ways, environmental and religious orientations that came with the past histories of colonialism, slavery, conquests, cold war polarisations, pandemics, local and world wars, and globalisation among other areas of concern (Wagana 2022). To respond to these tempos of change, Africa's religio-social state has always found itself trying to understand the 'new normal' by appealing to NRMs as the panacea to these tests. A case in point is the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) where some NRM members in Kenya were over spiritualising the epidemic by calling for psycho-religious reforms among individuals and society, as a measure of ending the global scare. This was in response to Jeremiah's (7:3) appeal: "Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place." While forgetting that COVID-19 was not about the Kenyan transgressions or simply a Kenyan affair, some NRM leaders went on to dismiss it as a global hoax (Gathogo 2022c). Sadly, the NRMs in Kenya, as in the rest of tropical Africa where it largely poses as Afro-Pentecostal or as Charismatic churches have had to contend with the moral-ethical challenges more than other religio-social organisations noted above. A case in point is the Shakahola massacre which came to the limelight in April 2023 after the discovery that 'Pastor' Paul Mackenzie's *Good News International Ministries* had led to mass deaths through indoctrinating members in fasting to death as the best model of meeting the resurrected Christ (Theuri 2023). NRMs' general posture that makes them appear like Afro-Pentecostal outfits has constantly complicated the matter, as wayward leaderships have tended to do immeasurable harm to society. Nevertheless, NRMs, like other conventional religious bodies in Kenya have largely relied on the breakthroughs of science and technology that are prevalent in the 21st century.

At this juncture, it is critical to underline that an Afro-Pentecostal, which is the concern of this treatise, will exercise his/her spirituality by glibly intoning indecipherable utterances (glossolalia) or even express a hitherto unknown language (xenoglossy) publicly and confidently. As a blending of Pentecostalism (in its schools or categories), some elements of the other four models noted above, and African ethos of wholeness and its resultant spirituality, Afro-Pentecostalism strives to employ the 'real' gospel of Christ in the African context (Njogu 2021). The blending of various elements, and their vibrant activities, is all in their quest for "Christ and the power of his resurrection and participate in his sufferings, and [zealously seeking to] become like him" (Phil. 3:10) within the context of its respective adherents. And in striving to become "all things to

all people so that by all possible means” they “might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22), Afro-Pentecostals employ diverse methods and approaches that are visible right from the 20th century to the 21st century. As noted earlier, one critical approach is their overreliance on science and technology in their ecclesiastical discourses. This expresses itself in diverse ways; as in the cases where the use of Tele-Evangelism that involves sermon deliveries via Satellite Television Stations, and through Radio services, among other activities, becomes the *modus operandi* (Achunike 2004). Besides Tele-Evangelism, this research article will demonstrate the use of science and technology among Afro-Pentecostals by looking at good infrastructures, genetically modified foods (GMOs), urbanisation, technological gadgets, environmental concern, and through African indigenous knowledge among other sampled cases across historical times.

Conceptual Clarifications

Historically, the religio-science debate has been in the global scene from time immemorial. While African indigenous knowledge and the practice of medicine has been the norm in ancient Africa and was also relevant in the era of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), Western Christianity, as was introduced in Africa through the 19th and 20th century missionary enterprises also displays its heavy reliance on science and technology in equal measure. In the era of the European missionary explosion, heavy reliance on science and technology was evident through Western education that encouraged technical education and the resultant courses such as artisans, nursing careers, building constructions, new farming techniques, electrical appliances and so on (Gathogo 2021). Indeed, the use of slates, mode of counting, methodology in algebra, and the magic of writing and reading among other sciences clearly epitomised Western science. As the missionaries used Lanterns, Gramophones, and Public Address Systems, and led in installing printing machines for Bible translations (Nida 1964), the use of technology, at least at its basic level, was evident. Virtually, the missionaries’ four-fold ministry, which involved health training, academic training, evangelical training, and Artisan training (Nthamburi 1982, Nthamburi 1995, Gathogo 2009), was a clear display of Western science and religion working as Siamese twins and was primarily set to address human needs in concrete terms.

Further, there are cases where the 19th and 20th century European missionaries promoted the breakthroughs of the Industrial Revolution that had far-reaching effects beyond Europe. Such included the use of machines, as in the case of training Christians to do ‘modern’ farming via tractors rather than through indigenous farming methods (Nthamburi 1982). As a post-industrial revolution phenomenon, the European missionaries would advocate migrations to concentrated para-urban areas, as opposed to scattered villages that existed. Such para-urban areas would eventually ease their activities, travels, and risks in the then-forested Africa, where wild animals and other dangers would be beckoning. Since the 1920s, the Anglican Archdeacon, Walter Edwin Owen (1878-1945), led the park, as he:

founded the Kavirondo Taxpayers' Welfare Association (1922) to teach Africans how to run their own affairs by utilising the western science and/or breakthroughs of the Industrial Revolution. Teaching how economic development actually takes place, Archdeacon Owen introduced ploughs, watermills, new crops, and bookkeeping as the secret of planned development (Barrett 1998, 1).

Equally, African indigenous religion demonstrated its heavy reliance on science and technology through industries such as clay-manufactured pots, bronze casting, leather tanning, cloth weaving, textile making, and aluminium metal scraps among others. Besides this, blacksmithing, brewing, iron smelting, arts and crafts, and carding and weaving were also part and parcel of indigenous industries (Kenyatta 1938).

In reference to East Africa, where Kenya is a part, Paskas Wagana (2022, 116–117) demonstrates how indigenous knowledge systems, especially in reference to general science and technology, are still relevant in the 21st century Africa. In other words, they are still as useful as they were in ancient times. In regard to how Tanzania responded to COVID-19, for example, Wagana (2022, 116) says, thus:

In addition to measures outlined in the national guidelines for COVID-19 prevention, the Ministry of Health in Tanzania encouraged the use of traditional medicine to arrest COVID-19 symptoms as the disease had, by then, neither cure nor vaccine. This advice was warmly welcomed and easily adopted by the public as the practice of using local herbs for treatment of various diseases is widely in use in Tanzania.

Wagana (2022, 117) goes on to explain further that:

The government approval made it public and even more popular. The use of local herbs was further promoted by herbalists and other people who shared the procedures of blending the herbs to obtain appropriate dosages through the social media. Tanzania [Africa] is extraordinarily rich in local herbs and is cheaply available in almost every place around the country. Lemon, ginger, chilly, pepper, neem tree leaves are boiled and mixed with honey to obtain a syrup for treatment. Sometimes same materials are boiled and patients incubate themselves from the steam produced thereof.

Historically, the use of science and technology among religious practitioners has had mixed fortunes. At times, it has aided in spreading pandemics further, as well as standing out as a critical vehicle of prevention and creating awareness. While offering the asset of trust, religion (afro-Pentecostalism or any other religious model) has a huge potential in providing trusted messages of caution, and providing the way forward when handling matters that are science-oriented (Wagana 2022). The family planning method program is one sample where a religious role is significant in driving a trusted message home. Positively, adhering to the voices of reason would eventually help the members of a given religious community to get out of ambiguous religio-medical cases which may need some guidance from a bigger sister or brother (leader). This is significant in cases where members' failure to adhere to the dictates of science and technology would automatically reduce them to slaves of the natural forces. Conversely, religion can also

be an impediment especially when cultism and occultist tendencies take hold of it. In such NRMs, a leader can be poorly educated and unable to conceptualise complicated religio-science issues, and conversely, mislead his or her oblivious adherents. Further, there are confirmed cases where Churches and Mosques were seen as bleeding points for COVID-19, at least during its initial stages in early 2020. For instance, for a religious pilgrim, in Iran, several COVID-19 cases erupted in the Muslim holy sites of Qom and Mashhad in 2020, “leading to the sudden closure of these religious centres in order to contain the outbreak” (Wagana 2022, 122; Zamirirad 2020). Further, “similar cases were observed in South Korea, where the origin of many cases of COVID-19 is associated with the Shincheonji Church of Jesus” (Wagana 2022, 122; Barmania and Reiss 2020).

Being on a continent where religious leaders are consulted during times of calamities, makes the heavy reliance on science and technology a significant matter. Indeed, religious leadership will always be consulted to interpret diverse aspects of science and technology in light of religious creeds, dogma, rituals, beliefs, and practices of a given community (Mbiti 1969). With religious leaders being commonly viewed as the “safe pair of hands” amidst huge mistrust in society, they have always had cardinal duties of providing moral-ethical guidance and directions to their adherents, who are sometimes ignorant of some global events. If we view leaders of the mainline religious institutions (afro-Pentecostals inclusive) in the 21st century as the de-facto cream of modern society, their word is trusted (and is the ‘law’ in some cases). Hence, their views on genetically modified foods (GMOs), COVID-19, HIV and AIDS, Ebola and other religio-science matters facing society, are methodologically sampled in order to understand the science-religion debate from the perspectives of the Afro-Pentecostals in Kenya. In view of this, Wagana (2022, 119) goes on to say,

There are many instances in Africa where religion was used to increase awareness of infectious diseases, reduce stigmatization, and promote safe health behaviours. For example, Muslim and Christian religious leaders were engaged in the fight against Ebola epidemic in West Africa as Ebola infections were largely due to exposure during funerals and burials. A similar practice was done in Tanzania during the COVID-19 pandemic where religious leaders were part of a national program for community engagement against the transmission of the virus.

Good Infrastructures

To an extent, a semblance of Afro-Pentecostalism has been in Kenya since 1895 when an American missionary society, the African Inland Mission (AIM), entered East Africa and joined the other eight protestant societies (that is, the Gospel Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society, the United Methodist Mission, the Church of Scotland Mission, the Seventh Day Adventist, the Friends Africa Mission, and the German Lutheran Mission) (Gathogo 2022a, 4). Although the Pentecostalism Movement had not officially begun, the AIM under the stewardship of Peter Cameron Scott, renamed African Inland Church on 16 October 1971 and displayed several elements that are

visible in Afro-Pentecostalism today. This included: insistence on baptism via immersing where a believer was submerged in water and was then brought up shortly—as opposed to sprinkling of water on the head (among Anglicans, Roman Catholics and others), deep conviction and great urgency in evangelistic outreach, vibrant worship, and some elements of mystical characteristics (Njogu 2021, 107). Being seen as a Pentecostal outfit before the beginning of the Pentecostalism movement at Azusa Street, in Los Angeles, California, USA, in 1900-1901, the AIM was viewed as a unique case during the missionary era. It is no wonder that the “Pentecostal element among the AIM [had the luxury of breaking] away and formed the Gospel Missionary Society (GMS),” which later established a mission centre at Kambui, in the present day Kiambu County (Gathogo 2008, 75). With improving infrastructures and the general progression of urbanisation, holistic growth was bound to move faster, as more splits and expansions of religious societies and other social groups followed suit. In view of this, this research article treats ‘good infrastructures’ as a scientific breakthrough that took shape during the colonial days (1887–1963); and which aided socio-religious activities. The 19th and 20th European missionary societies relied heavily on it, just as Afro-Pentecostals later came to do, and the latter could be heard urging the African government to do more on infrastructural work for their own convenience as well as for the larger society. To an extent, improved infrastructures had a huge theo-social significance, as it aided in the improvement of the numbers of adherents. Ironically, these numbers saw an increase in splits and mutations, and general ‘church growth’. Certainly, church history is replete with cases of schisms and splits that were poignantly instrumental in promoting growth. For instance, a Great Schism took place on 16 July 1054 when the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius, was excommunicated from the Christian church which was headquartered in Rome, Italy (Baur 1994). The fact that it triggered two major divisions that created the Eastern Orthodox Church (headquartered in Constantinople) versus the Rome-based Roman Catholic Church, did not kill the universal church. Rather, the by-products of the Great Schism remain the largest Christian denominations globally (Baur 1994). Hence, the AIM-GMS split appears to have speeded up church growth; and in turn, the breakthroughs in science and technology midwived the process. In a fast-growing Afro-Pentecostal faith, mutations, splits and registration of more churches in Kenya have remained a common occurrence and are largely oiled partly by improved infrastructural growth.

David Barrett (1973) in the *Kenya Churches Handbook* averred that there was a group of Pentecostal aficionados in the Western part of Kenya in as early as 1910, who was roughly 10 kilometres away from where the ‘official’ founder of Pentecostalism in Kenya, Emil Danielson (1878-1965) of the Finland Free Foreign Mission (FFFM), was ministering since his entry in 1912 (Ahonen 1984, 42). Danielson’s Finland Free Foreign Mission (FFFM) mutated to the present day Full Gospel Churches of Kenya in 1949. It is most likely that, Barrett’s (1973) reference to the Pentecostal faithful, who were operating in western Kenya in as early as 1910, was referring to the activities of the Pentecostal-leaning African Inland Mission (AIC). Like other protestant missionary societies and the Roman Catholics, noted above, the Finnish Pentecostal missionaries

of 1912 relied heavily on improved infrastructures that the colonial governance had installed since 1887.

Clearly, road and railway constructions began after the coming of Sir William Mackinnon of the Imperial British East Africa (IBEA) Company, who took over East Africa on behalf of the British government, from 1887 to 1895. The completion of the Railway, from the coastal city of Mombasa to Kisumu, a distance of over 800 kilometres came out as a major breakthrough in science and technology. It benefited all the operating Christian societies, the colonial administrators, Arab and Indian traders, settler-farmers and later the emerging African elites. Afro-Pentecostalism, which emerged after the conscious and unconscious dialogue between Pentecostals and the African heritage, also benefited from these post-industrial revolutions' breakthroughs. In turn, the positive impact of the Industrial Revolution in Europe included improvements in steam engines, mass production, a rise in digital technology and general advancement in science and technology. The Industrial Revolution also witnessed the coming of printing machines in the local Kenyan and East African context. This further made it easy to print more Bibles, translate Bibles into the local African languages, provide more instructional materials, and encourage techno-science education in the schools that were established by the missionary societies. By 1945, most of the major communities had Bibles that had been produced in the local languages of the dominant African groups (Karanja 1999). Ironically, these translations to the local languages made the European missionaries 'lose' the Bible, as Africans could read and develop their own Afro-biblical hermeneutics. These hermeneutical divergences led to not just the mushrooming of African Instituted Churches, but more importantly aided the Afro-Pentecostal wave, which was more culturally friendly, noisy, and vibrant.

Besides the Uganda Railway, which demonstrated the critical role of Western science and technology, the 970 kilometres Mackinnon-Sclater road, from Mombasa to Busia, had been constructed earlier in 1890 (Henry 1973). These road networks made it easier for Pentecostal ministries, just as it did for other Christian groups and the general society. Certainly, the Mackinnon-Sclater Road was a major improvement from the Arab slave trade routes that had been established across the decades. This critical road from the Indian Ocean (Mombasa) to the present-day Uganda border (Busia) was constructed by an Australian Engineer, George Wilson, three years before Mackinnon, who was one of the people who funded it, died in 1893 (Ochieng' and Maxon 1992). Besides the road transport that was slower, the Uganda Railway not only saw the influx of European missionaries, tourists, and potential traders, it also saw the influx of European settlers and farmers from South Africa in 1904. The latter came to occupy what became the White Highlands (Ochieng' and Maxon 1992). Pentecostal leadership, like other religious societies and the European and settlers farmers, could utilise the faster railway services to fast-track their respective areas. In particular, the former could receive relevant supplies such as Bibles, commentaries, and dictionaries among others from the seaport of Mombasa. Such supplies from the coastal towns that aided ecclesiastical activities would be taken to the interior of Kenya (Gathogo 2023).

As noted earlier, Bible translations to the local languages, and the availability of more printed copies, opened up a clear avenue for African Biblical hermeneutics that led to African Pentecostalism (hereafter, Afro-Pentecostalism) and the emergency of African instituted churches. In particular, the good infrastructures enabled the coming of Archbishop William D. Alexander, in 1935, from South Africa who was a member of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association to aid Afro-Pentecostalism which was emerging under the cover of African Instituted Churches (AICs). Garvey's association was an African welfare group from the Americas. Nevertheless, Archbishop Alexander's coming resulted in 16 months of intensive training for ordination as priests of the church, in 1935 (Welbourn 1961). This resulted in the ordination of four youths from the present-day Kiambu and Nyeri counties. The newly ordained Africans went on to promote Afro-Pentecostalism as leaders of the African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA) and the African Orthodox Church (AOC) (Welbourn 1961). This was a major turning point in Kenya's Afro-Pentecostal ecclesiology, as African church leaderships were visibly felt. The railway and road networks, as major breakthroughs in science and technology, were critical ecclesiastical growth facilitators, as various churches were established along the roads that were constructed and the towns that mushroomed (Oliver 1952). Similarly, Afro-Pentecostal churches, in their diverse names, appear across the railway and road networks, from Mombasa to Nairobi, and from Nairobi to Kisumu city among other places. It is in their heavy reliance on powerful scientific gadgets (referred to as Public Address Systems, Gramophones, Slides, Lanterns and through printing or publishing relevant materials for efficient use) that their ministries have been enabled to grow faster in the 21st century.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

Another area that helps us to understand the Afro-Pentecostal's use of science and technology is by surveying Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). In Kenya, the Mwai Kibaki-led government, which lasted from 30 December 2002 to 9 April 2013 when the latter handed over to President Uhuru Kenyatta, banned Genetically Modified Organisms (hereafter, GMOs) in November 2012 (Waweru 2017). In banning of GMOs, crops, importation and cultivation, the decision was prompted by a 2012 scientific study from French Scientist, Gilles-Eric Seralini, which associated GMOs with cancer in Rats. According to Eric Korir (in Langat 2022, 1), a Principal Biosafety Officer at the National Biosafety Authority (hereafter, NBA), Kenya had been importing genetically modified Maize prior to the November 2012 ban. This ban contrasted the wishes of various major food security donors globally, as GMO foods were being donated across the various hunger-prone areas of the world, Africa inclusive (Bergström 2007). It included the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (MGF) which remains a strong advocate of GMOs. MGF had recommended the cultivation of GMOs in sub-Saharan Africa despite theo-ethical concerns that it raised. Further, a World Bank (hereafter, WB) report also spoke generously about GMOs, as they "offer a powerful tool for nutritional enhancement that may save lives (Golden Rice) or help poor farmers adapt

to climate through faster integration of genes for drought and flood tolerance” (WB quoted in Langat 2022, 1).

On 3 October 2022, the government under the newly elected President Dr. William Ruto, lifted the ban on GMOs and authorised the importation and cultivation of both crops and animal feeds. By lifting the 10-year ban, the Government was informed by a report from the National Biosafety Authority (NBA), who claimed to have questioned the earlier report by the French-based Scientists’ study, Gilles-Eric Seralini. In the NBA’s view, their continued study of GMOs found that Seralini’s study was withdrawn from the *Journal of Food and Chemical Toxicology*. The National Biosafety Authority (Langat 2022, 1) also noted that the cost of GMO foods was far lower than other foods. With a drought hitting Kenya in the larger part of 2022, the NBA team were quick to advise the newly elected government to lift the ten-year ban. In view of this, the NBA (in Langat 2022, 1) team was building on the success of other African countries that were growing GMOs by 2022. They included Ghana, Egypt, Niger, Rwanda, Nigeria, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Mozambique, and Zambia. Besides this, the NBA had considered the view that “the leading GMO crops under consideration across different countries (Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana and others) [were]: GM cotton (tolerant to African bollworm), GM cassava (resistant to cassava brown streak disease) and GM maize (resistant to stem borer) among many more” (Oloo 2022, 1) – which also displayed some of its unpublicised advantages. Besides this, the NBA noted that the Kenyan government had previously given the go-ahead for the commercialisation of GMO Cotton in 2019 (Oloo 2022). This came after a two-season trial of growing it. As a result, the concerned farmers had expressed satisfaction with the good yield from the Cotton that came from this biotechnology even though the situation had been compounded by the drought that had invaded the sampling area. In view of this, the NBA viewed GM technology as “fast-maturing, disease-resistant crops, and get better yields” (Langat 2022, 1). Thus, such observations led the NBA team to advise the government to reconsider the decision made earlier.

In response to the lifting of the GMO ban, most Afro-Pentecostal outfits reacted angrily by opposing the whole idea of biotechnology. For instance, on 21 November 2022, Archbishop Erastus Njoroge, the County Director of the Kenya National Congress of Pentecostal Churches opposed the move on the grounds that there was “no sensible reason” for importation, growth or consumption (Isagale and Wairimu 2022, 1). Besides urging the government to “instead boost agriculture through irrigation and provide affordable farm inputs,” which explained that they were not opposed to science and technology in general. Rather, Afro-Pentecostals feared that the process had not been fully consultative among Kenyan “scientists and professionals” (Isagale and Wairimu 2022, 1). Other proposals that they made to the government included investing more in water provision technology so as to address food security, allow scientists to do further research, ensure public participation, and insist that the government had to buy foods from local farmers before imports were made. In a sense, they failed to insist on theological implications of GMOs, as was widely expected of moral leaders, during their

own communique on September 13, 2022. They also failed to appreciate that the government had already subsidised the costs of fertilisers and other farm inputs, in its bid to address food security (Isagale and Wairimu 2022). As good shepherds of their flock, theirs was meant to ensure their adherents got the best from science and technology rather than oppose it wholesale.

Urbanisation

To a large extent, urbanisation is a by-product of science and technology, which has been exploited by most Afro-Pentecostals in their bid to establish their ministerial activities. It is in the urban areas where there are more industries, architectural designs, clear sewage disposal systems, big malls and shops which are well computerised, that have better communication networks, organised structures and better living environments, employment opportunities, more supplies in terms of piped water, electricity, solar power and closed-circuit television (CCTV) installations, and permanent and modern forms of buildings, among other observable things in the Kenyan context. With some leading Afro-Pentecostals being urban-based, their fast growth is a by-product of the scientifically aided facilities therein. In their article, “God in the city: Pentecostalism as an urban phenomenon in Kenya,” Damaris Seleina Parsitau and Philomena Njeri Mwaura (2010, 96), have analysed how the charismatic Pentecostal Christianity has become “a prominent feature of the country’s religious and political landscape” and now “commands a massive following, especially in the urban Kenya.” They admit that even though the Afro-Pentecostal movement, or Pentecostalism in general, is largely urban-based, it is penetrating the rural areas and villages. In my view, this could be due to the 2010 constitution that regionalised the country into 47 devolved county governments. The coming of the 47 counties was accompanied by devolved funding, and a tendency to ‘urbanise’ and upgrade the rural areas with the devolved resources. Since 2013 when the new constitution was fully implemented, after the year’s general elections, a competitive spirit across Kenya’s territorial space, that promotes faster socio-religious growth and urbanisation, has been witnessed immensely (Gathogo 2013a).

Parsitau and Mwaura (2010, 96) agree with Harvey Cox (1996) who wrote that Pentecostalism, in general, represents the modern world of science and technology or the contemporary world. Cox (1996) went on to pontificate that the movement would be more influential in the 21st century. In sampling the Deliverance Church of Kenya (hereafter, DCK), Parsitau and Mwaura (2010, 96) contend that it is an urban Pentecostal outfit and a major player in Afro-Pentecostal ecclesiology. The church, which was registered in Kenya in 1970, has spread fast across Kenya and the Diaspora. Its engagement with science and technology has certainly aided this growth. As they further say about the DCK, “the church also has a website with information on its history, mission, teachings, ethos and activities” (Parsitau and Mwaura 2010, 97). It also publishes “a variety of newsletters, magazines and records, the perusal of which gave us a considerable amount of information about DCK.” Other information “was obtained

from the Church's numerous Television programmes, videotapes, audiotapes, CDs and other electronic media" (Parsitau and Mwaura 2010, 96). Their views resonate with Kwabena Asamoah-Gadu (2007, 389) who generalises the matter by stressing that Pentecostals reflect or display "a modern outlook and portray an international image." He further says that they "have a special attraction for Africa's upward mobile youth, a lay-oriented leadership, ecclesiastical office based on a person's charismatic gifting, innovative use of modern media technologies ..." (Asamoah-Gyadu 2007, 392). From a participant observation in the Mombasa City of Kenya, one finds an emerging society that has rediscovered science and technology as inescapable for those who want to succeed in their respective ventures. This passion to reach out by all scientific and technological means possible, among the Afro-Pentecostals, reminisces the words of the writer of the book of Hebrews (2:3) who remarked, "How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him." Similarly, the breakthroughs of science and technology, like salvation, are inescapable for the Afro-Pentecostals who have an urgent task to remake the world in light of the Gospel. In view of this, Afro-Pentecostals in the urban areas of Kenya have made it their business to occupy any urban space, as in the case of renting shops and opening up churches or ministries, cinema halls, night worship clubs, schools, hospitals and dispensaries, stadiums, gardens, recreation centres, theatres, incomplete buildings, and the unrestricted buildings, bus parks and bus-preaching forums where they sometimes ask for collections (Parsitau and Mwaura 2010).

In post-COVID-19 Kenya, Afro-Pentecostals in both rural and urban churches have utilised science and technology through employing online services, and live Facebook worship services, and have improved on technological gadgets in order to advance voice projections, songs, dance and other spiritual-related activities. At the initial stages, most Afro-Pentecostals followed the Ministry of Health's requirements that at times, demanded closure, use of hand wash with soap and other detergents, keeping a distance from one another, controlling church attendance and ensuring smaller and/or manageable numbers, and suspending the Holy Eucharist among other requirements that were in continuum with other requirements of World Health Organisation (WHO) (Gathogo 2022c). There were limited cases where some wayward Afro-Pentecostal leaders insisted on COVID-19 as a global hoax and as a pandemic that would not touch the 'Holy Ones' at all. They would use biblical texts (as in the case of Jeremiah 7) and insist that the reformed ones would not be hurt by the pandemic (Gathogo 2022c). Viewing global calamity as a mere punishment for the sinful people meant that there were pockets of Afro-Pentecostals who did not play to the rhythms of science and technology. Like other Christians, Protestants and Catholics, Afro-Pentecostal adherents would appeal to the African indigenous knowledge systems as the situation demanded.

Technological Gadgets and Televangelism

Afro-Pentecostal's engagement with science and technology is clearly visible, in both rural and urban Kenya. This was evidentially seen when we consider several pointers to this. First, their powerful loudspeakers that invite people to worship and church services in general, which compares to the Muslims summoning worshippers to the Mosque (*Adhan*) for obligatory (*fard*) prayer (*salah*). In such scenarios, their physical presence is felt albeit with measured accusations of voice pollution in crowded suburbs. Further,

Characteristically, [Afro]-Pentecostal churches are exuberant in their mode of worship – a phenomenon, which is spiced by lively dancing, sophisticated music gadgets with melodies akin to contemporary secular music ... Sometimes, themes of leading open air meetings or crusades are put on bill boards; and may read: “Signs and wonders crusade”, “Come for your miracle”, “Come for your healing”, “Come for your financial breakthrough”, “All your physical needs will be prayed for”, among others. Sometimes, a person moves around the city [or any other urbanized or peri-urban area] announcing an impending healing or breakthrough crusade atop a vehicle where powerful public address system gadgets are mounted (Gathogo 2011b, 141).

In regard to the Parklands Baptist Church (hereafter PBC) of Nairobi city, Kenya, Loreen Maseno and Kang'asia Mamati (2021, 4) have expressed the view that the “church boasts of having a dynamic, tech-savvy youths” in the congregation, a fact that gives confidence in their bid to achieve their Vision for 2040. Likewise, there is widespread use of techno-savvy youths in most of the leading Afro-Pentecostal outfits in Kenya, as in the case of -

Mombasa Pentecostal Churches (MPC), Deliverance Church of Kenya (DCK), Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM-Nairobi), Jesus Celebration Centre (JCC-Mombasa), Neno Evangelism Ministries, The Happy Churches, Faith Evangelistic Ministries, Jubilee Christian Centre (JCC-Nairobi) and Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM-Nairobi), and the Winners Chapel International Ministries, among others (Gathogo 2011b, 134).

who aids their fast growth, as it equally becomes an evangelistic bait that attracts more youths. In the researcher's deductions after a participant observation, appearing ‘modern’ is in itself a positive tag, as churches seen to rely heavily on science and technology are largely seen to attract youth and students. Equally, adults who identify with the ‘noisy’ Afro-Pentecostalism as the ideal churches of Africa would equally troop there for socio-spiritual nourishments. In my observation in the last 20 years (from 2003 to 2023), there are cases where parents have followed up their adolescent's sons and daughters right into the Afro-Pentecostal outfits with the sole aim of reaching out to them in their bid to stop them from ‘getting lost’ in joining the ‘noisy’ Afro-Pentecostal outfits. Such parents have tended to shift their allegiance to the Afro-Pentecostal faith instead and eventually fail to return to the so-called mainline churches (refer to the Roman Catholics, Presbyterian, Methodist, Reformed, Anglicans, and Lutherans among other ‘missionary’ churches) (Karanja 1999). In other words, such cases are prevalent as parents get attracted by the polished use of science and technology. Thus, the use of

scientific gadgets –slides, computers, and wall screens - has historically attracted both youths and adults, almost in equal measure. Such engagements with science and technology have largely made Afro-Pentecostalism to be the fastest-growing ecclesiastical outfit in the 21st century Kenya, with almost 40% of the population. Despite being accused of Sheep stealing by the mainline churches, Afro-Pentecostalism cannot own up to such an accusation, as the Great Commission (Mat. 28:17-20) did not set restrictions. Thus, the command to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Mat. 28:19) does not draw clear boundaries and/or limitations for mission outreach; and indeed, no human being should be excused for his/her unskillfulness or ineptitude for that matter. In this understanding, an ecclesiastical leader who cannot fathom or appraise the contribution of science and technology in the 21st century has to give way; as indeed, history is never hopeless, as it always produces leaders fit for every generation.

Regarding Televangelism, as a major outcome of science and technology, Afro-Pentecostals have historically utilised it to engage a broader constituency, and eventually market their ‘project.’ In the case of Bishop Mark Kariuki of the Deliverance Church of Kenya (DCK), he had established “Celebration Time” a television programme in the early 1990s. In a televised sermon, thematically on: “Triumphant in all Areas” on 19 August 2007, he said:

Joseph of Arimathea was rich. God wants you to be worldly so he can establish his covenant. We were told, “Be poor and go to heaven.” That’s wrong theology. We were taught the poorer you are the better. [But] I need to be rich and go to heaven. I want to be rich. We are preparing millionaires here. Our vehicles are coming in a big way. God has decided to bless you, lift you up, [and] change your status (Gifford 2009, 131).

In view of this, Mokaya (2015, 5) has expressed the view that the use of modern technology has “seen television, radio, and internet [being] used as a medium of reaching many people and achieving these religious roles.” In Kenya,

Some of the churches that use televangelism include Jubilee Christian Church (JCC), Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM), Jesus Is the Answer Ministries (JIAM), Maximum Miracle Centre (MMC, under Bishop Pius Muiro) [Neno Evangelism Church under Apostle James Maina Ng’ang’a, Around the Global Church under Bishop Francis Musili, Jesus House of Praise under Bishop Magambo, Jesus Teaching Ministry under Bishop Peter Manyuru, Christian Seekers Fellowship under Apostle John Kimani William, and non-Pentecostals also have the Kirk TV of the Presbyterians, the Pillar TV of Kirinyaga Anglican Diocese, and Radio stations as well], and House of Grace among others. In Kenya Television programming associated with religion is largely unregulated as the media is self-regulated. However, with televangelism being viewed as a conduit for commercial exploitation, entertainment and shallow theology, the public may potentially be subjects of exploitation and false religion (Mokaya 2015, 7).

While the theological content of the televised sermons is subject to interpretation, some Afro-Pentecostal leaderships have nevertheless utilised televangelism to remain at the top of things. Others have utilised Radios, printed church magazines where the Bishop

or Pastor's 'inspired' words are published among other engagements with science and technology (Gifford 2009). For Afro-Pentecostals who were previously denounced "theological training as nothing but secularisation of the church and insisted on the Holy Spirit as the trainer of the pastors (classical Pentecostals)" one can easily understand this 'about-turn' (Gathogo 2022b, 8) as driven by the silent embrace of science and technology as a significant partner in pushing their discourses in the 21st century.

Environmental Concern

In their article "An Appraisal of the Pentecostal Eco-theology and Environmental Consciousness among Youths in Parklands Baptist Church, Kenya," Maseno and Mamati (2021) have singled out Parklands Baptist Church (hereafter PBC) for its critical role in eco-theology. This is clearly seen in their Pastors' sermons and the environmental consciousness that is generally undertaken across the board, and which is also seen among the rank-and-file of her membership. In particular, they have cited a Pastor who preached from Zechariah 10 and went on to urge the care for the environment as a religio-spiritual duty. In view of this, the eco-friendly Assistant Pastor said on 8 January 2017:

Let me give you one verse Zechariah 10:1 especially for the farmers right now. Zechariah 10:1 is an interesting verse for them. And we shall be praying for rain. This is what the bible says: Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field. So, I want to declare this, for those farmers who are listening to me right now in Jesus name, may the Lord give you rain ... (Maseno and Mamati 2021, 4).

A similar eco-theological sermon was delivered in the same Parklands church, Nairobi, on 17 January 2017:

As we lift our hands to God, may we together ask for rain because God is the rainmaker and the streams of God are full of water. My God, we pray very quickly that may you send rain in the name of Jesus because you are able. My God, may you fill our dams again, may you fill our rivers again. May you fill our farms again with water. May we see green everywhere all over this country. Lord, we ask for rain today and we know you hear us and will answer us (Maseno and Mamati 2021, 5).

In appreciating that care for Mother Earth is a religio-scientific duty (Ps. 24:1), we underline the critical role of preserving Kenya's urban areas, a phenomenon where sewage disposals and other forms of waste management have been going down the drain. Like other rivers in sub-Saharan Africa, the Nairobi River "is facing serious water pollution problems due to increased discharge of industrial, commercial and domestic effluents into the river system" (Kinyanjui 2011, iv). In research that was conducted from October 2005 to March 2006, it was established that,

Diversity of benthic organisms in Naivasha, Kamukunji, Mwiki and Ruai sites was low and was mostly dominated by pollution-tolerant species from the orders Diptera,

Oligochaeta and Hirudinea. Ruai station had the highest number of algae and those collected were 947 in total while the relatively clean water at Ondiri Swamp had the least number of 100 organisms. The increased presence of algae in the river was also an indicator of severe pollution (Kinyanjui 2011, iv).

Despite the presence of vibrant Afro-Pentecostal Churches, the environmental theme has not featured prominently, as it ought to, in their socio-ecclesial discourses, in as far as this research article has gathered. The care for the eco-system is a key driver to any spirituality of a people in all conventional world religions; all of which subscribe to the Golden Rule of all Religions: “Do unto others what you would have them do unto you” (Gathogo 2013b, 11). While the aphorism that cuts across all religions of the world (refer to Jainism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Rastafarians, Confucianism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Sikhism and others), appears too anthropocentric, it also refers to the entire cosmos, as all our lives are endangered when we ignore one aspect of the universe. Certainly, hurting Mother Earth translates to hurting the entire cosmos; and as St. Paul tells Romans (8:22), “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” The pollution in the Nairobi River, as a matter of socio-ecclesial shame, reached its climax on 17 November 2022 when Kenya’s Deputy President, Hon. Rigathi Gachagua, met 25 United Nations agencies and informed them that “the government is putting in efforts to clean [up the] Nairobi River which has been neglected for long” (Wangui 2022, 1). With a youthful following, Afro-Pentecostals would be the best placed to lead in environmental consciousness, keeping it green—and in collaboration with County governments convert recreational spaces as fellowship zones. Clearly, this is not a mere Nairobi County challenge, but largely a Kenyan urban test as participant observation will attest to this. Sadly, as Maseno and Mamati (2021, 2–3) have noted,

Nairobi, Kenya, like other African cities, has seen the concentration of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches more than double since the 1970s ... In some Pentecostal churches in Nairobi, the leadership has shown little concern for environmental issues. Maseno (2017) in a sample of Sunday sermons from three Pentecostal churches in Nairobi, namely, Jesus is Alive Ministries (JIAM), Faith Evangelistic Ministry (FEM), and Parklands Baptist Church (PBC) noted that it is only PBC that showed concern to environmental issues. The other two churches in the study were primarily concerned with the great commission of evangelizing.

Conclusion

The research article began by underlining the fact that Afro-Pentecostalism and/or African Pentecostalism is the fastest-growing ecclesiastical model that is worth our attention, and deserves a critical examination, from a theo-historical perspective. It went on to draw its conceptual clarifications and established that the Religio-Science debate is not just a matter of Afro-Pentecostals of the 20th and the 21st centuries. Rather, it has been part and parcel of the global scene from time immemorial. African indigenous knowledge has been displayed as both ancient and modern, as its relevance in the era of

COVID-19 was felt, especially in the 21st century, Kenya and Africa at large. While putting more emphasis on Western science and technology, Afro-Pentecostals have utilised it as bait for the youths who would prefer well-computerised churches, use of slides, techno-fantasies with mystical leanings, digital devices, consumer electronics, iPhones, twitters, WhatsApp, emails, smartphones, Facebook reunions, Google Meet communications, piano accordions, Bible printing machines and translations, Lanterns, Gramophones, and effective Public Address Systems among other techno-science gadgets. The place of televangelism among Afro-Pentecostals has also been underlined as a critical way of their engagements with science and technology. Training in health, academia, evangelism, and for the Artisans is also a progression of science, though this was largely seen among non-Afro-Pentecostal Churches. The challenge however is the emergency of the NRMs—a section of which is cultic and embraces occultist tendencies despite posing as Afro-Pentecostal outfits in diverse aspects. In showcasing Nairobi County, it has been noted that Afro-Pentecostalism has ignored environmental concerns—and instead concentrated on the Great Commission (Mat 28–17–20), as evangelistic outreach has been viewed as their core mandate. While environmental concern is a central issue in our general survival, neglecting or downplaying such a weighty matter amounts to a serious miscarriage of the natural flow of things and against common decency.

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