

Relationship between Biblical Context and Fulfillment of Mission among Akurinu Believers in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Simon Nderitu Wambugu¹, Dr Esther Kibor², Dr William. Koros³

^{1,2,3}Kabarak University, Kenya.

Main author email: nderitusimon1982@gmail.com

Abstract

The intent of this study was to look into the relationship between biblical context and fulfilment of mission among the Akurinu believers in Nairobi County, Kenya. Two theories that guided the study were Divine Command Theory (DCT) and Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DIT). Descriptive research design under mixed methods research was adopted. Akurinu congregations registered with the General Conference of Akurinu Churches Assembly (GeCACA) in Nairobi County were sampled using simple random, proportionate and purposive techniques to obtain 336 Akurinu believers and 18 leaders respectively out of a population of 2,600 congregants. Structured and semi-structured questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect data. Validity and reliability were ensured through piloting and expert advice. Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22.0, was used to generate multivariate linear regression models at $\alpha=0.05$. Frequency tables, themes and inferential statistics were used to present data. SPSS output with an r-value of 0.207 indicated that there was a weak positive relationship between biblical context and fulfilment of the mission. An alternative hypothesis was accepted. The findings were useful to Akurinu leaders, believers, researchers and policymakers among GeCACA national leadership towards biblical contextualisation of theology.

Key Terms: Biblical hermeneutics, contextual theology, contextualisation, diffusion, divine commands.

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Introduction

Normally, Bible interpreters should use biblical context as one the scientifically verifiable principles to access God's objective truth that informs believers on their specific mission in specific ways that contextualise believers' doctrine, faith and practice in various dimensions of church life. However, some believers in African Independent Churches (AICs), Akurinu Church included, have attempted to contextualise (fulfil) of their special mission through the use of unauthentic methods of interpreting God's word in order to access objective truth that informs their mission. Bevan and Schroeder (2004) note that Christian history is an account of the church in mission. However, mission without biblical theology is displaced from God in terms of centre, source, resource, purpose and sustainability of outcomes.

The outcome of biblical hermeneutics should result in biblical contextualisation, called contextual theology in this study. The problem was lack of contextual mission based on the truth that informed doctrine, faith and practice as an aspect of theology among Akurinu believers. Internal complaints included the stated vision and one of the missions of the General Conference of Akurinu Churches Assembly (GeCACA) constitution and by-laws (2016, p. 1) indicate the need for restoration of "One Church, One Calling, and One Faith: United in purpose and mission." If this problem continues, the impact of expressed concerns will continue. It is against this background that this survey sought to undertake a study on the relationship between biblical context and fulfilment of mission among Akurinu believers in Nairobi County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sills (2008) has defined the mission as God's plan for every believer for God's salvation to ungodly in the world. The word context has two parts, Latin *con*, meaning together and *texere*, meaning to weave. Nystrom (1997) has outlined

three phases through which historical principle (called biblical context in this objective) is accurately applied by a Bible interpreter towards making contextualisation of theology biblical. In phase one, God as the speaker through human writers, original audience, their needs, problems, questions, dynamics of their context, among other details are understood. In phase two, once the interpreter has God's truth from the biblical text in its original context, universal dimension of this truth becomes the focus since God's truth is timely (does not change, Mal. 3:6). The truth of God's truth in scripture is timely in that God still speaks to every individual in any culture through the unchanging truth as He spoke to the original audience.

The third phase in the use of biblical context focuses on contemporary significance. Believers committed to the contextualisation of God's truth are studied or educated in order to understand their contexts, questions, opportunities, challenges, threats, strengths and weaknesses, among other dynamics in the light of compatibility with God's truth. Relating this procedure to every Akurinu believer in Nairobi County, the texts that speak on mission of God to mankind through the church, such as great commission in Matthew 28:18-20 on disciple-making and Matthew 5:13-14 on church being influential upon unchurched in godly ways similar to the ways salt and light work applies to Akurinu believers if contextualisation of theology of mission were purely biblical.

Applied to Zech. 3:1-10, God spoke to post-exilic Israel by using leaders in the priestly ministerial office. Of the eight night visions God gave to Zechariah, vision with the symbolism of Joshua is the fourth. These visions relate to God's purpose and time, which was the restoration of godliness to His contaminated covenant people (Strong, 1990). Meanwhile, God removed Judah' idolatry and other sins (symbolised by the removal of filthy garments and replacing them with clean ones sin of Judah had to be

removed. Grammar principle helps to clarify the meaning of Zech. 3: 4. The Hebrew verb used here is *abar*, עָבַר, with a wide range of meanings, 'to pass over or by or through, alienate, bring, carry, do away, take, take away' by erasing (Heb. *machah*, מָחָה) their sins. The Heb. noun for mitre in Zech. 3:5 is *tsaniph*, צָנִיף, ancient Jewish headdress of cloth wrapped around the head, turban. Gathogo and Kinyua (2014) contend that Akurinu believers use allegorical interpretation which the writers call Afro-biblical hermeneutics, such as spiritualising removal of shoes based on God's one-time encounter with God in Exodus 3. However, an incidental theological detail does not qualify to form normative theology. Theophany at the burning bush is not repeated in other texts to constitute God's prescribed practice. God told Moses to remove sandals because sandals covered only the physical realm, and God was addressing three parts of Moses (spirit, soul and body, 1Thess. 5:23). Relating this event to every Akurinu believer in Nairobi County, the text in Exodus was God's inaugural of His mission to deliver the nation of Israel from Egypt, the land of bondage. New Testament texts that speak on mission of God to mankind through the church, such as great commission in Matthew 28:18-20 on disciple-making and Matthew 5:13-14 on church being influential upon unchurched in godly ways similar to the ways salt and light work applies to Akurinu believers if contextualisation of theology of mission were purely biblical.

Sunquist (2013) defines the term mission in terms of church identity, core function and God's desired outcomes which is the making of disciples of Jesus Christ with biblically distinct indicators of the ongoing transformation of the converted from less ungodliness to more godliness through divine power. First, Christian witness occurs at persona level and within the community in expansive patterns (Acts 1:8). Second, the mission task theologically looks into church history, contemporary culture and ongoing transformation of people within the cultural context. Third, the task of mission is centred on the person

of Jesus Christ, communication of God's truth to draw people to Christ for lifestyle within specific culture and context. Fourth, people invited to Christ to become a witnessing community of God's reign (kingdom) through living, serving and preaching Christ. Mission has three theological chords, in Greek, *kerygma*, κήρυγμα, meaning proclamation and action, *diaconia*, διακονία, in Greek, meaning service as a noun and to share with someone what one has as a verb. Bevan & Schroeder (2004) have raise six questions which, answered biblically provide missiological constants, namely, who Jesus Christ is, the nature of the church, how the church sees her eschatological future, nature of salvation the church preaches, value of human beings by the church, and value of human culture in which God's Christocentric truth is. Relationship between biblical context and contemporary mission is important because God's timeless, eternal and absolute needs to correspond with the dynamics of contemporary people, culture, context and activities of the mission.

Sills (2008) believes that every Christian is called to international missions because of Paul's use of 'sent'. However, the text does not imply geographical mobility or location as it does about reaching the condition of the human heart. The text includes unsaved neighbour in America and for every other Christian. In Gen. 3:1-15, God as mission Dei comes to Adam and Eve as lost people from His former relationship. This text is similar to Zech. 3 in that God takes missionary initiative to restore post-exilic Judah.

On the contrary, Akurinu believers believe that God called them to a specific mission. Akurinu believers were an important group of AICs in Kenya in a number of ways. Having started their denomination in 1926 (Wanyoike, 2016) as reactive hermeneutics against missionary culture which was presented with the Gospel as good and African culture as evil reviewed studies indicate that standard principles of interpreting scriptures have not been used in

contextualisation process, which has produced contextual theology among Akurinu believers. A dominant feature of this theology was that reliance on the Holy Spirit to get most of the answers to experiences of life through the prophecy, dreams and visions as God's means of communication. Emergent gaps exist between existential hermeneutics and biblical hermeneutics which should guide biblical contextualisation.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design was used to guide the study, together with a mixed-methods approach. The study was conducted in Nairobi County. The officially estimated population of Akurinu believers in each sub-county by GeCACA in the seven sub-counties of Nairobi County was 2600 believers out of whom 336 were samples, questionnaires administered and response rate calculated. This target population included some Akurinu believers who are part of the national leadership team of the clergy. Response rate data were collected between May and July 2019 through distribution and supervised the administration of three hundred and thirty-six (336) questionnaires sampled from a population of 2600. Three hundred and two (302) were returned. The response rate was, therefore, ninety per cent (90%). Cronbach's Alpha test was performed using SPSS-assisted analysis (Table 2). Results were an alpha of 0.712 (70%). Twenty-nine (29) questionnaires were piloted in African Holy Ghost Christian Church in Mwioko. The SPSS results using Cronbach's

Alpha were generated. Collection of data was done using an interview guide and questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to three hundred, and thirty-six (336) sampled Akurinu believers, of which 302 were returned. The data obtained was quantitative. This data was analysed using a regression model with the help of Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. Qualitative data was obtained from purposively sampled eighteen (18) Akurinu church leaders using in-depth interviews. This data was analysed using frequency tables, percentages and emergent themes.

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

In the oral interviews, purposively sampled eighteen (18) Akurinu Church leaders were coded as clergy C1-14, two youths as Y6 and 9, Church deacon D15, pastor's wife PW and overseer's wife OW. They were asked to list any three verses in the Bible, which helped them to know about their service to God. Finding out biblical content was necessary because it informed the nature, process and outcomes of Akurinu's fulfilment of mission perceived to have been handed down to them by God through the founding prophets. The aim of this question was to find out leaders' awareness of biblical and theological foundations for their mission as a church as a predictor of the extent to which contextualised fulfilment of the mission was biblical. Verbal statements were summarised; the original mission God had in the biblical context specified and recorded in Table 1.

Table 1: Akurinu Leaders' Perspective on Biblical Context for God-given Mission

Text	Designation Code	Biblical context and mission of God
We know it from Zech. 3:1-5, Lev. 8:1-10 and Exodus 29:1-7 as God's once for all mission of Akurinu church	Archbishop (M): clergy C11.	Restoration of post-exilic Judah; Institution of priestly office as a formal order of mission
1Cor. 14:26, Isa. 61:1-5 and 1 John 4:1	Overseer (M): clergy C13.	Gospel-based mission
Zech. 3, Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8	Bishop (F): clergy C14.	Messianic prophecy, Institution of priestly office as a formal order of mission
Prophets were given scriptures by God, such as Zech. 3:3-4, to guide the mission of Akurinu, mainly warfare prayer assignments for Kenya. Prophets interpret what God is saying directly	Bishop (M): clergy C7.	Restoration of post-exilic Judah
Zech. 3 and others. God, in His own sovereign way, gave biblical songs to composers as a biblical revelation. They are biblically based	Bishop (M): clergy C8.	Restoration of post-exilic Judah
Matt. 2:11-13, Deut. 22:11-12 and Rev. 3:18-19 9 (white garments)	Senior Bishop (M): clergy C1.	God's safety through dreams, dress materials, restoration of Laodiceans
Scriptures revealed to the Akurinu prophets include Zech. 3 and others in Exodus as God's command to Aaron and his sons	Senior pastor (M): clergy C2.	Restoration of post-exilic Judah. Institution of priestly office as a formal order of mission
Mainly through prophetic leadership, Zech. 3 and communal ministries guided by Acts 2:42-47	Pastor (M): clergy C3.	Restoration of post-exilic Judah, formal discipleship in the apostolic church
Exo. 28, Leviticus 8. However, what God tells the prophet is very strong in determining and sustaining our standards of life and ministry	Pastor (M): clergy C4.	Institution of priestly office as a formal order of mission
We dress according to Aaronic priesthood in Exod. 28 for ministry in Exodus 29	Pastor (M): clergy 5.	Dressing and mission-related
Isa. 61 and Exo. 29 teach us about service	Pastor (M): (clergy C10).	Dressing and mission-related
There are many verses, but I cannot remember any off-head	Youth leader (M): (leader Y 9)	Challenge memory of scriptures (Psalm 119: 9-11, 105)
Zech. 3 and Isa. 61	Youth leader (M): leader Y6).	Messianic prophecy, Restoration of post-exilic Judah
There are many scriptures, Zech 3 and Isa. 61 included	Deacon (M): leader D15.	Restoration of post-exilic Judah
I cannot remember any	Youth leader (F): leader Y16.	Challenge memory of scriptures (Psalm 119: 9-11, 105)
1Cor. 6:16-20, Gen.1:26-28	Pastor's wife (F): leader PW 17.	Godly lifestyle related to the mission
Romans 12. Gifts of the Holy Spirit	Overseer's wife (F): leader OW18.	Gift-based and charismatic in nature

In summary, distribution of God’s truth based on original mission given by God in texts cited by church leaders as theological basis for their mission in rank order were: restoration of post-exilic Judah (33.3%), institution of priestly office as God’s formal order of mission (22.2%), relational mission, notably right dressing, specific gifting and godly lifestyle for mission God’s way (33.3%), restoration of Laodiceans (5.5%), mission and God’s safety of His servants (5.5%), challenge of scripture memory

(11.1%), messianic prophecy (11.1%). Leaders who cited Zech. 3 were 78%.

A questionnaire was given to 336 Akurinu believers, of which 302 were returned. The brief analysis of the findings from the processing of the raw data using the Software Package of Social Science (SPSSo version 22.0) was presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Findings on other Ways of Knowing Call of God (n=302)

Ways of knowing the specific mission	Frequency	Per cent	Rank	Theological category
Holy Spirit’s revelation	152	50.3	1	Pneumatology
Dreams and visions	93	30.8	2	Paranormal experiences
Needs in the community	82	27.2	3	Need-based ministry
Godly character	78	25.8	4	Being & doing balance
Leaders observe believers as they serve and appoint	75	24.8	5	Experiential dimension
Prophecy	73	24.2	6	Paranormal experiences
Example from other people	63	20.9	7	Imitation
Social influence	43	14.2	8	Cultural trends
Influence of friends/peers	19	6.3	9	
Church activities	5	1.7	10	Leaders determine mission

Since variables were repeated, percentages do not add to 100%.

Analysis of independent and dependent variables

Table 3: SPSS Output on Analysis of Independent and Dependent Variables

Variable /constant	Fulfilment of mission
Biblical context	0.207*
Constant	1.646*
Observations	302

Discussion

Findings in Table 1 show that 78% of the participants cited Zech. 3 and other Old Testament texts as the basis of God’s

call to specific mission from Akurinu leaders’ understanding of the relationship between who God is and what He wants men and women who believe to do as a ministry to others, called mission in this study. Among other statements supporting this perspective is “God’s once for all mission of Akurinu church” (Archbishop C11). This finding indicated that a high majority of Akurinu believers depended on one scripture to form a theology of wearing a turban. However, God’s message in this text in its biblical context has a double meaning, specifically God’s unconditional forgiveness of past sins of post-exilic Judah which had led

them into captivity (now that 70 years of punishment were over). “I have caused your iniquity to pass over you...” (Zech. 3:4) Turban symbolism was a visible sign that God had granted forgiveness judicially as imputed righteousness upon the whole nation in a way similar to Rom. 5:1). The two messages of Zech. 3 God’s restoration of post-exilic Judah to Himself and prophecy about the future redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ, the Branch.

Though 78% of leaders cited Zech. 3 as a theological basis for priestly mission, which was initially interpreted as God’s specific call to pray for Kenya (Table 2), personal methods of hermeneutics used by church leaders were investigated using in-depth face to face interviews; recorded statements were transcribed, presented and analysed in Table 2. Findings in Table 2 showed that the majority (50.3%) of 302 Akurinu believers expressed that they relied on the Holy Spirit for interpretation of mission. Since there were no definite indicators of how the Holy Spirit led them in determining their mission, the other ways expressed, namely Dreams and visions (30.8%), system/community needs (27.2%), godly character (24.8%), prophecy (24.2%), example from other believers (20.9%). Emergent theological themes based on statements on how they determined specific mission as Akurinu believers did not refer to any texts in their biblical contexts. Theological themes were pneumatology (the study of the Holy Spirit), paranormal experiences (reliance on prophecy, dreams and visions), need-based ministry, living godly, experiential dimension, imitation of other believers, adaptation to cultural trends and doing what the church leaders emphasised in each congregation.

According to Frederick (2018), those who rely on direct work of the Holy Spirit use pneumatological hermeneutics as reflected by a leader’s statement that “The Holy Spirit gives me words of encouragement and prayer burdens” (Overseer’s wife OW18). The third approach was called by Colon (2012) the service-focused approach discernment of

God’s call to ministry. One participant said that “others notice your service and make you a leader, such as praise and worship: You feel it from inside” (Youth leader, Y16, F). To illustrate diversity in methods of determining the mission, a bishop said that “Akurinu’s methods of interpreting scriptures vary from Spirit-led interpretation, Kikuyu traditions, and allegory to exegesis”. The clergy further added that Akurinu songs were a recorded interpretation of the Bible. Personal words emphasised: “we value Akurinu songs more than anything else. Our songs are biblically based. It is the Bible sang” (clergy, C8).

From a biblical context, Akurinu believers and leaders cited texts with meanings different from those they gave, Correct biblical themes include but not limited to institution of priestly office as formal order of mission strongly anchored on Akurinu prophets, Gospel-based mission, Messianic prophecy, institution of priestly office as formal order of mission, restoration of post-exilic Judah, restoration of post-exilic Judah, God’s safety through dreams, dress materials, restoration of Laodiceans, formal discipleship in apostolic church, dressing and mission-related, challenge memory of scriptures (Psalm 119: 9-11, 105), godly lifestyle related to mission and gift-based mission is positively related to charismatic in nature.

Inferential Statistics

The hypothesis adopted by the study was as shown below: H₀. There is no statistically significant relationship between biblical context and fulfilment of mission among Akurinu believers.

The r-value of 0.207 indicated that there was a weak positive relationship between biblical genre and the way Akurinu believers contextualised their specific missions. The regression model was $Y=1.646+0.207X$. Since this value was higher than the p-value, the study failed to accept the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis that there was a statistically significant relationship

between biblical context and fulfilment of mission among Akurinu believers. Similarly, the objective was adequately addressed by findings.

CONCLUSION

The biblical context might have lost emphasis over the years due to high reliance on prophecy, dreams and visions. Cited scriptures were mainly Zech. 3, Exod. 28 and Isa. 61, as the guiding Akurinu biblical context and informing their mission. However, findings indicated the challenges of lack of accurate interpretation of biblical and theological foundations that informed Akurinu believers led to challenges non-biblical contextualisation of Akurinu doctrine, faith and practice in Nairobi County. These findings reflected a weak relationship between biblical context and fulfilment of hermeneutics. There was a need for hermeneutical methods which enabled Akurinu

believers to get meaning God had in any biblical text and apply this timeless truth in an ever-changing contemporary context. The implication was that other factors which affected included a variety of ways Akurinu believers determine what their personal or congregation. The biblical context might have lost emphasis over the years due to high reliance on prophecy, dreams and visions. Comparing and contrasting qualitative and quantitative and qualitative findings, qualitative findings in Table 1 show that 78% of the participants cited Zech. 3. However, the text is not about the mission. It is about the restoration of Judah to God and contextualised godly living as a post-exilic community. Although the relationship between text and mission appears high, it is a theological fallacy, and it communicated an erroneous understanding of God. The statistically substantial relationship between the variables of the study is a more reliable indicator.

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