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## OPINION-Of Predator Pastors and Guillible Christians in Kenya

Ishmael Munene Feb 13, 2015

### Of predator pastors & gullible Christians in Kenya

As “Prophet Dr.” Kanyari’s theological transgression of biblical proportions exits the news headlines and the shock effect dissipates, Kenyans are returning to their old habits. “Prophet Dr.” Kanyari’s coterie of followers is back in business, unmoved by the damning expose in the national media. Elite worshippers gloss over their own Augean stable, falsely convicted “prophet Dr.” Kanyari’s antics are the stuff for the *hoi polloi*.

Yet both rich and poor, highly educated and those not, are unwitting co-conspirators in the death of the Christian church as an organism, consisting of God’s people in whom Christ dwells, and its reincarnation as an institution owned and operated by individuals or corporate groups.

Nowhere is this institutional entrapment of the church and the self-serving rationalization by the clergy more apparent than in financial matters. With the exception of Nairobi Chapel (and associated Mavuno Church) that posts its audited financial statements online, in most churches financial matters are conducted in dark smoked-filled rooms.

During my visits to Kenya, phone calls to elite “M-pesa” churches seeking information on financial matters including pastoral and staff salaries have only elicited stern reminders of confidentiality. Worshippers have not fared better, believing hook, line and sinker the warped logic of pastoral salary confidentiality. A spiritually and biblically comatose laity is enormously good business for the Kenyan clergy.

Apostle Paul’s letters to the Corinthians visualized the church as a dynamic organism with life-flowing energy. Christ is the head of this body and organizes members of the body through the impulses of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 13 and 14 he envisions the Christian church as a dynamic entity where all members’ gifts, from clergy to laity, are appropriately ordered and governed through institutional elements of leadership, policy and structure for furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The furtherance of the gospel is through the ministerial forms including proclamation, celebration, teaching, ordering as well as deeds of love and justice. None is superior to the other.

The church ministry is characterized by unity within functional diversity, honored in the division of labor. The proclamation, teaching and celebration are major roles of the clergy; the ordering (governance) is performed by elected “ruling elders”, and deeds of love and justice by deacons and laity. In matters of money and housekeeping business of the church all have a spiritual responsibility, elders, clergy, paid staff and laity.

How did we arrive at the likes of “prophet Dr.” Kanyari and his cabal of celebrity “M-pesa” fundraising bishops owning and controlling the church as a personal institution for self-aggrandizement? No doubt, the rigid hierarchy of medieval Catholicism of the second and third centuries marked the beginning of the embellishment of the clergy over the laity in church matters.

While contemporary pastoral work is based on Apostle Paul’s letter to Ephesians (4:11-12) where the pastor’s job is described as “equipping the saints for the work of the ministry”, Kenyan clergy only give lip service to this call. The result is a dependency model of church goers: pastors do the ministry while people are grateful recipients of their professional care. Pastors are regarded as experts in spiritual matters (prayers, prophecy, miracles etc.) while the congregants view themselves as enfeebled objects incapable of nourishing each other spiritually despite decades of attending church as Christians.

This dependency model of pastoral care has given rise to pastor “prophet Dr.” Kanyari” and his ilk with their snake oil salesmen antics purveying prayers and miracles to the highest bidder. Viewing themselves as Omni competent, they mimic the multi-talented pastors of megachurches in the USA who appear to operate like well-oiled machines.

The spiritually malnourished congregation becomes solely dependent on these pastors, an addiction pastors cannot let go. It is a congregation that rarely reads the bible to discern God’s will. It is a congregation that does not pray because it lacks the formula to do so. It is an impoverished tithe-giving congregation awed by the wealth and opulent lifestyle of the pastor while he/she preaches prosperity and blessings hereafter.

Equally, the congregation has convoluted views of pastors. They are viewed as the ubiquitous multi-talented servants of god. They are perceived as motivational speakers who provide biblical vignettes for escape from daily troubles rather than spiritually equipping them to confront the hard realities of a broken world. They are regarded as the possessors of the church rather than ones who have given their life to the ministry so that the people of god may thrive spiritually.

This co-dependency creates what we have come to see in the charismatic churches in Kenya today: pastors and bishops distorted believe that God’s presence is borne only by them and the congregation cannot be channels of God’s mighty

activity and power. The church has become a picture of a dependent child stuck in a suffocating attachment to a publicity-seeking wealthy pastor.

AG Githu Muigai's proposed legal framework may partially ameliorate the quandary. Real solution lies returning the ministry to the people. This requires a professional trained clergy who are equippers to train all God's people for the ministry. It needs a bible-reading and praying congregation active in ministry. It also needs a USA-like Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability to provide oversight and accountability to member churches.

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