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## Liturgical Dancing Styles in Selected Postmodern Churches in Kenya

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### **Abstract:**

*Postmodern society has been amalgamated with the western lifestyle. Many young people see celebrities as their role models. Their cultures and beliefs are strongly influenced by social media. Their way of thinking and approach to reality is based on the kind of experience they encounter on day-to-day lifestyles. In this world of individualism, people work with their religious impulses by selecting the bits of various spiritualities that 'speak to them' and create their own internal spiritual world. By doing so, the truth that is contained in the Biblical teachings gets another dimension of approach and it becomes quite challenging for the postmodernists to participate effectively in their application for a right living. Secularism is also within the realm of postmodern spirit of individualism that has affected the culture and human lifestyle and in turn has affected the concept of morality among young people. Christianity being one of the religions that is widely adopted by many believers in the world lays its emphasis on the teachings of the Bible. It is in the Holy Bible where definite doctrines that are aimed at creating an ideal society for human existence are found for the Christian believers. These Biblical doctrines in their understanding and application in postmodern culture has both positive and negative effects on the entire human race and especially social morals of youth. A phenomenological study that was aimed at giving an evaluation on concept of morality among Christian youth in postmodern time was conducted in August 2014 on the Catholic Church, Pentecostal Churches, Anglican Church of Kenya and African Inland church as selected church denominations in Machakos town, Kenya. The researcher looked intently on liturgical dance as a devotional practice in praise and worship and issues of dressing styles as viewed by postmodern contemporaries in line with Biblical teachings on morality. Data was collected from participants through the use of questionnaires, observation guides. Interview guides, photographs and audio recorders were included in order to enhance the study. Collected data was analyzed using tables, pie charts and histograms in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0. Reports, summaries, conclusions and recommendations were provided in order to enhance dissemination of the findings to potential users.*

**Keywords:** Devotional practices, Secularism, Celebrities, Liturgical dancing

### **1. The Background of the Study**

Morality of individuals in the society is shaped by their culture and the environment within which they live. Culture subjects human beings to have desire to live in an ideal society which is governed by the values. These values are attained in the way people live and relate with one another in the course of their existence as initially governed by the natural law that is inscribed in the soul of all human beings. Moral values for believers are obtained from the Holy Scriptures and they are widely accepted in any humane society. For the Christian believers, the Holy Bible is regarded as the ultimate source of these moral values that are embraced in order to bring forth a good and just society. These moral values have been affected by both secular and postmodern lifestyles in that, whatever is universally accepted as moral truth has become an individual affair in the contemporary life Owino (2011). He holds that an objective truth that has existed for centuries has become a subjective truth such that, whatever appears to be true to one person's point of view can be the opposite to that of another person's since it may not be necessarily true. Christians believe that God is the source of the absolute truth according to Kariam (2010). Jesus Christ as the son of God proclaimed himself as the truth: John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me". The postmodern society is undergoing tremendous change in relation to the modernism and ancient epochs. During the time of renaissance and enlightenment, both reality and truth was based on rationality and scientific proves Anthea (2012). He says that People started developing truth from all that which is scientifically verifiable and empirically proven. In postmodern era, such trends of viewing reality were advanced by the development in technology. For instance the linguistic structures, arts, architecture, transport, communication among others fields of human life endeavors have taken a different dimension which have in turn affected the concepts of truth and reality. McCrindle (2014) described postmodern generation as baby boomers, X, Y and Z generations who understand the same truth and reality in different perspectives. It is within this realm in religious background that the basic concepts of Biblical doctrines have been subjected to criticism and elaborate analysis due to extreme dynamism in

postmodern arena. This is because the status of postmodernism is defined by the style of living and thus it has changed the nature of understanding and applying the existing Biblical truths Omede (2011).

Postmodern society has been amalgamated with the western lifestyle. Many young people see celebrities as their role models. Their cultures and beliefs are strongly influenced by social media. Their way of thinking and approach to reality is based on the kind of experience they encounter on day-to-day lifestyles. According to Kariam (2012), the images and ideas of God are manufactured in human mind for believers in the postmodern society. These ideas are used to give specialness (holiness) to particular relationships which are valued by a particular group and they hold it as religion. For instance, in this world of individualism, Omede says that people work with their religious impulses by selecting the bits of various spiritualities that 'speak to them' and create their own internal spiritual world. By doing so, the truth that is contained in the Biblical teachings gets another dimension of approach and it becomes quite challenging for the postmodernists to participate effectively in their application for a right living. Postmodernists not only deny the claim of Jesus to be the truth but they also dismiss the statement that he is the way to heaven when He says "I am the truth the way and the life (John 14:4)". In this view, Christianity and its doctrine are reduced to the level of opinions and so is morality and the principles that govern social morals among the believers.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The study was based on theories of Ninian Smart (1927-2001) on religion. Smart engages himself in a descriptive understanding of religion whereby he described it in seven dimensions. These dimensions include; practical and ritual dimension, experiential and emotional dimension, the narrative dimension, doctrinal and philosophical dimension, ethical and legal dimension, social and institutional dimension and material dimension.

Smart described devotional practices in the way they are conducted and practiced in religious form of worship. For instance, he described prayer as private and solitary moments of quiet reflection on God. He asserts that, within prayer there is praise and worship which involves group singing, chanting and dancing.

In ethical and legal dimension, Smart asserts that ethics concerns on what is right and wrong, what is good and bad and how one is ought to live. For him ethics concerns the behaviour of an individual and to some extent, the code of ethics of dominant religion control the community. For this reason, religions have been influential in molding the attitudes and morals of the societies where they belong. Smart distinguishes ethical teachings of faith from ethical dimensions of religion.

## 3. The Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Study

Virtue and character are fundamental variables which describe the personality of humans as moral beings. These three factors are also considered in the code of conduct and in evaluating the behaviour of a person, hence being of a profound importance in the formation of human character. Virtue refers to the power or ability of the spirit situated between the rationality and sensibility which moves and intends the passion and reflection to guide the moral person towards perfection Hulse (2012). Virtue combines two aspects of a moral agent according to Hulse, that is, the rational and sensible aspects guided by the spirit in the sense that virtue is an interior and internal disposition of moral conduct and character.

From the beginning of creation, human beings were created in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26a, And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness) whereby they have related moral character. He gave human beings intelligence and ability to make moral decisions thus making them greater than any other created beings in universe. In this regard, person with moral character is someone who can judge what is right and what is bad and has the courage to do what is good. God has created humans as moral beings who are obliged to live in a meaningful relationship with Him and exhibit the same moral character that He does for He is the foundations of morality, Dorram (2006). God as the sole ultimate moral Being has nothing to do with darkness (immorality) because in His light human beings adopt the right character of Christian living (1John1:5 ...that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all).

During exodus, at Mount Sinai God established a covenant with Israelites whereby He gave them Ten Commandments to guide them in their way of life, (Exodus 19:11, And be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai). Those commandments contained a standard moral character of God to His people. They acted as moral guidelines on how they relate to God and to one another thus acting as divine moral instructions.

Liturgically God the Almighty is worth shouts of joy with glorious acclamation as revealed by Psalmist (Psalm 100: 1-2, shout joyfully to the Lord all you lands, worship the Lord with cries of gladness; come before Him with joyful songs). For Christians, dancing is seen as a necessary activity which is a reflection of dance that was practiced by Israelites the chosen race of Yahweh (2Chronicles 29:30, Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praises unto the LORD with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped). Their greatest patriarchs like King David also worshiped God in songs and dances (2Samuel 6:14, And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod).

Christian life is a life of practicing or living the virtues by cultivating morality of doing good and avoiding evil. This is because whoever does not do the right or act in a good way is a sinner, (James 4:17, to him that knows to do well, and does it not, to him it is sin). In this regard, religious virtues enable moral agents to live an authentic Christian life.

## 4. Literature Review on Liturgical Dance

Dancing is a fundamental element of human behaviour from the primitive movements of earliest civilizations to traditional ethnic or folk styles, to the classical ballet and modern dance genres popular today. According to Hedgman (2007), there are many functions and types of liturgical dances in the church and each has its own purpose and styles. He holds that, even though everyone is a dancer and called to worship God through praise, thanksgiving and movement, everyone is not called to be a

liturgical dancer. Kariamu (2010) holds that dance existed from time immemorial as an integral part of celebrations and rituals, a means of communication with gods and among humans a basic sense of enjoyment and beauty. For him, dance was designed for everyone to enjoy. Gospel music in Kenya according to Ayisi and Maria (2007) is a popular music differentiated from others by its lyrics in that it shares instrumentation and stylistic features with other popular music. From their findings, musicians in Kenya who start with secular music often cross over into gospel songs or dabble in both secular and sacred music.

In twenty first century, dance includes ballroom, jazz, tap, aerobics and a myriad of other movement activities according to Kariamu (2010). According to him, the joy derived in participating in a dance of any genre and physical activity required provide the opportunity for the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle into today's world. The richness of cultural traditions observed in ethnic or folk dance genre offers the participants and spectators an insight to customs, geography and religious nature of particular people. He also discovered that dances are originally passed from one generation to the next and they continue to evolve as our civilization and society changes.

No dance form is permanent, definitive or ultimate. The changes occur but the basic element of dance endures. He holds that dance is a legacy of the world as always been and always will be a form of communication. He also emphasizes that dance is the soul of Africa because it has the foundation of all of the arts and it weaves a tale about daily lives of the people. It celebrates everyday events and occurrences in the lives of its people for example the rites of passages (birth, initiation, marriage and death), the harvest and historical events. In the same point of view, Ngoya (2012) holds that secular music in one of major tools used by devil to mislead youth in Kenya. For him, the youth are allowing the devil to minister to them through these types of music both in homes and even going as far as listening to them in church where the altar of the Lord is right in His presence.

Gill (2012) discovered that dance movement patterns, postures, gestures, costumes rituals, sensory experiences are inseparable from religious and cultural identity, value and meaning. According to him, some religious practices and rituals attains their full actualization when they are articulated by dance. He also discovered that there are some dancing styles that do not match with religious activities but those that are within the religious domain plays a vital role in shaping the morals of participants in the religion.

Dancing in the liturgy cleans out the body and the spirit, and energy that might be destructive suddenly becomes an expression of joy and happiness, Reissner (2001). According to him, dancing is done in relation to music and rhythm. Gschwadtner (2012) had an opinion that liturgy consists of bodily gestures and expressions in the language of flesh. The body is physically involved in the worship especially in the aspect of praise whereby the totality of ones-self glorifies God.

### **5. Liturgical Dance in Medieval Time**

In the early Christian church, religious dance was both liturgical and sacred. It was practiced when believers gathered for fellowship and breaking of bread in commemoration of a great commission of Christ. They conducted hymns and chants based on Biblical psalms and they were aimed at enhancing their form of fellowship. Liturgical dance was considered as part and parcel of religious service.

In medieval time, dance represented a rich culture from all over Europe. It was considered as a way for folks to interact with their friends, neighbours, visitors, family and partners. During common occasions like celebrating weddings, seasons or birth of a child, songs and dances often spanned across a whole village with sounding instruments with participants making merry in rhythmical expressions of body movements. If it was a happy story presented by the participants, the way they expressed their bodies would release a sense of joyfulness and optimism to the audience as well as having an effect on viewers to escape the everyday predicaments.

Originally medieval dances were exclusively performed by the male gender. Males were the only one allowed to lead religious functions and lead other in worship. As time passed, values, attitudes and beliefs came about allowing both males and females to participate in communal dances. Women were recognized to perform better than men in songs and dances thus they were integrated in religious fellowship. There were no definite dancing styles to be performed by participants but they practiced different forms of dance styles in order to please God as well as to meet their expectations. During the middle ages, dance was also performed after dinner in order to promote good digestion and bodily health.

### **6. Study Findings on Liturgical Dancing Styles in Postmodern Church**

From the study conducted in Machakos town on an evaluation on concept of morality among Christian youth in postmodern time, 121 out of 200 participants from the sampled population very strongly supported an idea that Christians engage in dancing to the Lord during praise and worship as a form of fellowship. 85% of the participants in the study held that dance is necessary for God when it comes to praise and worship. Only three participants from category of sampled youth were not for the opinion of Christian dance whereby they rated it as very weak. Seven participants; 3 and 4 from parents and youth respectively also rated the same opinion as weak thus contributing to 5% of total sampled population.

Participants acknowledged that dancing to God during praise and worship for liturgical services is an acceptable phenomenon according to psalmist (Psalm 149:3, Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp). Singing and dancing as devotional practices of religion, the religious leaders were in a very strong agreement that when Christians dance while praising God, they acclaim His glory with heavenly angels (Luke 2:13-14, and suddenly there was multitude of heavenly host with the angel praising God saying; Glory to God in the highest).

It was noted that, one out of three gospel dancing styles used by youth in church do not match with Christian teachings of praise and worship. Some of these dancing styles include; *gully creeper*, *kangaroo style*, *sway*, *Nolinga style*, *mosquito style*, *kadunga style*, *get-down style*, *one-drop style*, *Chinese style* among many others used. It was observed that youth just articulate the gospel rhythm used in a gospel songs of praise with those dancing styles they know from secular world. Such dancing styles were

considered by both parents and religious leaders as erotic in nature that tends to project immorality to youth through their ignorance. For instance, *one-drop* dancing style is done when the performer vigorously shakes the buttocks more than any other part of body. Jerking dancing style is done by jumping one leg after the other at the same point. These dancing styles were noted to have immoral implications thus they are not worthy to be practiced in the church liturgy.

		Dancing styles commonly used in worship today by youth are secular					Total
		Very Weak	Weak	Average	Strong	Very Strong	
Religious leaders	Count %	6 15.0%	3 7.5%	4 10.0%	12 30.0%	15 37.5%	40 100.0%
Youth	Count %	6 5.0%	20 16.7%	45 37.5%	22 18.3%	27 22.5%	120 100.0%
Parents	Count %	4 10.0%	2 5.0%	3 7.5%	14 35.0%	17 42.5%	40 100.0%
Total	Count %	16 8.0%	25 12.5%	52 26.0%	48 24.0%	59 29.5%	200 100.0%

Table 1: Cross tabulation on dancing secular dancing styles used in worship based on categories of participants

## 7. Discussion of Findings

From table 1 above, it was noted that 45(37.5%) was highest count among youth participants who rated average the opinion that the dancing styles commonly used in worship today are secular. This high response from youth indicated that, some secular forms of dancing styles are partially integrated in worship. It implied that not in all the churches where such secular dancing styles can be accepted and in those church denominations where they are practiced, they are not strongly encouraged. Cumulatively, out of 200 participants in the study, the highest count of 59(29.5%) strongly agreed that secular dancing style was in use in liturgical services among the churches surveyed. The same opinion was supported by 48(24%) participants who rated it as strong.

It was noted with a lot of concern that some gospels singers and dancers joined their efforts with secular celebrities. This was referred to as 'unholy alliance' by Catholic religious leaders during the study. Such kind of unity was considered centrally to Biblical teachings of Saint Paul (2Corinthians 6:14, be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?). In this regard, other forms of dancing styles learned from youth participants that raise eyebrows on youth morals in the society include; *kusunguana*, *tiggle*, *bubble*, *turbo whine styles*, *jiggle styles* among others. Such dancing styles have not yet been incorporated in the liturgy because they are extremely erotic in nature. Youth between 13-25 years of age were discovered to be an age group that is highly influenced by secularism and they slowly include such immoral dancing styles in church worship.

According to parents interviewed, secular celebrities and music artists use rhythms, beats and lyrics by articulating them to appear liturgical and then manipulate the same crowd (especially youth) to be partakers in their performance. Among the parents interviewed, seventeen of them supported an idea that the moral character of Christian youth is highly affected by contemporary celebrities who bring forth a different dimension of praise and worship inform of contemporary gospels and dances. They acclaimed that young people have become morally confused and their spiritual religious self-esteem is declining in alarming rate whereby they have to lean on the contemporary influences.

Secular dancing styles have cropped in the religious services whereby young people do not fully recognize it as an issue in the church. Parents and religious have realized some transformations in the dance styles applied by youth in liturgical services. Some of such secular mode of dance was noted to involve pairing of dancing partners of the opposite sex and twisting their body in the same manner as in clubs and discos theatres even though the song engaged in is religious and liturgical in nature. Some youths dance in pairs of male and female partners whereby they embrace each other contrary to liturgical expectations. They affirmed that such styles are not acceptable even though Christians wanted to retain young people within church activities and norms. One religious leader asserted that some of those dancing styles make the partakers twist in a manner that exposes their uncovered body parts as well as inner wears to the viewers. In this way they convey immoral message to others.

It was observed from the study that contemporary gospel musicians are being led by sales of CDs and DVDs in order to compose songs in lyrics, genres, beat, style and rhythm with religious and Biblical contents. They target majority of listeners and viewers among believers whereby youth becomes victims of it. It implies that they are more led by money and material gains than the influence of the Holy Spirit. All those secular songs and dances as they integrated with gospel were noted to be bringing confusion to the church and especially to the youth. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 16:14-18 the Bible explains about light & darkness not mixing or rather it states clearly that the Devil can't work hand in hand with Jesus since they represent different kingdoms.

Most of the churches in Kenya have noted secular dancing styles being in-cooperated with the gospel by youth. Such sediments have failed to interpret Biblical teaching on morality in the sense that their presentation in terms of rhythm singing and dancing manifests more of immoral character than religious ethics. Youth were noted to be highly influenced by secular dancing styles as they learn from the social media among many other different channels of receiving and sending information.

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