

Neo-Pentecostals' Religious Practices and Alleviation of Domestic Water Scarcity in Tigania West Constituency, Meru County, Kenya

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Abstract

Neo-Pentecostal Churches have had varied religious practices that have differently been informing their involvement of alleviation of societal problems. This study focused on how these Neo-Pentecostal practices have informed Pentecostal Churches' role in alleviating domestic water scarcity in Tigania west constituency of Meru County, Kenya. The participation of these churches in the alleviation of societal problems is not felt, contrary to the requirements of Exodus 17:1-7, Numbers 20:1-15, Isaiah 41:17-20, Matthew 25:35 and John 4: 5-15 that teaches that churches be involved such societal affairs. Scarcity of water affects 97 percent of the constituents. The study specifically analyzed the practices of neo-Pentecostal Churches under the theme 'spiritual warfare', 'prosperity gospel', 'faith healing and deliverance', and 'prophecy'. It was guided by theological reflection and social capital theories. The study adopted interpretivist philosophy, qualitative approach and phenomenological research design. Twenty-two (22) pastors and 59 out of 594 members were sampled using cluster and simple random sampling technique. The pastors were interviewed, while Focus Group Discussion was conducted on 5 groups of Pentecostal churches members. The study further analyzed documents from participating churches. The instruments were validated and tested for reliability. Data collected was then analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis. The findings indicated that Neo-Pentecostal churches held their religious practices as adequate in alleviation of domestic water scarcity. This outcome necessitated recommendations on the need for Pastors to take measures for enhancing knowledge of ecclesiastical praxis. These measures include seeking advisory from their umbrella bodies. Consequently, the theological institutions ought to include social gospel in their training curricula. Further, Faith Based Organizations should organize conferences, seminars and workshops to train clergies and practicing pastors on the same. This would enable them to balance their epistemology on holistic aspects such as alleviating societal problems like water scarcity.

Key terms: *Neo-Pentecostals churches, religious practices, domestic water scarcity, ecclesiastical praxis, Tigania West, Meru County-*

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1.0 Introduction

In the period 1950s to 1980s, alleviation of domestic water scarcity was the prerogative of governments, with churches being treated tangentially (Bellin, 2008, Freeman, 2016). Within the same period however, church proponents were pushing for inclusion, based in bible texts such as Isaiah 41:17-20 (Ruden, 2020). Such proponents were the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Junior (Beukes & Huffel, 2016; Nancy, 2017). Consequently, the church triumphed and started to participate in the alleviation of the domestic water scarcity notably in the 1980s. Accordingly, this study focused on how religious practices of Neo-Pentecostal churches [NPCs] informed alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania west constituency of Meru County, Kenya.

Clean water is colorless, tasteless and odorless, originating from rain or springs. Springs combine to form streams and rivers, often flowing into lakes, seas or oceans (King James Version [KJV] Bible Dictionary (2019). It is used for environmental, industrial, agricultural and domestic purposes (Demie, et al 2016). Domestic water is most critical for life sustenance (World Health Organization [WHO], 2017). The criticality of domestic water dates back to 2.4 billion years Before Christian Era [BCE] (Pariona, 2018). It was still felt in 33 CE at the time of Christ (Matthew 25:35) (World Vision, 2021). In 2019 CE, it was rated 4th global risk (World Economic Forum [WEF] 2019). There risk when water resources are characterized by: stress (Genesis 26:12-33); poor quality (Exodus 15:22-25), and

over 1 Kilometer accessibility [Km] (II Kings 20:20), unaffordability (Isaiah 55:1) (Shen, 2019). Additionally, other stress factors include below 40 liters of water per person per day (Ezekiel 4:11), usage inefficiency (Proverbs 21:20) (Sandowich, 2016), and conflicts (Genesis 26:12–33) (Agesa & Agesa 2019; Demie et al., 2016; Kreamer, 2013, Parker, 2016; WHO, 2017).

Alleviation of water scarcity can thus be viewed as playing any role against any of these water stress factors in the locality. For NPCs' such roles had been identified as religious practices, characterized by spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:4), prosperity gospel (Malachi 3:6-12), faith healing and deliverance (Psalms 41:3 & 32:7) and prophecy (Judges 2:16) (Parsitau, 2019; Zenner, 2020). However, just like the Samaritan woman in John 4:5-15, NPCs appear inclined to spirituality aspect only, with meagre reference to these practices (Gregory & Gabrielle, 2013). Globally, 58 percent of the population has domestic water scarcity (Kummu, et al 2016). Out of these, at least 1.1 million has water related diseases with 205 deaths per hour.

In addition to governments' interventions, some mainline churches had done much (Martin, 2017). Also, a few NPCs such as those in Russia and Ukraine have been contributing to help with the marginalized in doing water projects for the latter (Marsh & Tonoyan, 2009). In Africa, 50 percent of its population is faced with domestic water scarcity, 250 million people have water related diseases and 112

are dying hourly. In intervention, the Church of Pentecost (CoP) in Ghana has developed a 5 year plan to operationalize faith healing and deliverance in conserving clean disease-free waters (Donkor, 2020). Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) has 58 percent of its population faced with domestic water scarcity, with about 188 million people having water related diseases, with 81 hourly deaths (Tumble Green Editorial team, 2015). Mainline churches such as the United Methodist Church has been conserving water in remote communities (Kumuterera & Nkhoma, 2020). But, for most of the NPCs, their religious practices, particularly the prosperity gospel and spiritual warfare had an ambiguous relationship with praxis. Theirs is full time spiritual ministry (Kwateng-Yeboah, 2016; Sande, 2020).

Kenya's population comprises 39 percent people facing domestic water scarcity, with 15 million having water related diseases with about 3 hourly deaths (Bissh, 2020; Water.Org, 2020). Churches like African Divine Church had transformed their spirituality into alleviation of domestic water scarcity (Sam Sam Water, 2020). Meanwhile, large NPCs' such as Jesus Is Alive Ministries [JIAM]' had been breeding social capital that is often extended into building water projects (Mwaura, 2020). Ninety two percent of Meru County residents are faced with domestic water scarcity (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2019). In this county, 2 people died of cholera in May 2016 CE and another in May 2018 CE (Murithi, 2016; United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), 2018) among other cases. In search of solutions, the Methodist Church in Kenya [MCK] initiated several training programs on rain

water harvesting (MCK, 2020). NPCs however, had social capitals that were not translated into groups for alleviating domestic water problems (Mwaura, 2020). Tigania West Constituency of Meru County has 97 percent of its population faced with domestic water scarcity. But regarding churches, conspicuous intervention could only be found with the Catholic Lay Volunteers International Association [LVIA] (2012). The foregoing discussion shows that NPCs participate very little in alleviating domestic water scarcity. The causal variables are quantitatively spiritual warfare, prosperity gospel, faith healing and deliverance and prophecy. Qualitatively, however, the epistemology underlying these practices is not clear. Hence, the need to analyze their religious practices to determine what they state about alleviation of water scarcity menace in Tigania West Constituency, Meru County, Kenya, using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis [IPA].

“Kenya’s population comprises 39 percent people facing domestic water scarcity, with 15 million having water related diseases with about 3 hourly deaths”

Alleviation of domestic water scarcity is the participatory role of all cohorts of churches as asserted by the WCC (Beukes & Huffel, 2016) and prescribed in the bible in texts such as Isaiah 41:17-20 (Ruden, 2020). In line with this, many churches were playing this role (Unruh et al, 2018). A closer example is the Roman Catholic

Church that has been supplying water to sections of the constituents in addition to government interventions (LVIA, 2012). In spite of this, however, it still appears that alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania west constituency continues to remain an elusive issue with NPCs. The religious practices of NPCs in alleviating domestic water scarcity, the latter now standing at 97 percent in Tigania West constituency were not felt. This had resulted to many water related diseases accounting for about 80 percent of all reported cases in the constituency (Karuku, 2018).

This raises serious concerns on whether these churches heeded to declarations by bodies such as the WCC or the biblical prescriptions of Exodus 17:1-7, Numbers 20:1-15, Isaiah 41:17-20, Matthew 25:35 and John 4: 5-15. Several studies such as that of Martin (2017) and Vida (2018) indicated churches' religious practices of spiritual warfare, prosperity gospel, faith healing and deliverance. But, no study presented NPCs as handling any of these variables in Tigania West constituency. It was on the basis of this gap that this study was conducted focusing on NPCs variable of the alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania West constituency, using IPA.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the religious practices of Neo-Pentecostal churches in the alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania west constituency, Meru Kenya, with a view to examining how spiritual warfare, prosperity gospel, faith healing and deliverance and prophecy gospel informed the Neo-Pentecostal Churches on

alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania West constituency.

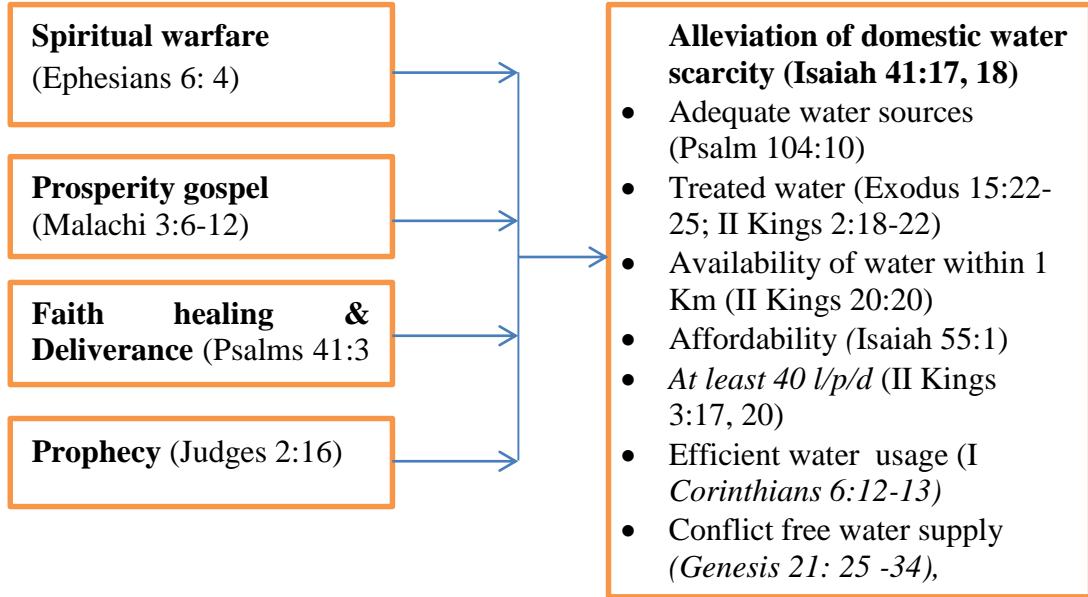
The study was based on Theological Reflection Theory by Pedro Arrupe (1907-1991). This theory relates to the epistemology of people regarding a phenomenon for the purposes of challenging, clarifying and defining new truths (Sallai, 2019). The literature reviewed showed that first, spiritual warfare is the fight in the spiritual world to bring down powers of darkness that being about problems in the society (Asamoah-gyadu, 2020). Second, prosperity gospel has to do with preaching about good health and wealth through salvation and giving tithes, offerings and first fruits (Wealth, 2018). Third, faith-healing and deliverance means believing God's word so as to be sure of one's aspiration though not yet seen (Mwaura, 2020), by practicing the authority of Christ over Satan and demons that oppress a person (Shoo, 2017). Fourth, prophecy which means to foretell what will come, forth tell what is about to happen and reveal the pertinent issues around people (Parsitau, 2019). These four religious practices inform alleviation of domestic water scarcity differently.

In the US and Africa for instance, NPCs were mostly inclined to spiritual warfare and were dismissive of physical alleviation of domestic water scarcity (Asamoah-gyadu, 2020). In Russia, Ukraine and Norway most NPCs have extended their religious practices on the ground to alleviate domestic water problem (Eriksen, 2020). In the Sub Saharan Africa, there is often some uncertain relationship between the religious practices of most NPCs and their attitudes towards alleviation of domestic water scarcity (Sande, 2020). In

Kenya, a few NPCs have transformed their religious practices into social capital which gets involved in the alleviation of domestic water scarcity at times (Mwaura, 2020).

Figure 1 conceptualizes this theoretical discussion clearly.

Figure 1
Conceptual framework



2.0 Materials and Methods

This study was conducted in Tigania West constituency in Meru County, Kenya; an Arid and Semi-Arid Land with 97 percent of its population facing domestic water scarcity (Revolvy, 2018). The study adopted interpretivism philosophy and used qualitative approach. It further applied phenomenological research design (Dudovskiy, 2019; Pulla & Carter, 2018; Qutoshi, 2018). Twenty two NPCs were targeted as units of analysis, while units of observation were 22 pastors and 594 church members. To get the sample size (Atitwa, 2013) both non-probability and probability sampling techniques (Bryman, 2012) were used to arrive at 22 pastors (taken through census). The 59 members taken through ‘10% - 30%’ formula (10% preferred) (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003),

followed by 5 clusters decided upon through simple random. The instruments of collecting data were interview schedules for 22 pastors, documentary analysis and, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) for the 59 sampled church members (Oliveira et al, 2018; Prasad & Garcia, 2017; Pulla & Carter, 2018).

Pre-testing of these instruments of collecting data adopted 10 percent of the sample for pastors and members in the neighboring Buuri constituency (Hudelson et al, 2014). The validity of the instruments was ensured for through construct, criterion, bracketing and testimonial validities; while reliability of the instruments was ensured by making the interview schedule clear and with the same questions on all variables (Leung, 2015). Data was collected systematically starting with pastors’ interviews, documentary

analysis and then members’ Focus Group Discussions in that order. The data obtained was then analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis (Hudelson, et al. 2014).

3.0 Results and discussion

Twenty two pastors and 59 church members participated in this study. There was a 100 percent response rate for these pastors and church members as they took part in the interviews and the Focus Group Discussions respectively. Part of the reason for this response rate was good communication with correct details, together with constant reminders and facilitation.

The main research question was on how religious practices of NPCs informed their engagement in the alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania west constituency. Specific sub-questions were first, spiritual warfare anchored in

Ephesians 6:12; second, prosperity gospel anchored on Malachi 3:6-12; third, ‘faith healing and deliverance’ anchored on Psalms 41:3 and 32:7; and fourth, prophecy anchored on Judges 2:16. Accordingly, an understanding of these practices which formed their religious/public life epistemology needed to be understood. Their related sub questions in the interview schedule, FGDs, as well as in documentary analysis majored on how they helped or translated into alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania West constituency, as they got operationalized in the churches’ weekly, monthly and annual meetings. This would help to unveil the reality on NPCs the same, to necessitate action.

The findings are tabulated in tables 1 for pastors’ interview; and table 2 for members’ Focus Group Discussions separately.

Table 1:

Pastors Interview on How Religious Practices Inform How Neo-Pentecostal Churches Engage in the Alleviation of Domestic Water Scarcity in Tigania West Constituency

Subordinate themes derived from related questions	Superordinate theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spiritual warfare is important because any physical manifestation is first a function of spiritual manifestation and thus must be fought spiritually because evil spiritual forces do not want a release of blessings such as domestic water. 	Spiritual warfare, combined with the gospel of sacrifice alleviates domestic water scarcity problems such as diseases through faith healing and deliverance and prophecy on the right political leadership to help alleviate this problem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prosperity gospel through alter financial sacrifice in the church makes Christians prosper in everything including access to clean domestic water from rain and community water projects. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith healing and deliverance is crucial even in alleviating domestic water scarcity because people sick of water related diseases such as cholera or depression from water conflicts are prayed for and healed. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prophecy helps to fore tell, forth tell or reveal the best advocates (political candidates) for election who would end domestic water scarcity 	

Table 2:

Members Focus Group Discussions on How Religious Practices Inform How Neo-Pentecostal Churches in Engaging in the Alleviation of Domestic Water Scarcity in Tigania West Constituency

Subordinate themes derived from related questions	Superordinate theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We can enter into the supernatural and cause spiritual warfare to get domestic water projects done by those responsible When we make financial sacrifices in the church, we prosper in everything including access to clean domestic water from rain water and even miraculous flows of clean water from our project water initiatives Water problems such as the water related diseases are caused by Satan, demons and a host of evil forces, hence the need for faith healing and deliverance. Prophecy helps to fore tell, forth tell and reveal alleviation of domestic water advocates (political candidates) for election to end domestic water scarcity 	Spiritual warfare combined with the gospel of sacrifice alleviates domestic water scarcity problems such as diseases through faith healing and deliverance and prophecy on the right political leadership to alleviate this problem

The findings indicated that first, spiritual warfare in the supernatural realm was what needed to make water actors to work in the alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania West constituency. Thus, just like Parsitau (2019) had pointed out, these respondents implied that domestic water scarcity characterize a spirit in the high places that suppresses the lives of individuals, communities and nations with water problems.

Second, it was significantly evident from these respondents that alter financial sacrifices acted as triggers for prosperity. They believed that such alter sacrifices (mainly tithes, offerings and first fruits) would miraculously bring about their domestic water through any water actor. However, as Benyah (2018) had observed,

this epistemology was an act of selfishness and prevents NPCs from focusing on the needy in the alleviation of domestic water scarcity among other issues. Third, all respondents tended to agree that human sickness and stress related to domestic water scarcity were caused by Satan, demons and other evil spirits; hence, the need for faith healing and deliverance.

This view had also been held by Myhre, et al (2019) and Wutich et al. (2019) Forth, Prophecy was critical to them because it was used to foretell, forth tell and reveal the right water advocates in form of political candidates for election in the alleviation of domestic water scarcity. As Ogera (2020) had argued, NPCs had much been emphasized on Prophetism by preparing the public for the current times and also the

times to come. These 4 subordinate themes yielded to the following superordinate theme: ‘Spiritual warfare, combined with the gospel of sacrifice alleviates domestic water scarcity problems such as diseases through faith healing and deliverance and prophecy on the right political leadership to help alleviate this problem.’

4.0 Conclusion

There was a misconception among Tigania West NPCs that spiritual warfare with the prosperity gospel alleviates water problems such as diseases and depression through faith-healing and deliverance, and prophecy on national water advocates (politicians) for constituency’s domestic water improvement. This showed a negation of reflection theology which deals with social/holistic gospel. According to these churches, ecclesiastical praxis was the work of the Roman Catholics and the Mainstream, but not them. Intervening in the alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania West constituency wide religious practices was fairly wayward. However, failure by these churches to understand that there was no “us versus them” in this role made this endeavor intricate.

It was noted that that one of the main reasons why it was fairly difficult for the pastors to comprehend the possibility of introducing ecclesiastical praxis within their churches was because their initial emergence in the 1980s was not about mending social economic failure, but to give hope to the politically and economically downtrodden.

First, there is need for NPCs to seek knowledge and information from institutions (such as KAN International School of Theology-Kenya) that embrace social gospel, based on the theories of theological reflection, social capital and others. This would help them understand their responsibilities based on ecclesiastical praxis related to alleviation of domestic water scarcity. This will yield ground action in as far as adjusting their epistemology and hence praxis is concerned. Second, neo-Pentecostal churches’ practices need not be demonized by people of different world view because almost all problems have a spiritual origin. If incorporated in the physical processes of alleviating societal problems such as alleviation of domestic water scarcity, these practices can be of great use in rooting out and dealing with societal problems including domestic water scarcity.

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