

## **INDIGENISATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN EAST AFRICA**

Indigenization also known as Africanization or enculturation refers to an attempt to allow and accept some African cultural practices and ways of life into the church institution. It hence looks at localization of the church institution to fit in the African society for easy acceptability and sustainability.

### **INDICATORS OF INDIGENIZATION OF THE CHURCH IN EAST AFRICA TODAY**

The church in East Africa has been indigenized/ Africanized/enculturised in a number of ways as shown below.

Many churches in East Africa have been led by African leaders as pastors, Bishops, Archbishops, Cardinals and Priests, replacing the white missionaries hence indigenizing the church. A good example is of Arch Bishop Cyprian Kizito Lwanga of the Catholic Church in Uganda who is an African.

There is use of African local languages in many East African churches today such as Luganda, Kiswahili, Ateso, Luo, Rutooro and Runyoro among others during worship, praising and preaching of the gospel hence Africanization of the church.

African songs such as “yesu bera nange” by Judith Babirye of Uganda among other African songs have been introduced and sang in many churches throughout East Africa hence a good indicator of how the church has been indigenized/Africanized or enculturated in East Africa today.

Christians in East Africa today worship from any place like from markets, on streets, schools, hospitals and play grounds besides the special places of worship i.e. churches thus indigenizing Christianity in East Africa.

Many Africans have been trained and deployed to serve as missionaries moving from one place to another spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ both within East Africa and the world at large. Majority priests in countries like Canada, German and Italy are Africans with some coming from East Africa hence Africanization of the church.

African names such as Opala, Blikkudebbe, Kizito, Kwaligonza, Nyakato among others are today being well accepted and recognized in East African churches. These are being used alongside Christian names obtained during baptism hence the church in East Africa being Africanized.

The church in East Africa today tolerates some African practices such as African marriage customs like payment of bride price. Churches for example in kikuyu land have even gone ahead to tolerate and accept polygamous marriages and initiation rite of circumcision among their converts hence indigenization of the such in East Africa.

The church in East Africa has also recognized any day as a day of worship besides the Sabbath days of Sunday and Saturday introduced by Christian missionaries. This was a common practice in traditional Africa where all days were considered holy days for praying to divine beings.

African offertories such as chicken, goats, cows, sheep, bananas, sugarcane cassava among other items have been accepted and offered in churches today hence an indicator of how the church in East Africa has been Africanized, indigenized or enculturated.

African traditional musical instruments such as drums, xylophones, drums and “adungu” are widely being used in many East African churches today during moments of worship and praising hence Christianity being indigenized.

Christians in East Africa also dress in African traditional wears such as bark clothes, kanzus, Gomes and mushnana while going for church services and functions such as weddings thus an indicator of how the church in East Africa has been Africanized/indigenized or enculturated.

Religious books such as Bibles and hymn books have also been translated into African local languages such as Luganda, Ateso, Madi, Runyoro, Rutooro, Lukiga, and Luo among others from foreign languages like English, French and Latin an evidence that the church has been indigenized.

There is a rapidly growing African population in East African churches today as compared to the small population of the whites. This therefore indicates that, the church in East Africa has been predominantly Africanized, indigenized or enculturated today.

Many churches in East Africa have today been founded by Africans especially the born again churches such as miracle center cathedra by pastor Robert kayanza, revived Pentecostal church by pastor Wilson Kavuma and synagogue by pastor Samuel Kakande among many others.

African arts and craft have also been used in many churches within East Africa. Statues found in church premises are for instance of black colors and made out of African materials like tress, grasses and soil as it’s the case with the biggest cross in Africa at our lady of Africa in Mbuya parish which is made from a tree grown on Ugandan soil.

Many Africans have today been canonized and thus referred to as saints to whom pilgrimages make their prayers to God especially in the catholic church. Uganda martyrs such as St. Kizito, St. Mugagga, St. Mbuga and others have been referred to as saints from Uganda whom Christians pass through while praying to God hence the church being indigenized.

Many churches in East Africa have also been named African names for instance St. Yowana, St. Kizito and St. Mbuga church among others in Uganda hence indicating indigenization, Africanization or enculturation of Christianity in East Africa today.

## **HOW THE CHURCH IN EAST AFRICA HAS NOT YET BEEN FULLY INDIGENIZED.**

It is however important to note that, though the church in East Africa has somehow been Africanized, indigenized or enculturated, there are still some European elements observed in East African churches as shown below.

Many African Christians still prefer using European, French and Latin Christian names such as Charles, Rose, Julius, Stephen, Gertrude, Helen, James, Samuel, Richard among others which are mostly given to new converts at the time of baptism thus indicating a failure to fully indigenize the church.

Most African Christians in East Africa strongly believe in one God instead of believing in African divine beings such as the ancestral spirits and small gods like Wanga, Mukasa, Musoke, Walumbe, Kitinda and Nagaddya among the Baganda hence demonstrating a failure to fully Africanize the church in East Africa.

There is a strong belief in Jesus Christ among all Christian churches in East Africans and yet he is not an African but a European thus a great failure for the church in East Africa to be purely enculturated/Africanized or indigenized.

European musical instruments such as keyboards, Guitars, microphones, jazz and pianos are today being used in almost all East African churches during worship and praising times at the expense of African musical instruments like rattles, drums, xylophones etc. hence showing a failure to indigenize the church fully.

African Christians strongly believe in the resurrection of the dead which is a foreign idea as this was unheard of in a traditional African setting where the dead were merely believed to transform into spirits and not resurrect back to physical life hence a failure to Africanize the church.

African Christians so much believes in the Bible and other holy books such as the hymn books that are written by foreigners hence demonstrating on how churches in East Africa have today failed to embrace indigenization.

Most African Christians believe and go to a specific house/building called a church for worship which is also foreign practice. These have instead ignored African holy places of worship like caves and shrines that were perceived to be god's dwelling places in a traditional African setting thus a failure to fully indigenize Christianity.

Most African Christians still celebrate foreign religious holy days such as Christmas, good Friday and Easter days an idea that came from Europe. They have since abandon celebrating African festival days such as appearance of the holy moon, victory in wars, etc. hence a failure of Africanization of Christianity.

Some churches in East Africa have continued to condemn African offertories as being unholy, satanic and unaccepted before God but instead empathize on giving of money as offertory in the church which is a foreign way of offering.

Some churches in East Africa are been funded by European countries like America, Britain, Italy and Spain among other European countries. The Watoto church in Uganda for instance is funded by pastor Gurrey Skinner a foreigner thus indicating the failure to Africanize the church fully.

Foreign languages such as English, French and Latin are still being used during church services and functions like holy matrimony, baptism, preaching among others thus indicating a failure of indigenizing Christianity in East Africa today.

Church leaders such as Reverends, priests, Bishops and Arch Bishops still embrace foreign dressing codes like ropes and gowns while presiding over church functions instead of African bark clothes. These are typically foreign dressing codes that originated from Europe hence showing a failure to fully Africanize the church.

The church in East Africa still uses of foreign objects like Rosaries, Crosses and Statues during worship. The saying of the Rosary is for instance a famous practice in the Catholic church yet it is not part of the African culture thus demonstrating a failure to enculturate the church.

The world heads of Churches such as the pope for the Catholics are whites and African Christians strongly believe in them instead of believing in their cultural leaders like medicine men, foretellers, rain makers and witch doctors thus showing a failure to Africanize the church.

Some churches in East Africa still have their headquarters in Europe and follow policies formulated from abroad. The catholic church for instance has its headquarters in Rome-Italy thus demonstrating the failure to enculturate the church in East Africa.

Most names given to new converts at the time of baptism in churches are European, French and Latin names. Such names include among others Charles, Julius, Rose, Mary, Peter, Florence, John, Robert, Doreen etc. thus clearly indicating how the church in East Africa has not been fully indigenized today.

Foreign European songs such as “Amazing grace” composed by John Newton have today dominated most churches especially the revival churches in East Africa during worship and praising moments hence indicating a failure to enculturate, indigenize or Africanize Christianity today.

Churches throughout East Africa still use Bibles and other religious books like hymn books written in foreign languages such as English, French and Latin thus a clear manifestation of failure to completely Africanize the church in the region.

Most Christian churches in East Africa have continued to emphasize on monogamy as an ideal form of marriage and yet it's a foreign practice. They have instead criticized and condemned polygamy which is an ideal form of marriage for Africans thus a failure to Africanize church today.

African Christians have also embraced a foreign initiation practice of baptism at the expense of African initiation rites of circumcision, tooth removal, body cutting and elongating the labia among others hence indicating how Christianity in East Africa has today failed to be indigenized.

## **REASONS FOR INDEGENIZATION OR AFRICANIZATION OF THE CHURCH IN EAST AFRICA.**

Right from inception, Christianity was foreign to African culture and thus conflicted with most African cultural practices and believes a factor that made it hard for Christianity to spread in East Africa as a region. This as a result, made Africanization of Christianity very inevitable (unavoidable) so as to favour its rapid spread in East Africa.

Indigenization of the church was thus necessary or inevitable (unavoidable) in East Africa because of the following reasons.

Indigenization of the church in East Africa was done so as to reduce on the misunderstandings that existed between the Missionaries and African cultures at the cost over African cultures. something that was greatly hindering the spread of Christianity besides promoting the rise of African independent churches.

Indigenization of the church was also adopted due to the increasing population of African converts in the church. This required missionaries to train more African leaders as catechists, priests and reverends so as to reduce on the shortage of labor to preach the gospel.

Indigenization of the church in East Africa was aimed at creating a clear understanding of the Christian gospel among Africans. This as a result, called for interpretation and translation of the Bible from foreign languages such as English, French and Latin into African languages like Luganda, Rutooro, Luo among others.

The church was also Africanized to reduce on the continuous divisionism in the mother churches that emerged over disrespect of African cultural practices such as polygamy, circumcision, pride wealth, sacrifices etc. This thus, forced Missionaries to incorporate some African cultural practices into Christianity to reduce further divisionism and breakaway of Africans from the catholic and Anglican churches.

The desire to ease the spread of Christianity among the people of East Africa also called for the need to Africanize the church by preaching and translating the gospel in African languages such as Luganda, Madi, Swahili, kikuyu, Runyoro, Rutooro, Luo, Ateso among other African local languages for easy understanding.

Indigenization of the church was also aimed at making Christianity acceptable to Africans who had denied the faith as being foreign with foreign cultures and beliefs. This hence called for the need to incorporate some African cultural practices like circumcision among the kikuyu, African offertories, African leadership etc. to accommodate Christianity among Africans.

Indigenization of the church in East Africa also became inevitable because many Africans had attained missionary education especially in theological schools as pastors, priests, reverends, bishops and catechists a factor that made many to be deployed in several established church institutions.

The church in East Africa was indigenized in order to promote lively worship in the church and to overcome boredom as converts would worship in the languages they understood and also use musical instruments they were familiar with. This thus explains why African languages and musical instruments were incorporated into Christianity.

The church in East Africa was also indigenized in order to solve gender sensitive issues that were created by Christianity in African societies and to respect the status of women in the church in order to attract many women into the church. This for instance led to accepting African women to take up church leadership as Priests, Bishops and Reverends.

Indigenization of the church was done with intentions of harmonizing the conflicts that existed between Europeans and Africans over church affairs such as leadership and wealth in order to promote the spread of Christianity. The conflict over church leadership was for instance resolved by accepting Africans to take over leadership in churches.

Indigenization of the church was also done with selfish motives of promoting material gains especially for church leaders. This was for instance done through allowing African offertories such as bananas, beans, chicken, sugarcane eggs and other agricultural products.

Indigenization of the church in East Africa was much necessary so as to enable easy spread of the gospel among the converted freed ex-slaves who had linguistic challenges such as being unable to read and interpret the Bible scriptures. This thus called for interpretation of the scriptures into African languages to enable the freed slaves understand Christianity.

Indigenization of mother churches was aimed at creating and maintaining the spirit of confidence among Africans in the church which was strongly challenged by the revival churches. This for example resulted into adopting African music, language, arts and design, leadership among others to keep Africans in mother churches.

The indigenization of the church in East African was aimed at avoiding the misinterpretation of the gospel by Africans. This thus explains the interpretation and translation of the Bible scriptures from foreign languages like English, French and Latin into African languages such as Luo, Rutooro, Runyoro, kikuyu, Luganda among other local languages.

Indigenization of the church was also done as a strategy to out compete Islamic faith at the coast and interior of east Africa. This for instance resulted into accepting African offertories, bride wealth, circumcision in kikuyu land, African leadership and translation of scriptures into African languages to avoid African from converting into Islam.

Indigenization of the church was embraced because of the rigidity and conservativeness of Africans towards their cultures that could not tolerate the European ways of worship. This thus, forced missionaries to adopt some African cultural practices, norms and believes such as African offertories, circumcision and languages into the church to favour its growth in the region.

## **CHALLENGES OF INDIGENISATION / AFRICANIZATION OF THE CHURCH**

Indigenization of the church has today been affected by the believe that African cultures such as witch craft, sorcery and food libations are linked to evils. Such a believe, has made many African Christian converts to hate their own cultures thus hindering the indigenization of the church.

Indigenization of the church in East Africa is also hindered by shortage of well-trained African church leaders. This as a result, has led into foreigners serving as priests, pastors and Bishops in African churches instead of Africans taking over leadership in these churches.

Indigenization of the church is difficult because many Africans still admire foreign European cultures such as dressing codes, languages like English and marriage practices among others at the expense of African cultures thus making Africanization of Christianity too difficult.

Improvement in technology has also hindered indigenization of the church in East Africa today. This has for instance led to innovation of foreign modern musical instruments like microphones, keyboards, pianos and jazz hence making Africans to abandon their own traditional musical instruments such as drums, shakers, rattles and xylophones.

Absence of a uniform indigenous language has also made attempts to indigenize the church much difficult. This as a resulted, has made African churches to use foreign languages such as English, French and Latin as official languages of communication thus promoting foreign cultures in churches.

Rigidity among some African Christian converts has also made attempts to Africanize the church too challenging. These have for instance, refused to become flexible in adopting African musical instruments and languages during church services hence making indigenization of Christianity difficult.

Indigenization of the church has become difficult because most churches have their headquarters in European countries. This has hence left many aspects in churches unchanged since many churches still continuing to embrace policies formulated from abroad.

Many African cultural believes, norms and practices such as clitoridectomy, alcoholism, twin dances, polygamy and courtship dances are unacceptable in churches thus becoming a challenge in Africanizing Christianity in East Africa.

Indigenization has also been hindered by escalating levels of poverty among African Christians and churches. This has for instance made many African churches to continue depending on foreign churches and church leaders for survival and development thus a failure to fully Africanize the church.

The collapse in the spirit of African nationalism has abstracted the struggle to defend and extend African cultures in church institutions today as many African Christians have more love for foreign cultures at the expense of their own cultural believes and practices.

Disunity among Africans also stands out as one of the greatest challenges facing indigenization of the church in East Africa. continuous disagreements between African Christians has deterred them from jointly thinking of how to incorporate African norms and believes into the church hence a challenge facing indigenization of Christianity today.

The fact that the church has its origin from abroad, it has left many aspects such as language, dressing styles and funding unchanged thus creating a big challenge in attempting to Africanize the church in East Africa today.

### **THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF INDIGENIZATION TOWARDS THE SPREAD OF THE CHURCH IN EAST AFRICA.**

Indigenization/Africanization or enculturation of the church has today played great roles towards the rapid spread of Christianity in East Africa as discussed below.

Indigenization of the church has enabled acceptance of African material offertories such as sheep, bananas, chicken, grains and fruits among others thus promoting offertory in the church.

Due to indigenization of the church, many Africans have taken up positions of leadership in churches as Pastors, Priests, Reverends, Bishops, Catechists and Archbishops. These for instance include Rt. Rev. Stanley Ntagali the former archbishop of the church of Uganda, the Archbishop of Kampala archdiocese for the catholic church Rt.Rev. Cyprian Lwanga and Stephen kazimba the current archbishop of church of Uganda among others.

Indigenization of the church has also made African customary marriage practices such as payment of bride wealth into the church before church wedding is administered. This has attracted many Africans into the church hence leading to its growth.

Indigenization of the church has enabled Africans to serve as missionaries that propagate the gospel of Jesus Christ in different parts of East Africa thus contributing to the rapid growth of the church since they are easily believed in by fellow Africans.

Indigenization of the church has made Christianity to recognize any place such as forests, mountains, streets, schools, hospitals and markets as places of worship. This has enabled many people especially the working class who cannot go to churches to also receive the gospel of Christianity thus leading to its growth.

Indigenization of the church has led the gospel into being translated from foreign languages such as English, French and Latin into African local languages like Luo, Luganda, Swahili, Rutooro and Runyoro among others thus facilitating the rapid spread of Christianity in East Africa.

Indigenization of the church has also made all days of the week to be recognized as worshipping days other than the official Sabbath days of Sunday and Saturday. This has enabled the working class of people to also attend to church services any day of the week due to their busy schedules of work on Sundays.

Indigenization of the church has promoted use of local languages in churches today such as Rutooro, Runyoro, Luo, Rukiga and Luganda among others thus contributing to the rapid spread of Christianity in East Africa.

Due to indigenization of the church, African lively songs and dances have been introduced in churches during worship and praising moments a factor that has deepened and strengthened the faith of many African Christians besides attracting many followers into the church.

Indigenization of the church has also made the church to accept circumcision of Christian converts in kikuyu land. This has greatly attracted many kikuyu people into converting to Christianity thus leading to the rapid growth of the church in kikuyu society.

Due to indigenization of the church, some churches in East Africa have tolerated African polygamous type of marriage provided the first wife consents to the marriage of other wives. This has attracted many conservative Africans that believe in polygamy into joining the church thus leading to the expansion of Christianity in the region.

Indigenization of the church has also made holy books like the bible and hymn books to be translated from foreign languages like English, French and Latin into African local languages such as Luo, Luganda, Ateso, Rutooro, Rukiga and Swahili among others for easy understanding hence leading to the growth of the church today.

Indigenization of the church has today made the church to embrace African musical instruments such as xylophones, drums and rattles during worship and praising moments. This has made church services more lively, satisfactory and pleasing thus enticing many Africans to join the church.

## **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. To what extent has the church in East Africa been indigenized/ Africanized/ enculturated?
2. How far has the enculturation of Christianity been realized in East Africa?

**(Hint: Two sided questions. questions one and two demand a candidate to give stand points showing how the church in East Africa has been indigenized and how the church in East Africa has failed to be indigenized/Africanized or enculturated)**

3(a) In what ways has the church incorporated some African cultural values and practices today?  
(**Hint: One sided question. show the African cultural values and practices that have been embraced by the church**)

(b) Comment on the contributions of indigenization to the spread of the church in East Africa.

4. “The church in East Africa has up to date remained foreign to African cultural values and practices”. Discuss

(**Hint; Two sided question. show the foreign practices in the church then later indicate the African cultural values and practices in the church**)

5. “Indigenization of Christianity in East Africa was inevitable” Discuss the above view, giving relevant examples.