



Youth, Technology and 'Freedom Culture' in Kenya: The role of Christian Educators in Advancing a Contextualized Theology

Hosea Kiprono Mitei

Scott Christian University – Eldoret Satellite Campus

KENYA.

kipronomitei@gmail.com

Abstract

The youth in the 21st century are caught up in between a period of so much advancement in technology and an upcoming freedom culture. A life that disregards relationship with God and pushes matters of faith aside. This has in turn opened up a Pandora's Box of varied problems for the youth in Kenya. This paper examines the impact of technology and freedom culture on the spiritual and social life of the Kenyan youth and thereby advance a contextualized theology that aims at addressing the a fore mentioned issues. The data used in the study was collected through review of both published and unpublished literature. The findings of this article are that advancement in technology is a good tool. Humanity should use. However, the Kenyan youth in this century need to be directed not to exalt technology but to put in its rightful place and to exercise their freedom responsibly.

Keywords: Youth, Freedom, Technology and Culture.

Introduction

The Youth in the postmodern society face challenges on daily basis. These challenges vary from social, moral, physical and spiritual. The church therefore has an enormous task of discerning the real needs of the youth by articulating their situations of fear and optimism (Kamaara, 2005). It is for this reason that this paper focuses on the challenges affecting the youth especially on the area of technological advancement and the popular culture of freedom.

It is important to state at the onset of this paper, that both technological advancement and the freedom culture have a holistic influence on the life of the youth. Therefore, the author will discuss the influences of technological advancement and freedom on the life of the youth and thereafter, propose a contextualized theology on issues affecting the youths for the Christian educators today. Having identified the areas of concern for this paper, it is equally important to discuss each independently.

The world is full of empirical evidence of issues affecting the youth. These plethora of issues are dynamic and have a diverse influence upon the lives of the lives of the youth. In this case, we shall begin our discussion with technological revolution.

Technological Revolution

There has been rapid development in the world of technology in the recent years. The Children born in the mid- to late-1980s and the 1990s have been labelled the "Internet Generation": the generation that was first to grow up in a world where the Internet was always present. ("Generation i.", 2006). Surveys show that this generation (sometimes also called the "Net Generation," the "Net-Gen," "Generation i," the "Digital Generation," or the "Millenials") socializes more online, downloads more entertainment media, and consults the Web for a wider range of purposes than do present adults or young people of the previous generation. (Dutton, 2004). As a result, members of the younger generation are often more Internet savvy than their teachers, parents, grandparents, and even older siblings. The age gap with respect to technology is referred to here as the generational digital divide, or simply the generational divide (Jane Kolodinsky, Michele Cranwell, and Ellen Rowe, 2002). This has therefore led to a rapid revolution in the world of technology.

First, it is important to mention that in this century, we have a huge revolution in the world of technology than no other time in the history of humanity. Studies across history reveal technological advancement as an integral part of human culture, which has both functional and artistic values. In the history of mankind for example, technological advancement dates back to the Cainite Civilization (Genesis 4:16-24). This civilization envisages skyscrapers, agriculture, music, manufacturing industry and artistic works, while Cainite civilization and positive contributions such as oratory and poetry, ornamentation of music through the use of the harp and flute, manufacturing of working tools and agricultural productions, it also had negative contributions such as wanton destruction of human life, self justification and exaltation, and independency from God. Therefore, there is no doubt that the youths then were affected both negatively and positively. The trend established in the Scripture posits a negative influence on the youths. This is attested by the Lamechs' poem. He said:

Adam and Zilah listen to me;

Wives of Lamech, hear my words.

I have killed... a young man for injuring me (Genesis 4: 23).

To add, there are historical cities such as Cathage and ancient Greek cities that were land marks for technological advancements all showing similar trends as the Cainite civilization.

Secondly, the contemporary period is also dressed with all forms of technological whirlpool. This is attested by the increasing usage of mobile telephones, modern air planes, computers and the social media. For this, we have become familiar and accessible to all sorts of manufactured goods, household inconveniences and any kind of information. The issues just highlighted above, depict that technology's impact is greater (Webster, 1980). The greatness of this impact is envisaged in the life of the youth. It has shaped the world views of the youths. In this regard, moral values, spiritual values, social values, political and family values have greatly been affected. While on one hand we have to applaud the positive effects of technology, we on the other hand cannot fail to also mention that it has contributed to degeneration of social and moral values with the youth bearing the heavy brand. This is in the case of unrestricted access to pornographic and other morally destructive materials through the internet. This has made cheap the beauty of sex as a God given sacred gift to be enjoyed in marriage. In addition to this, the media such as the television bombards the youths with seductive dances and adverts. These have become merchants of moral destruction. Having established the technological revolution, we will move further into seeing the effects of technology on both the spiritual and social lives of the youth.

Effects of Technology

a) On youth Spiritual life

At this juncture, it is worthy noting the effects of technology on the spiritual values in the lives of the youths. It is important to mention at the onset that technology when rightly used becomes a powerful missiological tool. It is a vital instrument in enhancing the advancement of the Kingdom of God. For example, the world renowned televangelist Billy Grahams' ministry has led many young people to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Many others have through the same, had unlimited access to biblical and devotional materials from the internet.

On the other hand, it is note worthy to mention that false and misguided teachings have become rampant and are escalating like bush-fire via internet and other social media. For this, many youths have been negatively indoctrinated and radicalised in extreme situations. On the same note, the Christian faith in many ways has been post modernized. This effect is conspicuously evident in the lives of the youths, especially in matters of faith and practice. Due to these, scepticism has taken roots in their lives. The availability of diverse "Spiritual Materials" has exposed them into different versions of faith as a result, confusion prevails in their lives. To substantiate the above negative facts John Hull, quoted by Grimmitt wrote:

Just because so much unhappiness and human wants continues to exist in the midst of the plenty, provided by technology, many people feel a sense of passivity and hopelessness. The technological promise is fulfilled, and the future holds only on more of the same kind of thing. Even as it hopelessness is rooted in faith in the adequacy of technology as a source of meaning for human life, and may this be thought of as anti-religious of the consumer society (Grimmitt, 1987)

To conclude this section, it is possible to develop the spiritual life of the youths through technological advancement. At the same, technological advancement may be detrimental to the spiritual development of the youths.

b) On Youth social life

On the social aspect, the youths find themselves in a social arrangement (structure) determined by their respective societies (David, 1983). This social structure, have shared values which keep the society as an integrated whole. Human sociality is an inherent nature in man derived from being created in the image of God. But the question we need to ask ourselves is what impact have technological advancement had on the sociality of the youth in terms of their social values?

To begin with, technological advancement has availed vast alternative perspectives on the meaning of social values and sociality of the youth. To demonstrate this, technological innovations first arose in Europe and then with increasing rapidity it moved all over the world, fundamentally uprooting social values. These changes have destabilized many societies and their effects are evidenced in the lives of the youth. For example, in the identity crisis where youth have taken values of another culture and unwisely living them in their traditional society thereby creating conflicts.

Technological advancement has become a vital instrument which transports social values from one culture to another. Because youths are characterized by curiosity and desire for exploration, they are easily influenced and give themselves to cultural changes if they think it will make them popular. Thus, youth in African communities are rapidly and uncritically adopting, imported values and behavior via modern technologies like the social media.

To sum up, we have sufficiently explored how technological advancement has influenced the youths. Historical and contemporary trends have been discussed. The discussion is centred both in the negative and positive contributions on the moral, spiritual and social life of the youth.

Having established the effects of technological advance in both historical and modern trends above, it is equally important to offer a critique of the two view points. First "technology is the instrument by which modern man works out his philosophy of life" (Webster, 1980). Will Herberg a distinguished Jewish sociologist substantiates Webster's view. He writes:

Human problems are increasingly seen as technological problems to be dealt with by adjustments and manipulations ... In fact, the belief seems to have emerged that there is nothing beyond man's desires, nothing beyond man's power. His values are his, to make or unmake (Hardway, 1976).

According to Herbergs description of man's dependency on technology, depicts technology as a catalyst to man (the word 'man' in this paper is used interchangeably to refer to youths) living as autonomous being, dependant of the creator (God). Both historical and contemporary trends show that technological advancements have replaced youth's moral, social and spiritual senses. Moreover, technological advancement has served to promote the functional efficiency of youths. For instance, 'Computers, smart phones, tablets and modern dream-linear jets have not only enhanced personal

relational qualities but also... correspondences have been reduced to computer read outs and a work place to an assembly line' (Webster, 1980). This is demonstrated by the identity crisis and strange lifestyles lived by the youths. Technological advancement has resulted in cultural isolation within the same context.

As noted earlier, technology is a missiological tool which propagates the gospel hence fulfillment of the great commission, and desirable results have been seen in the lives of the youths. In addition, technological advancement has enhanced cultural interaction where positive useful values from another culture are assimilated for the betterment of the receiving context. This is illustrated by medial work, literally, communication among others. This has benefited the youths greatly.

The Concept of Freedom for the modern youth

Another issue affecting the youth today is the culture of freedom. In this paper we refer to it as 'culture of freedom' because freedom is the outcry of every youth in the world. In as much as it is true that we all desire freedom and we all want to be free, this freedom must be handled with great care and precaution. To illustrate this, Fodsick wrote:

The desire to be free, to have the chance to be ourselves, express ourselves, express ourselves, and to do as it pleases us, is one of the deepest passion in human nature. We see it in a little child resenting restraint and we feel it vicariously in all nations whose liberty has been wrenched from them. It is an appalling thing not to be free. So, the basic struggles of human life can be interpreted as endeavours after emancipation (Fosdick, 1945).

This is perfectly demonstrated by Patrick Henry when he said 'Give me liberty, or give me death' (Fosdick, 1945). The above quote gives a graphical explanation of the youth's life that endeavours to be free from all sorts of dos and don'ts. Everywhere, in personal and social life of the youths there is apparent struggle for freedom.

Modern contemporary trends depict that youths in schools, universities, colleges, homes and even churches fighting for freedom. When their demands for freedom are not granted, then the following consequences are normally observed; vandalism, open rebellion, running away from home, ecclesiastical schism, crimes and to some the highest expression of freedom is by committing suicide. In this regard, majority of the youth want freedom in its loose and natural sense. As ministers of the gospel, we have experienced that when you talk the youth about freedom, they say they would die for it. They claim that everything belongs to them and they add that "we are free from all restrictions" and we shall for fight freedom'. They even claim that the gospel has set them free. It is a gospel of liberty. It is interesting to note that some charismatic and liberal preachers instigate youths to embrace freedom in its loose sense via the pulpit. They encourage them to embrace all modern science and technology, all sorts of philosophies and any form of light that fall on their lives from any source. This slogan has been 'All things are yours and you are indeed free to utilize.' Similar enticements are seen in adverts and from worldly celebrities whom they easily identify with.

Having established the quest for freedom by the youth, it is equally important to offer a critique for their understanding of the same. Many of the youths have found themselves in a mess because of a wrong conception of freedom. It is important to realize that the way youth define freedom has determined to a greater extent how they react to the world around them. The youth need to understanding that it is much safer, intellectually, to understand human life in terms of freedom boosts ones dignity or tampers with ones dignity. For instance, today, the personal and social agony evidenced in the youth comes in how large measure they have embraced freedom in its loose nature. Starting out with the freedom, most of them 'end in the most unbreakable slavery habits, forced upon them by their own psychological constitution' (Fosdick, 1945).

In addition, youth ought to realize that freedom alone is not an 'organizational principle its puts nothing together, it is dispersive.' To add substance to this, Fosdick gives a graphic description;

Within society, it produces autonomous, irresponsible individuals, confusedly following their private whims and within the individual, it sets out various emotions and desires going every which way, doing as they please. Freedom alone is not an organizing principle –it does not draw us together into one direction, purposeful, integrated living (Fosdick, 1945)

To comment on the above quote, youth ought to understand that their success of failure in their moral, spiritual and social life lies on how best they understand freedom. Again, they need to realize that freedom is not a license. Too many youths have landed themselves into problems because they think in a free society, they can do anything they like. The world says "you are free when you are your own master". This is not freedom. In fact this is real slavery.

Speaking from Biblical point of view, freedom is only fulfilled and dependent upon God himself. 'Freedom does not mean being free of limitations.' Bosanquet said Nobody is anything except as he joins himself to something' (Ruegsegger, 1986). Therefore, it is right to infer that it is only in bondage that there is perfect freedom.

Contextualized Theology of 'Freedom Culture' and Technology

At this point, we wish to advance a contextualized theology on freedom and technological advancement that shall come in handy for Christian educators. To begin with, we shall discuss sufficiently a theology for the culture of freedom.

First, we have the Pauline view of freedom. According to Scriptures Paul was a preacher of freedom. He broke through as many moral, social and ritual prohibitions as any man in history ever did in ones lifetime. Fosdick describes it this way; 'of how many old restrictions; he cried' where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty; for freedom did Christ set us free! But what made him Paul was that his liberty was found upon loyalty; all things are mine –he was a freeman; and I am Christ's – he was a devotee' (Fosdick, 1945). To explain further, he identified himself with Christ. Paul began his letter to the Romans, 'a bond servant of Jesus Christ' (Fosdick, 1945). Therefore Pauline illustration of freedom is a

faithful self- commitment to Christ and what Christ stands for, it is a call for sacrifice and perpetual denial of ones desires and cries for freedom in its loose sense.

Secondly, Augustine's view of freedom is centred on the love for God. He is recorded to have said: 'Love God and do as you please; The love for God gives one a 'freely chosen inner loyalty to the highest, belong in his secret personal devotions to Christ, as a real scientist belongs to truth or a real artist to beauty, and then, being that kind and quality of and quality of persons, do as you please' (Fosdick, 1945).

To comment on Augustine's view on freedom, it is clear that where one devotes his love, his emotions, vocation, moral, social and spiritual life derives its principles and ultimately his philosophy of life. Therefore, Augustine's view of freedom is that, for one to be free, he must be mastered by that which he loves.

At this juncture, the researcher intends to give their own view of freedom. To him, freedom is the substitution of inner voluntary loyalty for outward constraints, in this case, Christ's adds, they contend that freedom should be based on responsibilities rather than rights. Again, they told that freedom requires discipline in specific, recognized parameters. This is only possible when we substitute our inner loyalty for constraints (Christ). To explain further, they contend to Stuart Fowler's wise counsel on freedom. In his article "*Freedom person and community*," he wrote:

Defining freedom in terms of discrete, and in principle, absolute, rights lead to inevitable conflicts between the chains of different freedoms in which, in the end, the claim of one must loose to other. He continues to say, much of the social conflicts in to days society is rooted in this conflict over the competing rights of competing freedoms (Fowler S. , 2002).

According to Fowler, there are different freedoms with different rights each demanding expression as a result competition is manifested. This manifestation is what we call the conflicts or confusions. It seems that, these freedoms come from different sources, and the sources dictate the rights attached to the freedoms to be pursued. Therefore, Fowler's view of freedom finds a parallel with the authors in that the source of freedom masters the executor of the same. In this regard, youth should join in the words of this song and make them their underlying philosophy of their lives:

Make me a captive, Lord and then I shall be free; Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conquer be (Fosdick, 1945).

To conclude, youth should embrace the freedom offered by Christ; freedom from quilt, freedom from self, freedom from fear. This is further explained by Stott, he writes:

...In the experience of Jesus Christ , his death , resurrect and freedom fear because he reigns , with all things under his feet... the true cry for the freedom is not from rescue from some tyranny , but also for liberty to live a full and meaningful life ...to enjoy self respect and dignity.. the freedom of every creature is limited by the nature which God has given it. He continues to say ... true freedom is freedom to be our true selves, as God made us and means us to be (Stott, 1992).

It is the authors' prayer that the youth shall take this in earnest.

The author also intends to advance a contextualized theology of technological advancement. A theology that integrates the book of God's word (Bible) and the book of God's works (nature). It is said that there is no conflict between the word of God and the record of nature, but there is a conflict between theology and science because these are human interpretations of the above respectively. This being the case, youths find themselves in 'techno-idolatry' because the pre-assumed conflict generated from varied ways of interpreting nature and God's word. Therefore, this posits need to harmonize the conflicts and develop a hermeneutic of understanding how to interpret science (Technological advancement) and theology, as a matter of history, grew up in a Christian soils. Therefore, Christianity provides in a unique way both philosophical background needed and also a strong personal initiative to the pursuit of technological advancement (A.N., 1972, p. 148).

Youth therefore, while they should be thankful for the benefits of technology, they should know how to assess and avoid the threats that technology ha produced to our society. The youths while pursuing technology, have a responsibility to direct their knowledge on the same in understanding of God's word. This is substantiated by David in his Psalm 112:2, he says; great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, because technology is good and God given capacity, it is immensely attractive and sinful men easily exalt it into an idol and try to make it do all sorts of things it can not do but the answer is not to react into fear of technology or a rejection of technology. The answer is to cut it down into its proper and excellent place in the created order. If set in rightful place, we shall be more than even thankful for it. He continues to advocate that, 'To the man who makes an advance in technology or application of scientific knowledge for use of man who discovers something fresh , the appropriate attitude is one of wonder, humility and thankfulness to God our creator. Therefore, when the youth are directed to put technology in its right place, there is no way it can replace their moral and spiritual senses, or becomes a substitute for independence from God.

On the whole, the role of Christian education in its advancing a contextualized theology as discussed above needs to consider the following proposals.

1. Christian education among youths should not only be culturally and morally exposed but also reflect the being and identity of the person in relation to God and his immediate society.
2. It should synthesis culture and faith for holistic influence in the lives of youths.
3. Educationalist should take up the challenge to provide cultural substance commensurate with spiritual and faith imperatives, so that contemporary realities should be addressed holistically without the danger of fragmentation of issues affecting the youth.

4. The church leaders should ensure that educational programs for the youth be it in the church, classroom or print should inspire them and by so doing enhance the creation of a new identity. This will make sure that the youth do not fall off-tune with the changing patterns of the world in which they live.
5. Christian educators should better understand how youth are engaged with these realms in their daily lives.

Bibliography

- "*Generation i.*" . (2006, 11). Retrieved June 2010, from <http://www.microsoft.com>: <http://www.microsoft.com/issues/essays/11-01geni.asp>
- David, L. (1983). *Sociology and Human Image*. Illinois: Intervarsity Press.
- Dutton, W. H. (2004). *Social Transformation in the Information Society*. Paris: UNESCO WSIS Publication.
- Fosdick, H. E. (1945). *A great time to be alive: A sermon on Christianity in wartime.* . London : S.C.M Press.
- Fowler, S. (2002). *African Journal for Transformational Scholarship Vol.1 No.1* , 34 .
- Fowler, S. (2002). *The Christian Professional: Called to the service of Love*. Melbourne: Amani.
- Grimmitt, M. (1987). *Religious Education and Human Development*. England: Mc Crimmon Publishing Co. Ltd.
- Hardway, G. (1976). *Christianity Today.* , 13.
- Imasogie, O. (1983). *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*. Ibadan: University Press.
- Jane Kolodinsky, Michele Cranwell, and Ellen Rowe. (2002). Bridging the Generation Gap Across:Teens Teaching Internet Skills to Senior Citizens. *Journal of Extension* 40, no. 3 .
- Kamaara, E. K. (2005). *Gender, Youth Sexuality and HIV/AIDS: A Kenyan Experience*. Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba .
- Ruegsegger, R. W. (1986). *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers.
- Stott, J. (1992). *The Contemporary Christians Attitude to the Material World, to culture, Politics Technology, Society*. London: Intervarsity Press.
- Webster, D. D. (1980). *Christian Living in a Pagan culture*. Illinois: Tyndale House.