Youth perceptions about the church: a study of youth exodus from the mainstream churches to the new charismatic-evangelical churches in Nairobi, Kenya

Kahenya, Simon Mburu
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Abstract:
This research attempts to establish the underlying factors causing the exodus by young adults from the Mainstream Churches to the New Charismatic Evangelical Churches in Nairobi province. It further seeks to explore their perception about the Church and to assess their expectations from the church. In order to achieve the above goal the study analyzed the general role that the church plays amongst the youth and identified factors mainly responsible for youth exodus from the mainstream churches. The study also investigated the effect of youth departure and recommends some appropriate strategies that will help reduce the exodus from the mainstream churches. The study employed the survey research method whereby data was collected through questionnaires, respondent interviews and participant observation techniques. All primary data was collected using this method. For secondary data, Literature review was extensively done with a view to understanding previous related work that was carried out in the same field by other scholars. The Internet also complimented the literature review. Two theories namely Conflict, Exit and Voice were applied in this study and a conceptual framework was also developed. The dynamics of the exodus were examined in relation to the social and religious lifestyle of church youth in Nairobi. The study established that there are a number of factors leading to youth discontent in the mainline churches and eventual withdrawal to the new charismatic churches. From the study it is evident that majority of the youth and particularly those who are unmarried and mainly below 30 years of age have become disillusioned with the Mainstream Churches. They feel the Church is irrelevant and does not address their needs and they have lost the sense of belonging hence the exodus to the emerging churches where they are made to feel at home. The clergy in the mainline churches seemed to agree that they have not met the expectations of the youth and all of them acknowledged that they have lost some youth to the new charismatic churches. This is naturally a dangerous trend which will eventually affect the ministry of the Word of God and at the same time create succession problems. The New Charismatic Evangelical Churches seem to understand what the youth are looking for and have acted accordingly. Unlike the mainstream churches that are generally conservative and tend to cherish long upheld traditions, the emerging churches exercise a very high degree of flexibility so as to attract and retain the youth in their churches. The study recommends a serious re-examination of some traditions and practices by the Mainline Churches and to discard those which are retrogressive and unpalatable without compromising the Gospel message. The Church should also understand that the youth not only represent the future but also the present hence the need to assimilate them in the mainline activities of the church to cater for succession.