

GLOBALIZATION AND THE DYNAMISM OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN THE DEEPER LIFE BIBLE CHURCH, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper is motivated by the recent changes in Deeper Life Bible Church, which are attributable to globalization. Deeper Life Bible Church came into existence in the 1970s when Pentecostal movements were still finding their strongholds in Nigeria. From the beginning of the existence of the church, it has experienced oppositions due to its teachings and practices which includes; holiness, restitution, marriage rites, Christian dressing, burial rites, the use of modern technologies, forms of music, ecumenism, and politics and so on. However, there is a considerable paradigm shift from the initial strict orthodoxy of the church to more modern approaches to these issues and life generally. The paper adopted primary and secondary methods of the qualitative research approach for the collection of data while the phenomenological approach was adopted for data analyses. The paper discovered that globalization has so imprinted on the religious practices of the church especially in the area of mode of evangelism, social media handles, collaboration with government and participation in partisan politics, life style, dressing and attitudes toward other religious groups.

Keywords: Deeper Life Bible Church, Globalization, Nigeria

Introduction

Deeper Life Bible Church also known as Deeper Life Christian Ministry is a Pentecostal denomination which began in 1973 at Lagos state. The Church took its root from the teachings of John Wesley, Charles Finney and Charles Spurgeon, who were England's great 18th century preachers. The founder, W.F. Kumuyi, is known as the defender of faith and his movement was precipitated by the Bible study he held with Students Christian Movement, Scripture Union and The Christian Union while he was serving as a mathematics lecturer at the University of Lagos. The Bible study group organized its first

retreat in 1975, at Akoka, Lagos metropolis. Expectedly the news of the outcome of the meeting went viral and people from Lagos and outside started trooping in to the Bible study. This made Kumuyi to start travelling to different states, holding programmes and establishing Churches through the effort of committed members who became his initial followers after the programmes. As Kumuyi's quest to reach human race persist, he incorporated the women, children, youth, campus and adult ministry for effectiveness and proper administration. In 1975, he resigned from his lecturing job having heard the call of God for his life and the need to go into full time ministry.

Deeper life Bible Church emerged from the background of dogmatic orthodoxy where believers have to struggle with the practicality of the scripture in their daily lifestyles. The call for holiness through the "apostolic" voice of Kumuyi from the Ivory Tower of the University of Lagos sounded like John in the wilderness and people came to him asking what they shall do. Deeper life ministry has successfully taken the gospel message to the nooks and crannies of Nigeria with several million memberships, a mega Church with branches in several countries of Africa, Europe, USA, Asia, Indian Ocean, to mention a few (DLCF Online, 2011). The Church can be said unblinkingly to be one of the indigenous Churches in Africa with the fastest growth and immense contribution to the growth and development of Christianity in Africa and the world at large (Babalola & Adewale, 1988).

After he founded the Church in Lagos, Kumuyi began a movement of national revival, a rebirth of righteous ethical values and this recorded a tremendous impact on Pentecostal movements in Nigeria, remarkably changing the narratives about Church life in Africa (Alan, 1990). Although before the Nigerian/Biafran war, Christianity has been in existence and there was a wave of revival, however, Kumuyi stormed the scene when Nigeria was experiencing the aftermath of the war and there was tension and hopelessness among the people who bore the full blunt of the war. Also at that time, there was moral debasement and socio-economic deprivation across the country, so there was need for redemption and hope.

Kumuyi enacted stringent rules, beliefs and practices which proved unbending, but with the advent of globalization, there has been great paradigm shift from most of these beliefs and practices which some of its members have begun to antagonize. To Kumuyi, it is a shift for the best but some of his followers are of the opinion that it is a drift from its foundation. This work was therefore conceived to identify those areas of change in the religious practices of Deeper Life Church with view to having a sociological reflection of changes in relation to its positivity and sustainability.

Some Religious Practices of Deeper Life Bible Church

The emergence of Deeper Life Bible Church is purely a product of the evangelistic work of W.F. Kumuyi and as such, its practices are fully entrenched in the lifestyle, teaching and preaching its founder. The lifestyles of the members are heavily influenced by the doctrines of the Church and that of the founder, which even the non-members can easily point out. The Church is known for their strict doctrine that made them different from other Pentecostal Churches. Over the years, the Church doctrine has been questioned several times that led to the removal of some of the church's strict stands. Such practices include:

Marriage rites

Kumuyi laid emphasis on the need for knowing and doing the will of God in marriage based on his teaching on the spirituality of marriage which he insisted should not be treated with levity or carnality. According to the structure of the Church, there is a committee for marriage which comprises of selected members both male and female. The procedures for marriage begins when a member sees the will of God in marriage or find someone he wants to spend the rest of his life with, he meets with his pastor who in turn gives him a letter to the Church marriage committee. The committee takes him through a question and answer session to ensure he is in the right part, and then they will invite the sister if she is a member of the Church with the permission of her pastor and both of them would be ask to go for medical test. The test result will be viewed by the marriage committee and if they are compatible he would be given the permission to propose. After which he will go for parental consent, if approval is granted then he commences his courtship which is to last for three months, six months or nine months maximum. After the courtship, a date will be fixed and the marriage organized in line with the laws of the Church, with strict supervision of the committee.

Burial Rites

The Church has some strange practices towards the death of members. A member who died in the house of a herbalist is regarded as a backslider and will not be buried according to the rites of the Church. The Church does not get involved in second burial or burial ritual such as killing of waist goat which is a common practice among the people of Delta state. They believe in Christian burial and they conduct it in a most solemn manner. Members are advised not to mourn as though they have no hope but they should rejoice when a believer dies.

Holy Communion

This is one of the dreadful moments in Deeper Life Bible Church because of doggedness and rigidity against those who would take it unworthily. Most of its members do not partake in this ritual because of the sacredness they ascribe to it and the fear that is usually instilled on members that taking it while someone is unholy could lead to dire consequences, however, the problem here lies in a proper definition of being unholy by the Church.

Retreat/Leadership Strategic Congress

Over the years, this has been the modality of celebrating Easter and Christmas. Deeper life members seclude themselves during the festive period to have a personal encounter with God and to be far from distraction of any sort. The Leadership congress is held every first week of January for leaders in the church. It must be noted that this practice has over the years severed relationships between members and other members of their families during Christian festivals. This is so as these festivals are usually earmarked for family meetings and other related community development matters. This has been variously interpreted to mean that Deeper Life members shy away from their extended family and community matters.

Divorce

Deeper teaching on divorce seems to draw inference from Henry Ford's response when asked on his 50th wedding anniversary for his rule for marital bliss and longevity. He replied: "Just the same as in the automobile business, stick to one model". According to Kumuyi, Christ's teaching about divorce and remarriage is explicit. Moses gave permission for divorce, not because it was so from the beginning but due to the people's hardness of heart. Jesus insisted that in the sight of God, marriage is a lifetime relationship that should never be severed by human action. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). His perfect will is the preservation of future generations and society through lasting marriages. God will give anyone great help in sustaining a marriage relationship or reconciling estranged marriage partners. He taught that the role models are not the pop singers, film stars and fashion models who seem to change marriage partners like they change their robes. People may hold whatever views they want on divorce, but God, who is the judge of the whole world, has already spoken His mind in scriptures. He affirms that His sheep hear His voice; so, seek His face for guidance or reconciliation with your spouse and He will answer you.

The use of Modern Technology

In the early days of Deeper Life Bible Church, the gadget “Television” was tagged "the devil box" It was seen as a taboo and members of the Church were strictly warned against it. At that time, some of its members who refused to put theirs away were seen as rebellious and placed on discipline by the Church. Use of technology gadget such as video camera was prohibited. Many years ago in a camp program at a town in Delta State called Sapele, one of its leaders died during their camp programme and his children wanted a befitting burial. During the burial ceremony, the children were instructed not to use the video camera for any coverage.

Physical Appearance of Members

Wearing of expensive clothes, using of expensive cars and living in magnificent building were discouraged. Members were told to be heavenly minded because they are earth born but they are heaven bound and their moderation should be made known to all men. In the time past, Deeper Life members were almost regarded as low lives because they were associated with poverty and poor lifestyle.

Deeper Life and Ecumenism

Deeper Life Bible Church members were believed to be holier than other people so, they don't attend programmes of other Churches, neither did they participated in the coming together of all Christian groups in Nigeria for whatever reason. They equally discouraged exchange of pull pits even with fellow Pentecostal groups. However, there is a considerable adjustment in relation to some of these strict practices. These paradigm shifts have been attributed to effects of globalization on the Church as shall be discussed in the next session.

Effects of Globalization on Deeper Life Bible Church

Globalization and Evangelism

Evangelism is one of the core teachings of the Deeper Life Bible Church and the heartbeat of the founder. In the 1970s, the Church made use of print and electronic media such as audio tapes (cassettes), video tapes, projectors, tracts, and Women Mirror magazine for its evangelical outreaches. But in recent times, the Church now has various printed materials such as; Daily Manner, Sincere Milk, Devotional podcast and youth higher every day, all in hard and soft copies to be used as daily devotionals for children, youth and adults. Also, the Search the Scripture booklet that was printed quarterly now has one volume for

a year. Other printed material of the Church such as Life Magazine, Campus Pearl and the Women Mirror are now distributed globally and many other Christian denominations make use of these materials within and outside Nigeria.

The Church now has a functional website (www.dclm.org), where one can freely access and download most of the messages ranging from Sunday worship, Monday Bible study, Thursday revival hour, national Easter and December retreat programmes, etc. The Church now has branches in almost every continent of the world and ministers, pastors and leaders are been sent from Nigeria to various nations to help establish Churches and also strengthen existing ones. The messages of the general superintendent are transmitted in various languages such as French, Portuguese and Spanish, etc. and more importantly is the fact that the Church is now into televangelism thereby encouraging the use of televisions and other internet related modern technologies for evangelism.

Globalization and the Use of Social Media

Social media is user-centered online content designed in a collaborative environment where users share opinions, knowledge and information with each other (Suraweera, et al (2011). Tools used in carrying out social media contents include: blogs, social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, Twitter), photo sharing sites (i.e YouTube, Instagram etc), podcasting. YouTube as a social media allows users to upload, share and view videos. Facebook allows individuals to post videos, share interests, make connections, and form groups with similar interests. Also, some services, such as Facebook and Twitter, have a broad range of users, while others cater for specific interest. LinkedIn for instance has positioned itself as a professional networking site (McDowell & Morda, 2011). The arrival of social media has paved a social cyber environment for Deeper Life Bible Church where its members from different parts of the world connect with one another with ease regardless of geographical or distance barriers. Social media have created new dimension to activities of Deeper Life Bible Church both in developed and developing countries. The Deeper Life Bible Church uses social media handles to share information relating to their past, present and upcoming events, they used them as tools for disseminating information to members of their social community. Previous message are usually shared using YouTube and face book.

Globalization has helped to widen the operational base and scope of the Deeper Life Bible Church by bringing the gospel through social media handles for those who may not be able to attend service physically. It is a great tool and a productive means to reach out to the world online. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when many countries were on lockdown and social gatherings where prohibited, the Church took advantage of social

media in organizing its weekly services and for broadcasting the pastor's messages. Today the Church has different social media handles such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Telegram, Instagram and Zoom. Social media handles have been fully deployed by the Church. The pastor now organizes a monthly crusade term global crusade and participants all over the world get connected to the Alpha location (center for live transmission) from the beginning of the programme to the end using these social media handles. Deeper life use Twitter to tweet Sunday topics, Bible study, works and leadership meetings, they also uses YouTube to share past messages, live programmes and Instagram to share picture and fliers of Church programs and activities. The church choir from different nations across the globe now minister to the congregants during Bible study, special Sunday service, and youth impact and other Church programmes using these social media handles.

Globalization and Expansion

The advent of Globalization has widened the scope of the Deeper Life Bible Church. It has extended the outreaches of the Deeper Life Bible Church to more nations, cities, towns and villages. Deeper Life Bible Church has served her moribund of ministerial inclusion through live telecasts of her ministers conferences, crusades and professional forums received across the globe and denominational churches. The evangelistic programs have given birth to so many other branches in Nigeria and beyond. The ministry is the 3rd largest church in the world.

More so, the teachings of the Church which emphasize holiness, restitution, Christian living, patience, persistence and other moral values have provided moral education for several members of the Church and participants of its programmes and this has in turn contributed to human resource development for several nations of the world.

Globalization and Collaboration with Government and Partisan Politics

Religion plays a potential contribution to massive political participation in societal activities. In time past, it was noted that W.F. Kumuyi has been silent on issues relating to politics because it was seen as a dirty game that Christians should not delve into but, in recent times, Kumuyi has granted press interviews and has given press statement where he encouraged the Nigeria leaders to create job opportunities for its youth. Also, during one of its Global Youth programmes tagged Impact, one of the guest ministers, precisely Ibukun Awosike, advised the youth to delve into politics with good aims starting with the position of a counselor in their wards. In another press interview, Kumuyi warns politicians on not being deceived by same religion tickets, advised politicians to be careful

in the choice of a running mate for the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. He went further to emphasize the need for leaders to consult, and conduct research on vital issues facing the society.

Kumuyi had appealed to the federal government to dialogue with the members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in the interest of Nigerian students (Pulse, 2022).

Also whenever the pastor is having a crusade in any state or country, he goes for a courtesy visit to the government and traditional ruler (King) of that state, country and community with national and international media in attendance.

Today members of the Church are involved in partisan politics which was not possible in the early years of the Church. Members of the Church are now allowed to take up government appointments and also traditional positions etc. For example, the Vice Chancellor of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Prof. Charles O. Esimone, the present Tor Tiv of Benue state, John Eliagwu Odogbo are pastors of the Deeper life Bible Church.

The church now collaborates with the government for infrastructural development. Recently the Church built a bridge to decongest traffic around its national headquarters in Gbagada-Ifako area of Lagos state and handed it over to the state government. Also, the Deeper Life Church has recently established an E-library in Taraba state which was commissioned for public use on the 19th of November, 2022.

Globalization and Religious Socialization in Deeper Life Church

One of the key teachings of the founder of the Deeper Life Bible Church is that of living peaceably with all despite the differences in social or cultural background. This aspect of their teaching has been partially carried out as some of its members do not regard those of other religions and denominations as one. During the Covid19 Pandemic period, the Deeper Life Bible Church embarked on a project that caught members and non members unaware. It was made known in Vanguard newspaper that the Deeper Life Bible Church donated relief materials to Ogun State Government and also gave 50 million naira to Federal Government to support members of the society not minding the religion and denominations of the people. In support of religious tolerance, the Deeper Bible Church has championed a programme tagged Global Crusade. It is an inter-denomination program that embraced people of different religions, and denominations with different belief systems. This Global Crusade which is also known as GCK has embraced the participation of pastors and bishops from other denominations. It has also involved collaboration with CAN, PFN and ministers from Africa and outside Africa.

Socialization is one major change that the Deeper Life Bible Church has embraced in the 21st century. In time past, some of its members were seen to be anti social, and they do not celebrate or allow others to celebrate their birthdays. Borrowing a leaf from the occasion that led to John the Baptist being beheaded according to the Bible, the Deeper Life Bible Church sees birthday celebrations as ungodly. However, in 2021, some Deeper Life Bible Church youths thought it wise to celebrate the birthday of their founder so, they organized a surprise birthday which was kicked against by some of the leaders of the Church. To the surprise of its members, pastor Kumuyi appreciated the youths that celebrated him and advised the adult members to allow the youth to express themselves and bring in their ideas to bear. In one of the programmes tagged Impact Academy organized in Bori Rivers State, Kumuyi for the first time publicly announced to the youth in attendance and those connected via satellite and social media that today is the birthday of mummy Esther Kumuyi. This act came as a rude shock to many.

As a process of socialization the Deeper Life Bible Church leadership held an Independence Service and Lagos State thanksgiving service in its headquarters and a growing relationship with other spiritual and political leaders constituted a chain of salient yet critical foundations to support what was to come.

The Deeper Life Bible Church has established the Deeper Life High School with 22 branches across Nigeria and has also established the Anchor University with a campus in Lagos. The establishment of these schools has provided employment for its members and nonmembers.

Effects of Globalization on Dressing and Lifestyle of Deeper Life Members

The followers of W.F. Kumuyi were not known for luxury rather they lived a moderate life as part of their consciousness of heaven just like Lazarus in the Bible days. They were not concerned about acquiring material things which were tagged earthly possessions. But in recent times, the reverse is the case. During one of the global crusades organized in Abuja, Kumuyi arrived with a private jet and limousine car. The Church now has magnificent buildings in different states and a large auditorium in Lagos. The noticeable change in the dressing pattern of members of the Church, when compared to the 80s and '90s, has been attributed to the global coverage the church now has. Also, the idea of wearing expensive, quality clothes which was once seen as carnality has been embraced by a majority of the members.

Globalization and Music System in Deeper Life Church

The Deeper Life Bible Church female choristers have a system of dressing that includes the use of pleated skirt and turban for ministrations. This style of dressing is so rigid that any countering outfit is seen as going against the ancient landmark. At one of its global crusades held in Port Harcourt, the choristers for the first time came out in an outfit totally different from the old method, when other choristers from other states saw it; they decided to emulate the new trend. With the invitation of guest ministers from other Churches within and outside Africa, the Deeper Life Bible Church saw the need to improve on their choristers and to produce a gospel minister. Choir leaders have begun to improve their singing style and the use of instruments especially the use of some sound in the keyboard which was once tagged as worldly sound. The invitation of ministers like Dunsin Oyekan, Nathaniel Bassey, Don Moen, Pastor William McDowell and Paul Baloche, etc, has stirred the heart of the Church into mentoring young people who are talented.

Effects of Globalization on Marriage and Burial Ceremony in Deeper Life Church

The Deeper Life Bible Church has an organized pattern of marriage beginning from the period of courtship to the day of the wedding. Their process of marriage was once termed as rigid and has led to some of its members leaving the Church. During one of the messages of Pastor Kumuyi in one of the Sunday services, he charges members of the marriage committee who are in charge of marriage to place emphasis on holiness during courtship rather than placing embargo which the Bible has not instructed. In the 1970s, the minimum age for male members to get married in the Church was 30 years while that of females was 25 years. Presently the age for marriage for females is 22-23 years while for males it is 25-27 years. Another aspect of the Deeper Life Bible Church system of marriage that has changed is the aspect of dressing especially for the ladies. In the 1970s the Deeper Life ladies during their wedding specifically were not allowed to use gowns of any form. They were made to use pleated skirt and blouse with turbans. As time progressed, modernism came in, exposure to western culture was engaged and it progressed to the use of decent wedding gowns. The Deeper Life Bible Church wedding was once tagged a burial ceremony because of the quiet form it takes. But in recent times based on state and region leaders, they are allowed to use musical sets or live bands but with moderation, they are allowed to decorate the reception venue, etc. Also in the 1970s, couples were not allowed to dance into the hall, but today the reverse is the case.

In times past the Deeper Life Bible Church did not see the need for giving a glamorous burial because they believe the dead are gone and where they are buried does not matter.

But in the present day, the Church has seen the need to honor its members who died in faith and also use the burial ceremony as an avenue to preach the gospel.

Conclusion

The summary of this research presents the highlights of the findings of this study on the “Effect of Globalization on Deeper Life Bible Church”. The Deeper Life Bible Church began in the year 1970s and took her presence in the western part of Nigeria from where it has spread across many parts of the world. This research works submits that globalization has raised series of reflective changes in the life and practices of Deeper Life Church.

Some scholars are of the view that some theologians have indeed capitalized on a certain congruencies between Christianity and secularity to welcome secularization as simply unfolding of the essence of religion, while others believe that religion has served as a source of globalization greatest resistance and as a haven for those standing in opposition to its iniquitousness, yet globalization has so impacted on Deeper Life Church in particular and Christianity in general whereby the faithful grapple with the challenge of maintaining and upholding biblical Christianity on a fast track. It is intricate and contradictory to the Deeper Life Church since globalization has become inevitable. The complexity of the reality of globalization is as intensified as they are as close as our living rooms and bed rooms.

Deeper Life Bible Church’s commitment and ability to propagate the message in the context of its recipient’s culture to experience and express their faith in a way that gives them acceptability and affirms their identity as both children of God and citizens of the world is a factor that projects her prospects. Globalization has helped shaped the mindset and understanding of the people of Deeper Life Bible Church. It is safe to say that the consequences of globalization on contemporary society are not homogeneous. Globalization has diverse implications on various aspects of global society. Deeper Life Bible Church has changed by adapting to new circumstances and developing new rules and identities for itself. Moreover, religion has experienced a resurgence world widely in the form of fundamentalist movements that appear in major world religion as well as local and national religions. It has regenerated a new birth of evangelism and relationship between people of same religion and same faith. It has drawn the church from its local view to reaching the world as a globe. Globalization has helped removed misconception and self-imposed law which was instituted by local church leaders. There is revitalization and rebranding portraying the church not to embrace saints but that all should come to repentance. Despite the opposition and resistance from some church members and leaders, globalization has eaten deep into Deeper Life Bible Church and has found its root.

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