

Original Research Article

Causes for the Backsliding of the New Converts from among the Seventh Day Adventists church at Nyamira County- Kenya

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Abstract

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The prerequisite of this paper was to examine reasons that were responsible for the lapsing of the novel adherents who come into the church, soon shortly after they were oriented into the life of the church. The paper's study area was Borabu Sub-County County- Kenya. The main objective of this paper was to disclose the underlying causes responsible for perpetual existence of the problem of backsliding. Mixed design approaches of both descriptive and analytical were appropriate. Interviews, likert scale of five key scoring points' methods and observation instrument were considered applicable. The implication of this paper in the first place will unearth the various causes for church dropouts which form the basis for designing relevant methods of reclaiming them back into the church life. Furthermore, the paper shall be beneficial in the provision of knowledge in the field of academics and to other researchers. Results and findings exposed that some churches experience the problem of backsliding at a proportion that is destabilizing the importance of improvements.

Keywords: Acculturation, Anthropology, Backslidings, Etymology, Lapsed, and Ethnocentrism

INTRODUCTION

Metzger (1993:247) holds that the word Backsliding connotes turning off against God from an earlier transformation. According to the interpreters Bible commentary backsliding is defined as foretelling and re-counting the disloyalty of the nation of Israel to God, ((Strong, 1974: 164)). (Richard, 1925:25) examined Jeremiah's and Hosea's views which holds the idea that "a backslidden society had sinned by deciding to worship other gods and moral deterioration marked the backslidden society. (Strong, 1974: 164), maintains that the word backsliding implies turning off from God's covenantal relationship. (Jeremiah 3: 67) and (Psalms 57:17) portrays the nation of Israel as a wife of Yahweh that had demonstrated treachery and embraced paganism and so excluded Yahweh for pagan deities. (Langes, 1960:145) analyzed Genesis (3:9) by indicating that throughout the entire Christian Bible, the God of the Christian religion is revealed in His dynamics of

searching man from his backslidden condition. In the Old Testament, Adam, whom the study identified as the first backslider was reconciled by God through animal sacrifice and in the process of redemption, God clothed him with the animal skin which pointed forward to the lamb of God sacrificed at cavalry in the New Testament (ibid). Furthermore, (Hubbard, 1992:117) argues from the Christian bible (Leviticus 5:6), that a backslider in the Old Testament was reunited to God by the blood of animal scarified for the remission of sins from among the commonwealth of Israel. Joers (1975:11) records that these sacrifices were not sufficient to reconcile backsliders from their sunken nature. However, they only pointed to a better sacrifice and covenant in the New Testament, a model of reclaiming backsliders at every age until Christ's return, which is a gland glorious hope for the Christian church.

The Christian bible (Genesis 12) records that immedi-

ately after the first fall in Eden home, God designated Abraham in order to reinstate this wrecked bond between God and the nation of Israel. In Genesis (3:9) God called man back into fellowship from His disobedience in the Eden home. The book of Genesis identifies the disobedience of Adam as the cause for the backslidden condition of the pair at Eden (Gen 3:1). Adam's and Eve's insubordination noted in Eden contagiously gave rise to the fruits of disobedience to God's command in the contemporary church, which justified this paper in examining the causes for the relapsing from among the new converts in the Seventh Day Adventists church. The paper recognized that God selected Abraham in order that He might reestablish all the relapsed humanity unto Himself. The Christian bible (Jer 3:6) chronicles that God picked the nation of Israel as His gadget of restoration but the nation of Israel became unfaithful and absconded out of this great responsibility. Even so, God refurbished them back into fellowship. According to the New Testament bible (Mathew 28:19- 20), God inaugurated the great commission in His plan of restoring man from his backslidden condition by instructing the early church to go and makes disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, the son and the holy spirit, teaching them and commanding them to observe all things.

Marvin and Clanlan (1978: 29) contends that negligence of the study of anthropology in reference to etymology leads to the loss of many new members who join our churches. They further advance that in order to overcome the danger of culture shock, the study of enculturation and acculturation in reference to contextualization is paramount, (ibid: 35). Chintz (2004: 299) declares that when the Church member struggles to conform with the new church culture in vain, he or she quits, lest the church adopts the immanence of Christ. According to the study done (Linthicum, 1991:76), in Presbyterian Church in order to find the cause for the decline in number of members, it was found out that this is partly because of the unfulfilled needs of church members in addition to their incompetence, lack of ethics, satanic agencies and the member's themselves. Ellis (1974) notes that the Holy Scripture as recorded in the Christian scripture (Luke 15), lays a model of reclaiming church backsliders from among the new converts as illustrated in the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son

McAfee, ed. (1990: 37) observes that ethnocentric gospel is the major challenge to the churches of the world. Conn (1984: 154), maintains the same view that acculturation and enculturation is Christ's method of reclamation. (Guillermo, 1998:388) noted that Jesus used the culture form of the time in explaining His disciples on how to incarnate the gospel when He healed the blind man recorded in the bible (Mark 8:22-23) by mixing the dirt and his saliva to make mud. Jesus communicated his

love through the vehicle of popular medicine of that culture again when he sent this blind man to the pool of Siloam whose waters served for purification rites. As noted in the foregoing factor, the church has been experiencing the loss of the new members because of the church's failure to incarnate the gospel in the culture of the target group. The gospel has not been allowed to grow among the people. Biblical words that appear strange to the targeted group are to be carefully used in reference to the language they can understand.

Koranya (1999:275), transcripts that the statement of the conference of the Seventh day Adventist Church on world mission and evangelism in 1996 is in deep accordance with the experience of the early church, "there is no way being human without participating in culture, for it is through culture that identity is created." The responsibility and task of the church is to use the possibility given by God in culture in reaching backsliders. Likewise, Trompf (1987:25) agrees with Koranya in his statement that the gospel is not western culture brought in by missionaries, but that it is a Christian tradition inaugurated by Jesus Christ. Herbert (1985) noted that in the modern world, if the church is to penetrate through backsliders, it has to transform confessional theology to praxis theology. He further argued that the theology of contextualization is relevant to missiology. According to the Christian book (Acts 2) the Pentecost event demonstrated to the world how God Himself conceptualized the message written in the bible. (June, 1975), argues that God communicated His message to the early cross-cultural church at Jerusalem through their own languages. In the same view, White, (1975: 375) records that the Galileans heard the disciples speaking different languages of all the nationalities who had gathered at Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover.

In line with the foregoing factor, Adams, (2005:296) holds that the gospel of John begins with a contextual message as is recorded in (John 1:1), that in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. John incarnated the gospel in the Greek mythology by using the word logos which according to the Greek economy meant the eternal knowledge of the word. John won their audience by identifying with them by communicating the gospel through their cultural etymology. The apostle John equated Jesus with the logos of the Greek mythology. He (Adams) too revealed that early missionaries did not recognize the importance of the religious value in the African worldviews and how they could be used to interpret Christianity in Africa. Further still Adams (ibid) points out that the Theology brought from the west to Africa was communicated in the Jewish worldview, and that of the Greeks and later Romans and later Europeans. It was brought to Africa with little attempt at local integration.

In addition, Christianity was equated with western

culture, education and civilization. It remains a matter of fact that Africa may not come to a full awareness of Christ unless the gospel is presented in their worldview and in extension if Christianity is not allowed to grow in the context of the local inhabitants. Further still, to the disadvantage of African Christianity, missionaries of the 17th century used western culture as a Christian standard. It further follows that the Christianity presented to Africa saw western culture as superior and pure over other cultures to be used in converting pagans to Christianity. They introduced medicine, education, worship styles, architecture and dressing codes which were not in harmony with the Africa culture. Despite the fact that, we have been long been accustomed to identifying the people with the inhabitants of a given region, or nation, the church needs to understand that, a people is not the sum of the individual who compose it, but the complex made up of the staple relationships that they form among themselves such as their lifestyle, their way of viewing reality and their way of solving problems. "In general people spoken of in Mathew means culture, (Tambua, 1962: 162)". Aubrey (1998:124) transcripts that some of the children drop out of the church after form four (secondary) education to hunt other things like career and college, but not the church. However, eventually, they come back to the church after other traumatic occasions say want of a kid, matrimonial, sickness and unexpected bereavement of close relatives.

Statement of the Problem

A case study was done on two churches, Chebirate and Omobirona churches of Nyamira conference of Seventh day Adventist in Nyamira County to find out why there was a continues dropout of the newly baptized members. From the total of the five thousand plus newly baptized adherents by the department of Theology of Bugema University during the public evangelism series in 2001 in Nyamira conference (Nyamira County), many of them had dropped shortly after baptism. The researcher had these questions to the affected churches; where are these newly converts? What had happened to them? This scenario influenced the researcher to undertake an investigation to fill these questions as the major test of effectiveness of this paper.

Study area

The area of study was Nyamira County, formerly Nyamira District. It is a county in the former Nyanza province of Kenya. It was curved off from the former larger Kisii District, presently called Kisii County. By the time of this research the county had a total population of 598,252. In terms of gender the County had male 48% and female

52% with a population density of 665 people per km². Her annual Growth rate by the time of this research was 2.4% with age distribution of: 0-14 years was 44.1%, 15-64 years was recorded at 52.4% while 65+ was registered at 3.55%. It is located in the former Nyanza province bordering neighboring Counties of: Bomet to the east, Narok to the South, Kisii to the west, Homa Bay to the north and Kericho to the North East. Its total area coverage is 899.3km².

The County has her temperatures ranging from a mean annual minimum of 10.1 degrees centigrade to a maximum of 28.7 degrees centigrade. Her rainfall per annum amounts between 600mm to 2300mm per annum. The county has a poor road network of; Bitumen surface (104.2 km), gravel surface (641.4 km), and earth surface of 343.4km. Her economy includes: livestock, arable farming, pasture, tourism such as manga ridge and kiomachingi falls and hills. Economic activities include- tea, coffee, pyrethrum, dairy farming, banana plantations and brick making. Concerning education, by the year 2007 the Nyamira County had 567 public primary schools, 166 public secondary schools with a total enrolment of 144,085 primary and 36,099 secondary pausing a teacher student ratio of 1:43 and 1: 37 correspondingly. As regards to tertiary institutions by the time of this research, the Nyamira county had one University Camppus, one medical training college and 31 youth polytechnics. It had two district hospitals, two sub district hospitals, 4 dispensaries, 45 health centers, 24 medical clinics, 14 nursing homes, 3 maternity homes. (Figure 1)

Research Population and sample design

The researcher adopted both descriptive and analytical research designs. A sample size of 63 respondents was appropriately both randomly and purposively selected out of the total target population of 1205. Lapsed and regular adherents of good standing were suitable for the development of this paper.

Theory

The study adopted Wallhausen's Deuteronomist hypothetical frame work (1805). The researcher used this theory in order to elucidate that the state of Israel suffered the Babylonian deportation for the reason that it exhibited their disloyalty to God's law. This demonstrated infidelity of the kingdom of Judah was measured in terms of disobedience to the Deuteronomic law. The researcher used this theory to illustrate that the newly converted Christians backslide because of their unfaithfulness to the commandments of God spelt out in the book of Exodus (20: 1-19).

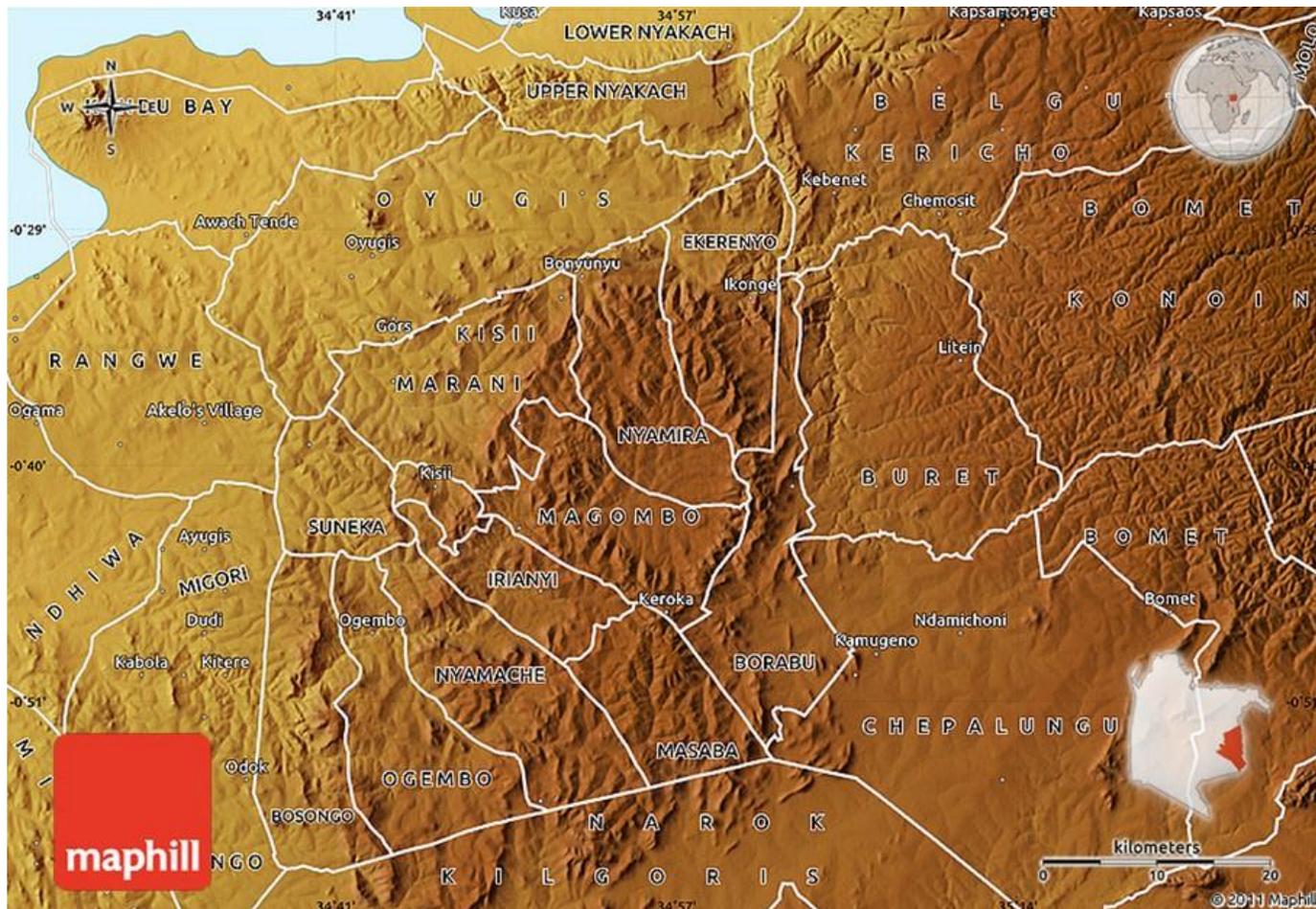


Figure 1. Map of Nyamira County showing her sub-Counties and neighboring Counties

Source: maphil Maps

METHODOLOGY

Investigations were carried out at eleven sites of Borabu sub County with a total population of 1205 and a sample size of 63 respondents arrived at by purposive sampling and random sampling at 20%. Both analytical and Descriptive survey designs were used. Instruments and techniques for data collected were interviews, questionnaires and observation. In addition, the research used partial exegesis of selected Bible texts that followed the grammatical historical method of interpretation. Published books, periodicals and commentaries were used as secondary sources to this study.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

By the use of a likert scale of 1-5 point scoring keys, the respondents were asked to indicate their preferred options as 'SA' means strongly agree, 'A' –agree, 'DK'–

don't know, 'SD'– strongly disagree and 'D' –disagree where 'SA'=5, A=4, DK=1, SD=2 and D=3. Results and discussions were recorded below.

The results recorded in table 1 at a cumulative score of 47% below does not form the threshold required to conclude that these adherents were thoroughly instructed on the values and doctrines of the church. The interpretation derived from the information decoded is that these relapsed members were not inculcated on the fundamental teachings of the Seventh –day Adventists as they are recorded in *the Seventh –day Adventists believe* (2006), which holds that the great ethics and values of God's law are exemplified in the ten Commandments and are epitomized in the life of Christ. The paper transcripts that the Ten Commandments express God's adoration and purposes regarding the social behavior and relationships. It is the expectation of this paper that new converts ought to be instructed on the doctrines of God, the doctrine of humanity, the doctrine of the Christian life, doctrine of the church, the doctrine of

Table 1. Whether the new converts were instructed for continues period of three years immediately after their baptism.

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
Strongly Agree	12	19	19
Agree	18	28	47
Don't know	01	02	49
Strongly Disagree	25	40	89
Disagree	07	11	100
Total	63	100	

Source: Research data 2007

Table 2. Responses on whether negligence to care for the new converts might have caused the loss of members from the church

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
Strongly Agree	10	15	15
Agree	47	75	90
Don't know	01	02	92
Strongly Disagree	10	02	94
Disagree	04	06	100
Total	63	100	

Source: Research data 2007

Table 3. Whether Negligence of divine prerequisites were appropriate to the lapsing of recently baptized adherents of the SDA church at Borabu Sub County

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
Strongly Agree	12	19	71
Agree	45	71	90
Undecided	01	02	92
Disagree	03	05	97
Strongly Disagree	02	03	100
Total	63	100	

Source: field data 2006

salvation, and the doctrine of eschatology in the process of preparing their retention in the church.

Concerning the findings recorded in table 2 above, majority of the respondents agreed that physical and social needs to a large extent at 90% were proposed to be responsible for the massive new converts' dropouts at Borabu County Seventy day Adventist churches. This result is similar to the findings of (Guillermo, 1998:388) who notes that Jesus who is the model of seeking the lost mingled with the people as one who desired their goods. The results showed that some of the dropouts in this group showed a prolonged sickness without the awareness of the church. They showed a sincere concern against the church's indifference to visit them and identify with them. Others were seriously old and they were confined to their bed, however, the church bracketed them as dropouts unjustly. The findings of the paper revealed that the disconnection between the new

converts and the church leadership generates a challenge which leads to subsequent backsliding. In addition, the church's failure to the use of modern mass media such as radio talk shows and electronic recordings, tape recorders, internet charts, and discussions in its endeavor to bring the messages of hope to all old people in their social setting. Jesus often met people's physical needs and used this as an opportunity to meet their spiritual needs. The formula is for the church to begin where people are and take them to where God want them to be or the way the savior did with the Samaritan woman in John chapter four.

As revealed in table 3 above, 90% respondents agreed that exasperated divine wants of the spirit were found responsible for the grounds of the relapsing of the lately christened adherents within the Seventh day Adventists church at Nyamira County. Some retorted that they had difficulties in studying the word of God and

Table 4. Whether Economical Needs might have caused backsliding from among the adherents

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
Strongly Agree	37	59	60
Disagree	19	30	89
Don't know	01	02	91
Agree	04	06	97
Strongly Agree	02	03	100
Total	63	100	

Source: Research data 2007

Table 5. Responses on whether Political motives may have contributed to Church dropouts from among the converts to Christianity

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
SA	02	02	02
A	03	05	07
Don't know	01	01	08
Agree	45	72	80
Strongly Agree	12	20	100
Total	63	100	

Source: Research data 2007

praying frequently. While on the other hand, others complained of the uninspiring services, which did not impact their lives positively. One backslider confirmed that he stopped attending the church because of difficulties in getting permission to stay off duty during the Sabbath. He approached the elders of the church to assist him to overcome this problem but, when the elders were not able to assist him, the member dropped out of the church and continued to work on Saturday. Others showed that they did not have a prayer watch and meditation. Others also attested that they failed to study about the word of God and pray daily.

The findings from table 4 showed that 89% of the causes of dropout are caused by economic factors. Since scores above 85% are considered appropriate, this factor was a strong cause for the church dropouts. Some of these were attributed to Sabbath observance in which case the member had not been provided with an alternative in the event of being fired. Others were removed from church membership because they were not tithing, and so, they were found idle at home. Furthermore, the findings showed that because of the church's poor system of regular collection of funds, some lapsed members exposed that they were jaded with this consequence and decided to stay at home, only later to be informed that they have been removed from the church membership. One Youngman, when interviewed said that he stopped attending the church so that he could first of all look for money for dowry for his marriage, marry, and then come to church. He was met by the visiting team on Saturday making bricks for sale. This

Youngman when he got swayed by the visiting team that dowry is not a big problem to those who are faithful to their faith, he started coming to church once again and he became a member of the church choir.

The reading on table 5 indicated that seven Percent (07%) of the grounds for lapsing of the freshly rehabilitated adherents of the Seventh day Adventists Christian church are politically driven and so it may have not been the chief basis for this tendency for the reason that the 07 percentage tally does not come across the threshold essential for the investigation. The outcome of this inquiry under this current tool for investigation is analogous to the aspiration of the Kenyan constitution (2010) chapter two clause number eight as regards to state and religion, which holds that there shall be no state religion. Since there is no state religion it is expected that the people of Kenya ought to enjoy their freedom of worship. Since the Kenyan government does not force anybody to worship on the Sabbath, it is the interpretation of this paper that political motives were not considered as appropriate reasons for the relapsing of the adherents. The outcomes displayed that these respondents answered positively to their call to join the church, but along the way, their devotion to duty on Sabbath days forced them to leave the church. Though, they designated a disposition to come back if the church offers them a clarification on the question of both being true their responsibility and realistically observe the obligations of the church. Some of their explanations of plummeting as specified in the statistics comprised the subsequent facts. The area councilor (X) (2006),

interviewed attested that however he was a participant of the church (SDA), he had of late stopped presenting himself to the church for the reason that civic responsibility called upon him on the Sabbath. Also, one Member of Parliament (Q) (2006), when interviewed said that from the time when he was elected as Member of Parliament, leaders of the church had also clogged to come within reach of him about his affiliation; nevertheless, they always approach him for fund levitations and special church offerings. "Church adherents have never come up to me about my church relationship while I was the area member of parliament, but they always solicit for fund levitations and special church offerings"

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that much of the work of disciplining has not included that of teaching and much of the work of teaching has ignored that of disciplining. The conclusion was also drawn that it is impossible for members to drop out of small groups of the church unnoticed. Therefore, the other members for a well functioning group are immediately accountable for anyone who ceases to come to church. Therefore, the uncaring and negligence of the church was noted as one of the causes for the loss of newly converted members from the church'

RECOMMENDATIONS

In relation to the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. The paper recommended for the study of anthropology in relation to mission work in order to provide a relational approach to retention of new converts cross culturally.
- ii. The paper also recommended that the church ought to teach Christian values and ethics in order to prevent lapsing of new converts.

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