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African Christians in Finland**



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African and Western Concepts of Spirituality and the Transcendence of God: A Case Study of Sub-Sahara African Christians in Finland

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Abstract

Purpose: Through evangelism and missionary activities, Western Christian spirituality influences the lives of many people, both individually and collectively, and in many cultures around the world including the Sub-Sahara African region. This article aims to examine spirituality and the various ways in which to recognize it from the perspectives of both Sub-Sahara African and Western concepts. It also examines the secularization of Finnish churches and how this shapes the spirituality of Christians originating from Sub-Saharan Africa living in Finland.

Methodology: The argument is presented through an analysis of existing literature and documents on the matter.

Findings: The findings show that secularization had negative consequence to many churches in the Western countries. Consequently, Sub-Sahara African Christians are setting up their own ecclesiastic congregations in many cities of Finland.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: It is therefore important for individuals to belong to groups where the numbers share visible characteristics, values, and convictions.

Keywords: *African, African concepts, Western concepts, spirituality, transcendence of God, and Christians.*

Introduction

Spirituality has emerged as an interdisciplinary subject that is concerned with the specific spiritual dimension of human existence. It is a term that is commonly used by both Christians and non-Christians to describe the subjective experience of having a sense of peace and purpose. In Christian tradition, spirituality is a personal practice of belief that includes personal prayer, fasting, meditation, reading of the Bible, worship, praise, and devotional life all aimed at connecting their belief to something bigger than themselves, which is the supernatural force or being that controls the universe¹. It typically involves the search for the deeper meaning of life. Spirituality is a faith-based activity that arises from connecting with a higher force that transform people's lives and their communities across all locations where they find themselves. In the non-Christian circle, the use of the concept of spirituality consists in practicing divination, attempting to forecast the future, and trying to control the course of nature, humans, or circumstances with the aid of supernatural powers or spirits.

However, spirituality is not a trend that is separated from the rest of the practice of belief, but it is associated with community and the religious sacramental life². In addition, it is seen as related to a set of organizations, rituals, and ideologies. Spirituality helps a person to the transcendent dimensions, so that he may have a deep and meaningful relation to reality.³ In the context of Christian doctrine, spirituality is related to the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life and a personal relationship with God.

Finns have considerably positive attitudes to Sub-Sahara Christian immigrants, and Finnish missionaries have played a major role in the missionary work and in the establishing of churches in Sub-Sahara Africa region. However, both the number of African immigrants that are registered as members of the Finnish churches and the rate of their weekly church attendance in these denominations is very low.⁴ The aim of the current study is to clarify the reasons behind this phenomenon by examining African and Western concepts of Spirituality, and how secularization of Finnish churches have shaped the spirituality of Christians originating from Sub-Saharan Africa living in Finland.

A. The Concept of Spirituality in Sub-Sahara African Societies

Spirituality is a sense of connection to something bigger than a personal being, and it usually involves a search for meaning in life. In Christian terms, spirituality is the whole of human life viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the dwelling of the Holy Spirit and within the community of believers⁵ Spirituality in the African continent is a way

¹ Byrne & Houlden, 1995:514, Ackah, et al., 2018:34.

² Raunio, 2003:11–12.

³ Koskela, 2011:33.

⁴ Sohlberg & Ketola 2016, 28–30.

⁵ Byrne & Houlden, 1995:514.

of life, and it can never be removed from the public sphere. Walter Hollenweger⁶, one of the pioneers of Pentecostal research, has defined spirituality as a mix of the following elements: Liturgy, narrative theology and testimony, prayer and decision-making, dreams, and visions in personal and public worship life functioning as a kind of icon for individuals and congregational fellowship, and as a continued connection between body and soul applied through prayer for healing. Spirituality and concept are intertwined. Thus, the problem of defining spirituality in recent years appears in part because it is no longer a single, transcultural phenomenon but is rooted in the experience of God, and dependent on the histories of individuals and communities.⁷

What complicates the definition is the notoriety of Sub-Saharan Africans as deeply religious people.⁸ Sub-Saharan Christian spirituality, therefore, does not simply originate from the Western concept of spirituality but can be seen as a mixture of indigenous pre-Christian concept. In many traditional Sub-Sahara African societies and even in modern times, African people have sought daily guidance using consultation of men and women who are traditionally conceived as possessing the power to see the future or to know the secret behind the problems of African people.⁹ Religion occupies a special place in Sub-Sahara African ontology, for it defines the concept of Africans.¹⁰ Religion belongs to the community and every African must belong to a community; thus, African traditional religions are everywhere in the life of the community. Therefore, the concept of Sub-Sahara African spirituality is rooted in their belief that there is a Supreme Being that has created physical entities such as mountains and landscapes.

The Connection of Traditional and Christian Religious Beliefs

The existence of God is at the top of the traditional African ontological structure and can only be accessed through the smaller gods. God is known in Sub-Sahara Africa by the names given to Him which are descriptives of his existence. Until the eve of colonialism, Africans believed in a Supreme being they called the Maker and the Healer. There was also a strong belief that spirits of the dead mediated between Africans and the Maker. At the same time, they feared that the spirits of the dead could come back to haunt the living and curse them.¹¹ Some Africans believe that evil spirits dwell in specific areas or come out at certain specified times of the day. In Rwanda and other Eastern African countries, people traditionally believe that bad spirits live in volcanoes, and they can come out to hunt people at night; and good spirits live among the living ones, in their families. Sub-Sahara African people could also consult the spirits of the dead people to solve their problems. According to researchers, some African Pentecostal pastors do use magic to heal and

⁶ Hollenweger 1997:18–19.

⁷ Byrne & Houlden, 1995:515.

⁸ Mbiti, 1991:10.

⁹ Michael, 2013:43.

¹⁰ Mbiti, 1991:13–14.

¹¹ Michael, 2013: 94.

attract their church members.¹² They are in that sense no different from the traditional healer or seer who engages in similar practices. Thus, many African people still have shrines where they can worship their gods and ancestors. Recovering from witchcraft and illnesses has been at the center of African Pentecostal churches. A characteristic trait of these congregations is that they utilize Christian concepts, especially the power of the Holy Spirit to answer their everyday problems.

Nevertheless, with the emergence of Christian missionaries in the African continent, African traditional religion began to decline. Christian missionaries encouraged the Africans to embrace a new and "civilized" Christian culture. Some of this new and "civilized" Christian culture has transformed into delivering a 'prosperity gospel'. Under the umbrella of Pentecostal churches, these churches promise to solve all human problems. Poverty, being one of the biggest challenges currently facing Africa, has pushed many to embrace this idea. Churches and some pastors in some of these countries, e.g., in Ghana, Nigeria and some in Eastern part of Africa, have become very wealthy as a result. To work as a pastor in such a congregation is considered one of the quickest means to get out of poverty.¹³ However, many African Pentecostal church members have begun to discover the bad behaviors of their pastors as many stories of fraud, sexual harassment, theft, and corruption occur on an almost daily basis.¹⁴ For instance, in 2018, the Rwandan government has closed 8000 churches because many pastors had no theological training and their churches have not fulfilled the requirements such as toilet, road access, lights and ceilings.

Despite the popularity of these new churches, African traditional beliefs never really died and are still practiced side by side with the embraced Christian ideas in many African countries. Many Sub-Sahara African churches indeed lack discipleship programs and training therefore, some Africans are still running after traditional seers, miracle workers, and prosperity prophets to help them alleviate any challenges that they have.

The Bible

According to Mbiti, the Bible has profoundly shaped African Christianity.¹⁵ Many Africans have memorized many Bible passages but putting those passages into practice is problematic to some, because of lack of education and training. However, there are not only Sub-Sahara Christians who have memorized the Bible, because this has been an important part of Christian education also in many other parts of the world. The Bible gives the motives for spiritual training, whether in the home, church, or school to preach the gospel of Christ to faithful believers so that they may know, guard, and teach what they consider to be the true biblical faith.¹⁶

¹² Michael, 2013: 98.

¹³ Gifford, 2004:192.

¹⁴ Gifford, 2004:192.

¹⁵ Michael, 2013:55.

¹⁶ Michael, 2013:143.

Sub-Sahara African Christians believe that the Bible has a very strong power in healing the sickness and chasing the evil spirits; therefore, in the situation of sickness and bad situations, some Sub-Sahara African people put the Bible under the pillow so that it may protect them or heal them. In addition, the Bible is a holy tool among Christian Africans; they believe that it may bring death, curse, and fortune. With this regard, the Bible is a very important tool in the Sub-Sahara Africa where Christianity is a dominated religion. Furthermore, because of curses and blessings that are written in the Bible, African children believe their parents and aged people have the power to bless or curse them by using the power of the Bible.

Sub-Sahara African people accept the fact of God's existence without philosophical or academic arguments. Almost all African Christians believe that God has done miracles in their lives, and it causes them to believe in God's existence. They just say it is their simple faith that God exists.

Divine Attributes

Christian believers assume that their God has unique attributes and that he is omnipresent. He is present everywhere at the same time; no matter where they go, their God is there, and He observes everything they do (Ps.139:7-12; Acts 17:27-28). In the case of Rwandans, some people still believe that God goes and comes back. God spends the whole day somewhere else and comes back to Rwanda to spend the night there.¹⁷ The question is where does God spend the whole day, and what does He come back to do in Rwanda in the evening? This issue brings confusion about God's attribute on His omnipresence.

In addition, Christian believers believe that their Supernatural-Being-God is omniscient. He knows everything and he knows not only their actions, but also their very thoughts (1 Sam. 23:10-13, Ps.139:1-6). However, the omnipotence of God may lead to skeptical and doubt because of so many killings, wars, and hunger that have been prevailed for so long time in many Sub-Saharan countries. God's omnipresent, omniscient attributes and his love cause a major concern not only in Sub-Saharan Africa but also everywhere in the world. Many of Sub-Sahara African people believe that their people never die, they continue to be part of the community in the form of the living dead.¹⁸ They also believe that life continues even in the graves. When a child dies, he/ she continues to grow up. Thus, they should be respected, and their ideas need to be consulted by the society.¹⁹

According to Western African traditional belief, God is a reality and not an abstract concept, he is a personal being with whom individual can enter into a relationship with.²⁰ The dwelling of God among his people and his protection also causes a major concern, for instance in 1994, many Rwandan Christians were killed, and other Rwandan people participated in the killings thinking

¹⁷ Mbiti, 1994:23–24.

¹⁸ Morris, 2006: 148–159

¹⁹ Michael, 2013:214.

²⁰ Quarcoopome, 1987:52.

that they were protecting their country. The questions are: Should a Christian attitude reflect the attitude of Christ or to the state's order? How should a Christian be an obedient servant to God under an unjust government or in a secular society where obedience and servitude to the system endanger Christian ethical principles?

Furthermore, Sub-Sahara African Christians also claim that God's holiness includes his dedication to carry out his purpose and plan. However, this brings a critical concern "Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?" (James 3:11). If their God is Holy and they are His followers, why is there so many killings, wars and dictators, corruption in Sub-Sahara Africa?

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of the eternal triune God. The Hebrew word for Spirit is "ruah", a word that is sometimes translated as "wind" and "breath". Among Sub-Saharan African Christians, the holy spirit is understood as referring to the spiritual dimension of God, while the incarnation of Christ becomes the physical dimension of God.²¹ Furthermore, most Sub-Sahara African people believe that there are two kinds of spirits: those that were once human (ancestral spirits) and those that were never human.²² For instance, in East Africa, the word Roho Mutagatifu in Kiswahili is used to signify the concept of the Holy Spirit instead of the vernacular words for the spirit. Throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit is revealed to Christians as a person with a uniqueness that He is a divine person like the Father and the Son (Acts 5:3-4). However, because of the spirits in the African cosmology, several Sub-Sahara African Christians have simply replaced beliefs in spirits with the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit.²³

In his research of Pneumatology in the African context, E. Andersson²⁴ remarked that African popular theology has let the doctrine of the Holy Spirit be the wide gate through which several pre-Christian conceptions have entered. Still, some Sub-Sahara church movements have persuaded to confuse the Holy Spirit with the spirits, and some African Pentecostal and Charismatic churches emphasize the baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and healing.²⁵ If you cannot speak in tongue, you cannot be a pastor in some Sub-Sahara Pentecostal churches.

B. Tradition and Religion in Sub-Sahara African Communities

Cultural Conceptions of Death

Culture is by Ackah, et al. a heterogeneous, fluid, shifting, emergent, contradictory, processual, and other such descriptions which aim to capture indeterminateness about the idea.²⁶ Culture places people into their social environment and plays a major role in terms of personal meaning

²¹ Mbiti, 1994: 102-104.

²² Mugambi, 1989:103.

²³ Behrend, 1999:116.

²⁴ Andersson 1958:109.

²⁵ Westerlund, 2021:23-24.

²⁶ Ackah, et al., 2018:163.

and value. Furthermore, culture may influence an individual's spirituality and religiosity. According to Michael²⁷, death is received with mixed feelings in the Sub-Sahara African context. It is negative when it occurs among young people, and it is a blessing among the aged people. In many Sub-Sahara African cultural beliefs, whenever a young person dies, people say that he/ she is assumed to have been killed by malevolent means. In Sub-Sahara African concepts, there are bad and good deaths. Bad deaths are the death of young individuals, and the death of a pregnant woman. Many Africans believe that those deaths are caused by the frustrated soul, and pathological contexts such as leprosy, madness, incurable wound, suicide, enemies, skin diseases, and lightning.²⁸

In addition, in some Sub-Sahara African countries, death is believed to be contagious.²⁹ While in western concepts, death is a normal part of life. Other ways for Sub-Sahara Africans to worship to the Supreme Being are through sacrifices involving the shedding of the blood of human beings, animals, or birds, foodstuffs, water, milk, beer, juice, honey, and money. African researchers argue that there was human sacrifice before the advent of Christianity and colonization, and that this practice should be recognized in theology to teach Africans to sacrifice to God.³⁰ This statement arouses ethical issues, as God in his commandments says that people should not kill, and they should respect another person's life.

Music and Songs

Music and songs are means through which African concepts and spirituality are expressed. Music and songs are dynamic in Sub-Sahara Africa, and they enrich the local cultural and religious heritage.³¹ Songs are used in praise and worship, church service, naming ceremonies, weddings, baptism, funerals, during farm cultivation, going to war, praising the rulers, helping babies to sleep, and in many other activities. However, some scholars have critically questioned the way Sub-Sahara African Christians worship and dance in their church services.

Many hymns of European origin are sung in (some) Sub-Sahara African churches, which is something that has both negative and positive consequences. The positive side is that the hymns connect different traditions from different parts of the world together, while the negative may be that these hymns (both texts and music) do not reflect Sub-Sahara African spirituality, but European. According to Mbiti, the music and dancing are essential to Christian worship. They penetrate the very being of the worshipping individuals, and people feel satisfied in the spirit when

²⁷ Michael, 2013:184.

²⁸ Kale, 2011.

²⁹ Ackah, et al., 2018: 46.

³⁰ Michael, 2013:9.

³¹ Westerlund, 2021:38-39.

they worship and praise God.³² Africans argue that it is impossible to have a church without good music.

Gender, and Spirituality in Sub-Sahara African Concept

Spirituality is a concept related to both religious and nonreligious involvement. Scholars have argued that belief in God is part of the composition of the human brain and is therefore innate and that the lack of religious belief is strange.³³ Thus, humans are spirituals by nature. Gender affects peoples' spirituality and lives because it affects differentiation that permeates many aspects of life in most cultures. Many Evangelical and Pentecostal Christian groups in Sub-Sahara African value submission as a regular religious practice that is often used to justify and maintain men's dominant position in society.³⁴ In Uganda and many Sub-Sahara African countries, for a woman to show submission to her husband, she should kneel or bow down whenever she meets with any male person. In addition, a wife cannot eat together with her husband at the same table or in the same room.

In some Sub-Sahara African countries, daughters acquire no rights to immovable property.³⁵ A Sub-Sahara African proverb describes the position of women as, "A woman does not have an identity, she takes her husband's," indicating the inequality in land and economic rights. Moreover, it is commonly assumed that whenever a man dies in the Sub-Sahara African context, his wife possibly has information linked to the cause of his death. Thus, there is a scary and aggressive action to force a widow to sleep with her deceased husband's corpse to prove her innocence.³⁶ In the Luo community in Kenya, the widow is restricted to her estate for a whole year, if she is considered culturally impure and dangerous to the community.³⁷

McGuire argues that ethnic identity, religious identity, and gender identity involve a sense of "who I am". Many women seek healing in response to troubling reproductive events or for an illness that is attributed to their stress and pain from their roles as women, daughters, and wives.³⁸ In addition, women do use religious rituals and meditations for healing scars of sexual harassment, or troubled relationship with parents while some men seek healing for their relationships with their fathers, deceased, or living.³⁹ Finally, Christian people believe that the Son of God has the power to deliver them from the bondage of sin, the bondage of Satan, and heal their diseases.

C. Finnish Concept of Spirituality

³² Mbiti, 1991:59.

³³ Bauman, 1997:170-171.

³⁴ McGuire, 2008: 159.

³⁵ Jackson & Karp, 1990, 99–101.

³⁶ Reagon, 2001:05.

³⁷ Branch, 1990: 532.

³⁸ McGuire, 2008:166.

³⁹ McGuire, 2008:178.

The Arrival of Christianity in Finland

Throughout history, people have worshipped many gods, and goddesses around the globe. Finland was no exception from this, in Pre-Christianity, several pagan deities had had different names according to their functions.⁴⁰ Christianity had brought to Finland at the turn of the first and second millennium by both the Catholic and the orthodox Churches. The first impacts of Christianity arrived in South-Western Finland from Sweden, but also from Constantinople along the network of Russian rivers to Lake Ladoga and from there to the Gulf of Finland.⁴¹

In addition, at the end of the 11th century, the geographical area of Finland was a very sparsely populated country with no unified administrative system. From the first half of the 12th century up to the first half of the 14th century, immigrants from Sweden settled in Finnish coastal areas in several phases. During the 13th century the church was organized in such a way that the diocese of Turku was formed employing ecclesiastical administration, the territorial partition of parishes, and liturgy.⁴² The researchers noticed that even if Swedish people lived only in some areas in South-Western Finland, political, economic, and military dominance was however in their hands. As a result, society and social life in Finland were organized and formed based on Swedish legislation.⁴³ The motive for the colonization was both the political ambitions of the Swedish kings and religious ambitions of the Roman Catholic Church to spread the gospel around the Baltic Sea.

The interests of the rulers and the church were to a large extent in harmony with each other. Thus, such harmony between the church and society played a significant role in the medieval Scandinavian social system, especially in the 15th century where family ties between members of families with a dominant position, and the bishops could be close relatives of the ruling elite.⁴⁴ In the 1530s and 1540s, the Reformation began in the Diocese of Turku. Throughout that time the ecclesiastical administration and the liturgical life were formed according to the standards of the Reformation.⁴⁵ In the 1530s, King Gustav Vasa (reigned 1521-1560) and the Swedish reformers broke the ties with the pope, and they replaced the canon law with new ecclesiastical and social provisions according to the reformation principles. A new church ordinance was accepted and approved years later in 1571 by King John III (reigned 1568-1592), based on re-establishing the hierarchy of church ministry and developing her liturgical life.⁴⁶

Social- Historical Background of Christianity in Finland

⁴⁰ Lahelma, 2021; Kailo, 2018:5–6.

⁴¹ Jutikkala & Pirinen, 1989:24–31.

⁴² Sinnemäki, et al., 2019:179.

⁴³ Sinnemäki et al., 2019:180.

⁴⁴ Knuutila 2009:172.

⁴⁵ Pernler, 1999:164–194.

⁴⁶ Kjöllerström, 1971: 201–209.

Historically, Finland was part of the Swedish kingdom from the 12th century until 1809 when it was ceded to the Russian empire as the result of the Swedish and Russian war.⁴⁷ In 1807, Russia was obliged to sign the Treaty of Tilsit with France in which Russia accepted French dominance in Europe.⁴⁸ In mid-March 1808 Russian troops initiated the siege of the fortress of Suomenlinna and Finland was separated from the kingdom of Sweden and annexed to the Russian Empire. After the war between the Russian Empire and the kingdom of Sweden (1808-1809), to appease the opinion of the Finnish people, the citizens of Finland were obliged to pay taxes to Russia, so that the Russian Empire may establish Finnish administration. In addition, an Orthodox Christian, Tsar Alexander I, pledged to uphold the Lutheran tradition of his new province, which was legally known as the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland until its independence in 1917.⁴⁹

Consequently, at the start of the time of the Grand Duchy in Finland, there were no changes between the church as a spiritual vehicle and the government institutions.⁵⁰ In 1867 a church law was approved by the Emperor of Russia and published under the title “the Church Law for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland”.⁵¹ After Finland's independence in 1917 from Russia, some changes were introduced into church law on account of the Form of Government.⁵² Most of the Finnish people were members of the Lutheran Church of Finland but in the second part of the twentieth century the Church membership began to decrease.

The Relationship Between the Finnish Church and State

According to the study by Jyrki Knuutila, there were no significant changes in the relationship between the state and the church during the last half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.⁵³ The bishops had no political power, but they can still be said to have been part of the political system, because they were nominated by the president of Finland and their salaries were paid by the state.⁵⁴ However, the church continued to play a significant role in many sectors of the Finnish society. Some Lutheran pastors served in the army and some as chaplains in hospitals, prisons, and elderly homes and schools.

Furthermore, during the celebration of the Finnish Independence Day as well as the opening and closing of Parliamentary sessions there are still today national services led by the Lutheran Church leaders. All in all, the close relationship between church and state has made the church more sensitive for changes in values, opinions, and lifestyles of the people in Finland, which might have contributed to the secularization of the country.

⁴⁷ Allardt & Starck, 1981:166–171; Huldén, 2004:45–55.

⁴⁸ Hårdstedt 2006, 14–25.

⁴⁹ Knuutila, 175–192.

⁵⁰ Kansanaho, 1976: 23–28; Björkstrand, 2007:174–199.

⁵¹ Pirinen, 1985: 47–51; Björkstrand, 2007:198–207.

⁵² Hansén, 2004.

⁵³ Sinnemäki et al., 2019:187.

⁵⁴ Sinnemäki et al., 2019:187.

Education and Literacy in Finland

Finland is among the countries where people believe in education because it is the backbone of developmental changes. The quality of Finnish education and literacy is to a large degree indebted to the aims of the Lutheran Reformation. Martin Luther's idea of reading and writing had a significant impact on the Finnish education and the written Finnish language.⁵⁵ Throughout the Catholic Middle Ages, the Bible in Finland was written in Latin, the language of administration and justice was in Swedish, and the international commerce was German while the Finnish language was used by common people. The bishop of Turku, Mikael Agricola who is known as the father of the written Finnish language translated the New Testament and published books in Finnish.⁵⁶ The survey of the development of reading and writing skills in Finland in 1880 showed that 98.7% of all Finns could read while 12.4% were able to write. But the situation had changed dramatically in 1930 when 99.3% could read and 84.1% of Finnish had a writing skill.⁵⁷ Lutheran Church of Finland had strong and long-lasting effects on Finnish education and literacy because the church provided education for parishioners in the basics of reading and writing and in the knowledge of the catechism, as well as through preaching and the confession.⁵⁸

The Finnish Bibles were handed into the hands of common people in Finland during the early nineteenth century. Swedish remained the language of public administration, bureaucracy, and higher education even after 1809, until the Finnish language slowly replaced it in the years before Finland gained independence in 1917.⁵⁹ There was a strong Finnish national awakening in the later part of the 19th century, with an ambition to honor the Finnish culture. This resulted in tensions between the language groups, who both struggled to secure education in their own languages.⁶⁰ Still today, there are separate schools for Finnish and Swedish speaking people from primary schools to university level.

Finnish Spirituality

Historically, spirituality has been part of Finnish culture. For example, Topelius's book "Our Land" describes Finland as a God-believing nation and divinely given to them.⁶¹ However, spirituality in Finland in the 2020s, according to a religious perspective is on criticism of ecclesiastical traditions.⁶² Even though many Finns still belong to the church, they do not take an active part in religious events, such as the Church services and worship of God. The church is a place to go mainly for celebrations, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals, and Finnish religiosity is more

⁵⁵ Sinnemäki et al., 2019:101.

⁵⁶ Nielson 2006:27.

⁵⁷ Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002:114–116.

⁵⁸ Sinnemäki et al., 2019:102–104.

⁵⁹ Engman, 2009: 185–190; Ingemark, 2016.

⁶⁰ Nielson, 2006: 27–28.

⁶¹ Ehrnrooth 1999, 116.

⁶² McGuire, 2008:12–13.

a private matter than a public life.⁶³ Following Finland's independence, both the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church were considered national churches, but almost all Finnish citizens were members of the Lutheran church. Today the situation has changed dramatically. The survey of religious participation in Europe conducted during the last three decades of the twentieth century consistently placed the Scandinavian countries at the bottom of the table, because none recorded more than 7 percent of the population claiming to attend religious services at least once a week.⁶⁴ In addition, according to the study done by the Church Research Institute on Religiosity of Finns in transition shows a significant decline in Christian tradition among people who are between 30 and 39.⁶⁵

The European Values Study by the University of Tilburg on self-reporting of regular church attendance in 1999-2000 showed that church attendance was very low in Protestant Europe and especially in Scandinavia.⁶⁶ According to Jenny Te Paa⁶⁷, one of the main reasons for the secularization of the Finnish society (and other Nordic societies) that researchers usually point out is individualization: religious beliefs have become something private. Faith is something you do not share with others, and which you don't even transmit to your children, because you think that they should choose for themselves, in what they want to believe.⁶⁸ Another reason behind secularization is a strong belief in science and reason (which by many is regarded as an exclusive alternative to religious faith). A third reason worth mentioning is the welfare-state: many people feel so secure, that they think they can manage without God – at least until some major crisis affects their life or the society.

The spirituality of Finnish people is affected by a local history and cultural tradition, climate change, beliefs, gender issues, and related patterns and customs. Thus, in Finland and other Nordic countries, the Lutheran church status is reflected both in the values of the individual and in the social debate.⁶⁹ Thus, keeping an environment holy and the practice of being in nature as a place of meeting with God or a supernatural power are familiar trends in Finnish private spirituality. People's commitment to helping others also gives meaning to their lives.⁷⁰

Prayer and Meditation

Prayer is the most common way to practice religiosity. The Gallup Ecclesiastical survey done in 2019 shows that half of Finns prayed at least once a year, more than a fifth of Finns listened to religious songs at least a few times a month; but the reading of sacred books was less common.⁷¹

⁶³ Sorsa 2018, 7.

⁶⁴ Stanley, 2018:108.

⁶⁵ Sinnemäki et al., 2019:165–167.

⁶⁶ Stanley, 2018:108–109.

⁶⁷ Bevans & Williams, 2011: 75.

⁶⁸ Taylor, 2007: 507–508.

⁶⁹ Helkama & Portman 2019.

⁷⁰ Sinnemäki et al., 2019: 165–167.

⁷¹ Kääriäinen 2015: 64–65; Martikainen 2003: 245–246.

In addition, the study done by The Church Research Institute (2019) shows that one in three Finns had no prayer life at all, 36% prayed at least a few times a month, 33% never prayed, and one in six Finns prayed every day. The study continues to show that the number of women who pray daily has decreased dramatically by nine percentage points in four years.⁷² The most common form of prayer used by Finns is meditation (silent prayer), which two in five reported as part of their morning personal devotional life while less than a third prayed in the evening. However, both Christian and non-Christian meditation were practiced more generally by younger generations (those between 15-29).⁷³ In addition, the connection between meditation and yoga is apparent in Finnish culture: whereas more than two out of five (42%) of those who practice meditation also practice yoga at least a few times a month, while the proportion of those practicing yoga is about one in ten of the total population.⁷⁴

Pilgrimage -a journey along a physically prescribed route to a spiritually valuable object or place is also practiced among Finns. Meditation and pilgrimage can thus be assumed to be culturally connected, about one in six of those who practice meditation also reported participating in a pilgrimage, while four percent of the total population had participated in one.⁷⁵ Furthermore, making an anonymous donation is also a popular way to engage in religion. In the Nordic welfare states charity, voluntary and complementary to public services are in people's minds.⁷⁶ A survey done by the Church Research Institute revealed that Finns showed a high level of willingness to help. About half (49%) fully agreed, and just over a third (38%) agreed, with the statement that they were ready to help their close circle if necessary.⁷⁷

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Almost all churches in Finland have been very welcoming toward Sub-Sahara African Christian immigrants, however, membership and the rate of weekly church attendance of Sub-Sahara African immigrants is very low in established denominations in Finland. Instead, Sub-Sahara African Christians are setting up their own ecclesiastic congregations in many cities. Secularization had negative consequence to many churches in the Western countries where there is a shortage of priests and pastors, while in Sub-Sahara Africa there are many students in theological schools. In addition, the number of church attendees during church services is very low in Europe in comparison to Africa. There were European missionaries who taught Africans how to write and read. However, Christian theology is largely conceived and written in Europe, and many important traditions for Africans are therefore lacking.

⁷² Sinnemäki et al., 2019: 150–155

⁷³ Sinnemäki, et al., 2019:155.

⁷⁴ Sinnemäki, et al., 2019:155–156.

⁷⁵ Sinnemäki, et al. 2019: 162–165.

⁷⁶ Helkama, 2015: 25, Grönlund 2020, 243–244.

⁷⁷ Salomäki, 2020.

Spirituality has been part of Finnish culture; their national anthem describes Finland as a God-believing nation and divinely given to them. In the Lutheran theological tradition, the reformation is understood as a movement that underscored, that there is no need of a mediator between God and the Christians. In the individualized and secularized society of today, there is a strong belief that everyone can be in a direct contact with God, in a private and invisible ways. In addition, Sub-Saharan African Christians in Finland maintain fundamentalist views and consider the consumption of alcohol and tobacco as a sin while some Finnish churches consider it as no problem to their religiosity and have a more liberal approach to the Bible. Moreover, the existence of God is at the top of the African and Finnish ontological structure. The Holy Spirit is the agent of service that brings personal boldness and power into the believer's life. All Sub-Saharan African Christians and Finnish Christians believe in the God of the Bible, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, but they express their faith in very different ways. Furthermore, prayer, and music are very important into the life of both Sub-Saharan African Christians and very significant for Finnish Christians too but the songs they sing are mostly quite different.

Recommendations

The preaching of the gospel to the poor and the dialogue with them is a common element in both Finnish and Sub-Saharan African Christianity. Even Jesus preached about God's kingdom through things taken from people's cultural settings so that they could understand his message. In addition, studies show that religious identity may promote healthy development, hope, self-esteem, and trauma coping.⁷⁸ It is therefore important for individuals to belong to groups where the numbers share visible characteristics, values, and convictions. Thus, some Sub-Saharan African Pentecostal and evangelical churches have Africanized liturgy in a free and spontaneous way that liberate them from the Western World's approaches.⁷⁹ They have elements of both traditions and Christian's values. All in all, Sub-Saharan African churches in Finland function as arenas for reformulating life stories and their identities.

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⁷⁸ Smith, & Silva, 2011.

⁷⁹ Andersson, 1992:119.

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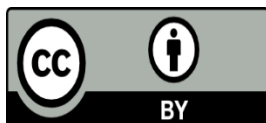
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