



## The Present Situation of Salvation in the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church in Vihiga District, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

Published Online: February 26, 2024

It is quite challenging that human beings are sensitive to minor things, and this sensitivity to minor things is surely evidence of a strange disorder of humanity and their great confusion. This involves a situation of one becoming as sensitive as to despise matters of importance that makes one to be so absurd because of the situation. It is the conviction grouped in the good news that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself" that makes salvation immensely more than a theory, a traditional belief or a slogan. It brings into focus as a necessity to understand. In spite of the fact that we are all unique persons, we share common beliefs, values and ways of life with many others around us. We not only share those beliefs but also reinforce them in one another and teach them to our children. The shared aspects of our personal cultures produce the common value, priorities and standards of behavior that we apply in each context. We begin to learn these things as helpless infants, and by the time we are adults, they shape much of what we are and do. It is also amusing to the author that many concepts currently labeled "Innovative" or "contemporary" are not new ideas at all. Everything seems new if one is ignorant of history. Many methods parading under the banner of "change" have been used in the past in a slightly altered form. Some of them have worked and some of them haven't. It's a well-known truth that if we are ignorant of the lessons of the past mistakes, we usually end up making the same mistakes made by the people before us. It is until the mental map of people are transformed is when true transition in the society can be accomplished. This is why the study aimed at investigating the present situation of salvation as understood by the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church(PAG) in Vihiga County , Kenya, and the impact of culture on it.

### KEYWORDS:

Culture, Maragoli tribe, Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Traditional Law, Salvation

### INTRODUCTION

At the time missionaries came to Kenya, and especially in Vihiga District, they presented the gospel that Christ had risen from the dead and they were partaking of His Life. But very early in the history of the PAG Church in Vihiga District, Satan created doubts: as in John 8:44; Jesus said, "You are of your father the devil and the desire of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning and he does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks lies, he speaks from his own source, for he is a liar and the father of it." Satan also raised suspicion as found in II Cor

4:3: "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing; whose mind the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of glory of Christ who is the image of God should shine on them." Satan has also set up prejudices among the believers as we read in the book of Jude verse four: "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long time ago were marked out of this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ."

Helping people to come out of their own cultural and religious beliefs to another set of beliefs is no easy task. For example, in Western Province of Kenya (Vihiga District) you find the Maragoli tribe. To transform the Maragoli from what their ancestors taught them concerning "salvation" to the way the Bible teaches is not a simple work. People have their own beliefs and they stick to them. That's why Jennings (1995:18) asserts that "How did the variety of present day Churches

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*\*Cite this Article: Dr. Julias Madaga Omuga, Dr. Rose Njoroge (2024). The Present Situation of Salvation in the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church in Vihiga District, Kenya. International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies, 4(2), 149-153*

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come into existence? The Church always has been made up of human individuals, susceptible to human error". It is quite true that error exists, but it is wiser if it can be eradicated. This is also why the researcher can conclude that the church is between cultures. That people who live in between cultures are naughty. It is challenging that before the missionaries came, the Maragoli had their own way of worship, belief, understanding of God, and salvation. Thus, they could not absorb the new system of worship from the missionaries. They had a blue print of God and salvation but according to their worldview. Since to change somebody from what he has believed for many years is so cumbersome, we have syncretism taking the biggest course. People would like to mix their own culture and beliefs with salvation so as to safeguard their morals. However, Mbiti (1992:33) argues in contrast to Jennings that "for most of their lives, African people place God in a transcendental plane making it seen as if He is remote from their daily affairs. But they know that He is immanent, being manifested in natural objects and phenomena and they can turn to Him in acts of worship at any time and any place". The distinction between these related attributes would be stated that, in theory God is transcendental but in practice He is immanent. African people think of God as self-existent and pre- immanent.

### **OBJECTIVE.**

The general objective of the study was to assess the present situation (the world as it is) of salvation in the Pentecostal Assemblies of God church in Vihiga District, Kenya.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research employed descriptive research design. Data was collected through primary and secondary sources. These involved literature review in the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) Church understanding of salvation and other scholars' contribution to the doctrine of salvation. Observations were also conducted, which involved a period of time to be spent with different groups of people in the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church in Vihiga District, Kenya, in order to get firsthand information. This also included data collection instrument which involved gathering information from the respondents using questionnaires, in depth interview, and focus group discussions. This design also included observations, asking questions, and also reviewing documents. Questionnaires were used mostly for the purpose of qualitative and quantitative data.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **1.1 AFRICAN TRADITIONAL DEFINITION OF SALVATION IN VIHIGA DISTRICT KENYA AMONG THE MARAGOLI TRIBE**

Now in spite of seeing all the miseries, jeopardy and stress that human beings have gone through, and how it affects and distort their peace, then human beings have an irrepressible

instinct which lifts them up in pride and sin. Human beings live in a world which claims to move beyond Christianity towards a vague notion of great and diverse spirituality. Anything new captures the interest of modern humanity. This is because human beings are nothing but subjects full of error that it can only be eradicated through grace and salvation through Jesus Christ. There is nothing to show them the truth; for everything deceives them. It is true from the author that every era has its myths. A myth is a fable which offers an imaginary explanation for a phenomenon. It is always easier to detect the myth of other cultures than it is our own. If the people (church) are under good care of pastors and are well instructed in the word of God, they will recognize what is false and eradicate it. The church must therefore be aware of beliefs which require devotion to a false doctrine and leadership and evade them. Paul says in 1st Timothy 4:1 "The spirit clearly says that in the last days, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." This will happen in the sense that people will refuse to believe the gospel because the truth of God illuminates the horror of their sins, spiritual subversion (following false teaching), intellectual pride, dogmatism or intolerance, contradiction in the doctrinal system, and narrow mindedness. All these leads to a great call for repentance and salvation. The measure for all doctrines must be the word of God. "What must I do to be saved?"(Act 16:30). The Philippians Jailer's question continues to anchor throughout the Pentecostal Assemblies of God church in Vihiga District, Kenya. But Paul also warns in 2nd Timothy 3:3-4 that:

*For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn away to myth.*

Salvation is not then valued by many of the kind.

The total dependence of humanity on their own mental capacity has led to all divine revelation to be denied. Human beings begin with themselves and not God, thus accumulating their own empirical data and formulating their own unbiblical principles. This is the ground of the researcher to do investigation and come out with his own hypothesis. Vihiga District comprises of the Maragoli tribe. This tribe has different views of salvation. This means that they understand salvation in their own way. In the first step, according to the result of interviews, John Keverenge from Vihiga District Kenya responded that 'salvation is believed to be rescue, protection, good omen for the day and good luck for the family'. He added that a good day was seen in the morning. This is reflected by the first person one meets in the morning. It is believed that if the first born is a girl, one has to meet with a girl in the morning as the first contact person in order to have a bright good day. If one meets with a boy, it is a bad

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omen. The same applies to a boy if he is one's first born. Concerning this argument, Mbiti (1986:29) says that: "African knowledge of God is expressed in the proverbs, short stories, songs, prayers, names, myths and religious ceremonies. All these are easy to remember and pass onto other people, since there are no sacred writings in traditional societies." As Mbiti indicates, the above quote is to show that when one believes on the traditions and culture of the society, then salvation is released in his life.

Therefore, it can be understood that every community has its own set of beliefs and customs. Customs are not religious but may contain religious ideas. Therefore, they work hand in hand to perpetuate good morals of the society. The metaphor of seeing and hearing explains the concept of God as omniscient in a concrete way, which is easy to grasp. Rituals and ceremonies are also very important just because they unite and bind communities and families together. They also communicate religious ideas, values and beliefs. To add on, Simalenga, (2002:11) asserts that: "Africans like celebrating events in the life of individuals and the community. This includes occasions like birth of a child, the giving of names, circumcision and other initiation ceremonies, marriage, funerals, harvest festival, praying for rains and others. Some of these ceremonies were done by a family and others by a whole community."

### **1.2 THE SUN AS A SOURCE OF SALVATION**

The Maragoli tribe in Vihiga District believes that salvation is found early in the morning. The first rise of the sun is believed as comprising blessings from God. So the old men and women can get up early before the sun rises up and get ready to see it as it rises up. Then they can spite saliva facing the sun as an expression that salvation and protection come from God in order to have a bright and happy day. Some words are spoken out as an indication of creating relationship with the Creator. The process of repentance also takes place since if they have gone astray, they can ask forgiveness from God before asking for blessings.

One of the parishioners in Vihiga District called John Amugune contributed that "It was the old men only who were allowed to stand as mediators between the living, the dead, and the world of the spirits. He added that if there was anything wrong in the family, the old men could stand early in the morning facing the sun as an act of worship and repenting of the sins of the family. They could ask for salvation and protection from the ancestral spirits as they faced the rising sun. They believed in some supernatural powers from their gods that came over through the sun. In contrast to this, Schaffer, (1973:74) contributes that "salvation is not just justification and then blank until death; God never meant it to be so. Salvation is a unity, a flowing stream, from justification through sanctification to glorification". For whom he did foreknow he also did

predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the first born among many brethren." Moreover, whom he did predestinate them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Romans 8:28-30).

From the above, we discover that salvation should be seen as an unbroken stream which connects all people to Jesus for reconciliation.

The researcher has found out that, when individuals and communities seek to follow their ways and systems of worship, their values and rules are transformed as they apply them in such a way as to honor and love others. Such a community embraces even her enemies and is characterized by forgiveness and self-esteem. In contrast, communities of the flesh exclude others, promote self-seeking and self-interest, and treat others with disrespect and violence. The Maragoli tribes in Vihiga did not have this expression of life. Respect was there between the old and the young since they were their spiritual mediators between the living and the spirit world.

Furthermore, when sickness fell in the community, the old men could also wake up early in the morning facing the direction of the rising sun asking for divine healing. This was done as the old men knelt down raising their heads up towards the sun. It was an act of salvation from the sickness. From investigation, this process was not just done everywhere. There was a specific place next to the mountain, hill or shrine that had been set apart as a place of worship, salvation and deliverance. Only selected old men were allowed to conduct these divine ceremonies.

### **1.3 RESPECT TO THE NAMES OF ANCESTORS AS A SOURCE OF SALVATION FOR PROTECTION**

The Maragoli tribes in Vihiga District have respected the names of the ancestors as a source of salvation. When a child was born, it was named after a certain person who died. It was believed that the names of the dead could protect the child from any attack of sickness or hinder success in life. When the child refuses the name given to him, he cries until the name is changed. One of the parishioners called Loice Andia contributed that "the Maragoli tribe believe that children are reborn from the dead ancestors. The ancestors are renamed for recognition if not; the dead ancestors come back and disturb the living." Kato (1987:40) asserts that "the belief in the life after death is full of contradictions and confusions. But nevertheless, it is there." The fact that there is a glimpse of hope for a future life is a further indication that life is more than flesh and blood. A great number of beliefs and practices are to be found in the Maragoli tribe in Vihiga District, Kenya. They are not, however, put into a systematic set of dogma which an individual is expected to accept. Many parishioners simply assimilate whatever religious ideas and

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practices are held or observed by their families and communities without question. These are traditions that have been handed down from forbearers and each generation takes them up with modifications suitable to their own historical situations and needs.

Through evaluation and research done, nearly all African names have a meaning. This is why the naming of children was marked by a ceremony in Vihiga District. Some names were given to children and are still given even today to indicate and remember some prominent people who died. Some indicated specific circumstances occasions, seasons among many others. Mbiti (1990:115) contributes that "there is no stop to the giving of names in African society, so that a person can acquire a sizable collection of names by the time he becomes an old man. Other names given to children may come from the living dead who might be thought to have partially reincarnated in the child especially if the family observed certain common traits between the child and a particular living-dead." From this we find that both the birth and childhood of a person are a religious process in which the person is constantly flooded with religious activities for protection and guidance. A child not only continues the physical line of life as thought to be a re-incarnation of the departed but becomes a real religious focus of keeping the parents in their state of personal immortality. The child was and is also tied a string at the hand and waist as a mark of protection from any evil eyes that may cause it to become sick. In general, there are many names all over Vihiga District which have religious meanings. Therefore, the researcher can say that Maragoli religious naming is found in the names of people and places. This shows the influence of religion in the life of people.

Respect to the dead for protection as salvation is also conducted by memorial ceremonies (makumbusho or lovego). This was and is still done forty days after the burial of the deceased; as an indication of protection of the community. A cow was and is still being slaughtered by the grave if the deceased is a lady and a bull if he is a man. Some words were spoken at the grave as the blood from the cow flowed down the grave. This function was conducted at night by old clan men who were respected and who had done the same ceremony to their families. The activity took place at night, then the following day a ceremonial service was conducted and some of the remainder of the meat was eaten by those who attended. If any of the clan members did not attend the ceremony, a piece of meat is kept for or taken to him/her to participate. This is done even up to date. This is why Mbiti (1994:171) asserts that "the accords with traditional African life in which the importance of the individual is recognized through ritual celebrations particularly those that mark the key moments of life like birth, initiation and puberty rites, marriage, death and funeral rites;

at the same time, the community dimension of life always forms the basic setting." The ceremony is culminated by the act of appeasing the spirits of the dead so that they can not come back and haunt the living. This is why some words were spoken at the grave to appease the spirits of the dead. That was a mark of salvation from attacks that might come through the dead. One of the parishioners in Vihiga District called Mudegu 16/June/2009 contributed. "It is a must for a Maragoli tribe from Vihiga District to do "lovego" (memorial ceremony) for protection, peace and joy to be in the family. He added that it was a taboo for a Maragoli man not to do it. "The day following the cattle drive, the hair shaving ceremony is performed. All those who came into contact with the deceased man, either in his death bed or during burial are shaved... A fowl or a goat is killed and those taking part in the ceremony share in eating the meat." says Mbiti (1994:154-155) if it was an old woman who had died, an old cow was killed to appease her spirit. If it was an old man who had died, an old bull was killed to appease his spirit. The animals are killed at night just at the grave side and the animal blood should flow going in the grave. The following day people come to share in the feasting.

### **1.4 RESPECT TO TRADITIONAL LAWS AND VALUES AS A SOURCE OF SALVATION.**

Man is in vain to pay so much attention to things which do not really matter. These are the opinions that have to be refuted. People are still vain even when their opinions are sound, because they do not see the truth when it is there, but assume things to be true when they are not. The world is desperately seeking for someone to follow who is speaking and leaning on the truth. That they will follow someone is certain, but will that person be one who knows the way of Christ, or will he/she be like themselves who lead others to greater darkness? This is a decisive question of our plan of life, the relevance of all that we do waits on its verdict and in turn the destiny of the multitude. In Vihiga District, there are laws, values and regulations that govern people as a source of salvation. These laws and regulations were and are still distinguished between men and women, boys and girls, and the children. If someone went against those laws, it was a great abomination to the society. The person was subjected to a great punishment. Girls were advised to be respectful and virgin until they get married. Boys were informed not to play around with girls and women. Married men and women were instructed to respect their marriages. If unfaithfulness was discovered, then punishment was an immediate act. On the same point Nkoyoyo (2001:68) contributes that "In social setting, moral courts follow hierarchical order, starting from the head to the youngest in the community. God as Creator holds the highest position; beneath Him are divinities and spirits, then the living dead, the human beings from rulers, specialists, elders, parents, brothers and sisters, to the youngest." Therefore, respect was given to a group of people



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since the clan lived together as one body. If one of the clan members messed with another, they were both excommunicated from the community.

The traditional African life in Vihiga District was rhythmic in nature. Time was measured by seasons of events as they follow each other. Furthermore, human life had its rhythms, and these rhythms were measured by rituals and initiation ceremonies, as each person went through a different ceremony. The Maragoli tribe ritualized the changes through which each individual passed from the time of birth to death. Role structure was given to each person to know what he/she was to perform in the society. The right values to be followed and transmitted to each generation were also taught. If anyone went against the rites of passage, then punishment was a result. Therefore, African philosophy refers to the understanding attitude of mind, logic, and perception behind the manner in which African (Maragoli tribe) think, act, or speak in different situations of life. To be human is to belong to the whole community and to do so involve participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community. A person could not detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, foundation, and his context of security, his kinship and entire group of those who make him aware of his own inconsistent existence. The Maragoli tribe in Vihiga District is strict with their laws and regulations. They believe that when someone keeps the laws and regulation of community so well then it is an indication of salvation "being counted right in the community".

### **CONCLUSION**

The author has gathered out some pitfalls and acceptance of salvation in the P.A.G church in Vihiga District, Kenya. It is deduced by the author that the word of God is supra-culture and therefore all cultures must bend to it in order for internal transformation to take place that will then influence the outward one. Orera (30:10:2005) quotes from Samuel and Sugden "No culture is static; all of them change though some change faster than others. This change can be any modification of the ideas, society, technology, economy and ecology of people due to factors working from within or without." There is no leader, nor church that depends on such dynamic culture that is unbiblical, can prosper spiritually. Failure is also the outcome of such structures and organizations.

### **RECOMMEDATION**

Pastors in the Pentecostal Assemblies of God church in Vihiga District, Kenya, have a big role to play concerning the

transformation of the church spiritually. They have to transform their ways of living first by exhibiting exemplary life. Salvation must be implied in their family, their daily walk, in their communication and even in their relationship with non-believers. They must put to death thirst of hedonism and impress thirst for the word of God. The church is thirsty for truth and the truth shall guide her all the way to freedom through Christ Jesus. But who will expound and uncover the truth about salvation to them? Who shall give a clear demarcation of what is to be done and what is not to be done? "I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none..." declares the sovereign Lord in Ezekiel 22:30 (NIV). God is looking for one pastor, one leader, one Christian who can rebuild the broken walls of the church. There is a cry for salvation all over the world and all over P.A.G church in Vihiga District, Kenya. This cry will only be met by faithful leaders, pastors and believers who will accept to stand in the gap and teach the right doctrine.

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