
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Christian Historical Heterogeneity in Sierra Leone: A Sociological Prospect and Interpretation

Mohamed Bangura

Lecturer One, Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Sierra Leone, Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Corresponding Author: Mohamed Bangura, **E-mail:** Mfbc17320@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

Sierra Leone, today a country with a Muslim majority (78.6%), has undergone an intense process of Christian religious conversion. Christianity was first introduced in Sierra Leone in 1792. Today, 20.4 % of the population is Christian, with a 'Born-Again' or protestant majority surpassing previous national historic denominations of Catholicism, the Pentecostal, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah Witnesses and Apostolicism, mainly in the minority. 'Born-Again' churches are a repertoire of Nigerian and Sierra Leonean religious leaders tutored by Nigerian theocrats called the redeemed Christian leaders. This article seeks to establish the dimension of divergent Christian religious groups in terms of follower compositions and to inject a sociological lens of these compositions, suggesting interpretations that influence Sierra Leonean Christian perceptions and diversions.

| KEYWORDS

Religious co-existence, denominations in Sierra Leone, conversion in Sierra Leone, religious heterogeneity.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 20 December 2022

PUBLISHED: 20 January 2023

DOI: 10.32996/jhsss.2023.5.1.2

1. Introduction

While the typical Sierra Leonean had a unique form of religion that was deeply rooted in their existing tradition, it is obvious that religious awareness was an indispensable aspect of their existence. Religious practice during those relatively dark days was not so much diversity and strictly resonated with their unique cultural manifestation. All of these fine experiences were later going to change through the unattended intrusion of the Europeans. Imbued with the zest to acquire humans for pernicious labour in the plantations of the new world, and later, with the sudden eruption of the industrial revolution, which rendered the physical misuse of human beings naturally useless, the White men turned their attention to the extortion of the black race by stripping them of their raw materials for the consumption of European machines to sustain the upshot of the industrial revolution. This rude intrusion in Africa shook the existing religious uniformity. The foreign Christian religion, despite its inherent tinge of heterogeneity, was blabbered as superior to the existing traditional religious practices, particularly in Sierra Leone. However, the process of the distortion of religious uniformity was gradualist and actually became extant later in the history of Sierra Leone.

Evidently, the era of religious explosion and disintegration assumed an alarming proportion in Sierra Leone following the bitter experience of the ghoulis war that shook the foundation of peace and serenity. During this ravaging moment, religious ascendancy was held in suspended animation purging the Sierra Leonean nature of its fine and unobtrusive beauty. The religious scholastic landscape has been doted by a series of historical accounts since the advent of the White men using Christianity as a powerful instrument to capture, exploit and subjugate the peoples of their colonies. However, the type of Christianity left behind by periods of subjugation of the black man was not as fragmented as it is today. The predominant brands were Catholicism, the Anglican Christian faith, the New Apostolic brethren, and a host of others. These sects clearly laid the foundation of Christian religious diversity, influenced firmly by their headquarters back home.

1.1 The Sociological View of Christian Cultural Heterogeneity

Most often, people's conception of sociological operations is shrouded with dark imagery, relegating the discipline to mere cryptic amusement. It is even assumed with strong religious intent, especially in the realm of Christendom, that Sociological discipline counteracts their Christian faith in diverse forms. As noted by Perkins (1987), some Christians have "deep misgivings about sociology", a situation nurtured by the perceived thought that the subject may "...undermine, if not destroy" their religious conviction. Yet, in the face of these misgivings, sociological tools still occupy a significant place in the teaching, analysis and understanding of social problems affecting a gamut of human activities. While this essay takes cognizance of these vague misgivings, it holds the view that Christian diversity can best be understood through sociological operations and analysis for certain undeniable reasons. It is obvious that reflections on religious practices often ignite hot debates and controversies, and by dissecting the analysis with a sharp knife offered by sociology, one is able to instill in the readers, and indeed humankind, an awareness of themselves and others. This awareness is central to the knowledge required about the diverse practices that Christendom has assumed at the turn of the 21st century. The second fact revealed by sociological operations lies in the group focus approach it offers for one understands and grasp a particular social phenomenon. By taking this path, then, sociology offers a final weapon to the neophyte who thinks sociology is a negation of the Christian faith. Beyond this thought, viewing a particular phenomenon with a sociological lens empowers both the analyst and the audience with a thorough grasp of their social world. Here, it offers a mastery and explanation of the proliferation of the Christian faith from a realistic perspective. This understanding of what sociology offers to enhance an understanding of the diversity of practices and views in Christendom brings us to grapple with some basic questions of great concern. How can sociology engender our understanding of Christian heterogeneity in Sierra Leone? How does such understanding differ from what other disciplines in the Social Sciences offer? In trying to respond to these questions, it is important to understand that the current of sociology runs through the blood stream of every man to the extent that we all behave and think like sociologists, either in reality or in abstraction.

2. Christian Religious Heterogeneity in Sierra Leone

In the realm of Christianity, the catholic denomination always constituted a national hegemonic majority in Sierra Leone from colonial times. Even today, it encompasses four percent of the 15% total Christian population. Among the Catholics, the majority is still made up of traditional Catholics, including those who attend Church on special occasions (baptisms, weddings and funerals) as well as those who regularly attend religious services, especially morning Mass, but who are not involved in the fraternity compositions of Knights of Saint John and the Sorority Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary. Within the Catholic tradition, there are many popular practices of devotion to the saints, promises, charities and pilgrimages to mountains such as the Mount at western rural Regent and Gloucester hill tops overlooking greater Freetown. However, the majority of traditional Catholics maintain religion merely as a form of social identity, going to Church only for the rites of passage. The traditional Catholics merely follow the religion in which they are raised. There are various groups of Catholicism, from Our Lady Star of the Sea, youth groups, Xavarian missionaries and a number of associations and pastorals under the mandate of local as well as international parishioners. The Xavarian missionaries have been tagged as the people's hearers because of their preference for meeting the needs of the poor, especially in the area of education, health and housing facilities in local communities. In the area of reconstruction, they have been so much active. Their Catholic identity is strongly marked by their devotion to the Virgin Mary, their attachment to the Eucharist and their fidelity to the Pope.

The second noteworthy is that of the 'Born Again' Movement, which was founded in 1996 and spread to another part of the country. It currently represents 10 percent of the country's Christian population. The 'Born Agains', as opposed to the Catholics, based their worship on religious life in the sphere of confessions, accentuating moral control with regard to social relationships, sexuality, family superstitious bondage and prosperity theology. They place great importance on the gift of the Holy Ghost fire especially speaking in tongues (the gift of speaking in unknown languages) when the Holy Ghost fire manifests itself to the faithful in collective trances, intercessions, reproducing the biblical episode of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles on Pentecost and the gift of divine healing. This is a belief that links them with Winners Chapel International, Sanctuary Praise, Redeemed and other associated branch Churches. Their attachment is based on linking prayer with the Holy Spirit, especially at midnight. Their 'Born Again' identity is strongly marked by their devotion to the body and spirit of Christ by which they invoke prosperity revelations and mundane competition and possessions. The 'Born Again' may be considered a Movement that is the result of a double reaction: within Catholicism, they are openly opposed to the Catholics who espouse the values of the Trinity and the Virgin Mary as depicted in their artworks and statutes displayed in the church.

In the different conceptions of religious groupings in today's Sierra Leone, the 'Born Again' Churches are the strongest in terms of women's participation and contribution. Statistically, 80 percent of its participants are women and in various associational interactions. Men are seen in the majority in terms of leadership positions who juxtaposed their authority with their wives serving the Churches intermittently. A 'calling' is a common parlance used to explain the divine authority ordained in their leaders. The 'Born Again' grouping comprised individuals who, in the majority, belong to the middle class, whereas the historic Churches of the

Catholics, Anglicans, Pentecostal and United Methodist bring together a vast majority of the poor who belong to the lower social class.

The 'Born Agains' form of worship is increasingly centred on an esoteric appeal, especially in the gift of the speaking tongues and on spiritual healing. The principal 'Born Again' denomination of foreign origin includes the Sanctuary Praise Cathedral, Word Works Wonders, Helping Praise International, and Redeemed Christian Fellowship. From 1996, the 'Born-Again' Movement was the source of the revitalisation of different Evangelical denominations that already function in Sierra Leone and increasingly emphasise fire brand divine healing forces and powers. Currently, Churches, now called Neo - Born-again, have emerged. In general, they have specialised in the use of radio, television and monthly Church oriented magazines and turned Christian spiritual relation with their maker to the following congregation through what is commonly known as 'Tele-worship', in large prayer fields, with a surgical focus on exorcisms, preaching and disseminating liberation and prosperity theology. Originally from Nigeria, where it is referred to as the 'Hand to Mouth Bible', this religious way of thinking values the material conception of Marxian nature that the admiration of religious knowledge is the reflection of materialism. The principal churches founded in Nigeria include Sanctuary Praise International, Redeemed Christian Church, Winners Chapel International, Deeper Life and the South African based Amazing grace under the international leadership of Pastor Chris. These larger denominations undergo continuous splintering into a great number of smaller Churches. Among the 'Born-Agains,' evil is always seen as the work of the devil (Demons/ Satan), which explains why the most recently formed Churches have taken on the task of the vexing expulsion of demons, which they tend to identify with the divinities and ancestral spirits of parents, relatives, and forefathers. They value the individual's spiritual and intellectual position and development, promoting the stimulation of social capital and mobility by means of education. Even though the 'Born-Agains' distance themselves from politics, their Churches have been attractive spots for politicians who see heads of these Churches as influential and with a large following; support from any could mean support from their congregation. In practice, this means seeking advantages and opportunities for their Churches from politicians perceived to be philanthropists.

The era of evangelism has dotted the history of Sierra Leone of Pentecostals comprising four percent of the Christian population - of which there are the local and international Pentecostals represented by the protestant reformed Churches of the Americas and the United Kingdom since the early 15th century. This group is completely rooted in Sierra Leonean Society, reflecting a protracted mesh of the indigenous Mende, Temne, Limba and Loko people with few Krio. However, its focused denominations are Baptists, Methodist and Episcopal, although it is further subdivided into greater units. This religious class is known for its relentless efforts to convert the indigenous upland or provincial poor and needy communities whose survival per day is heavily tagged below one dollar. The proportion of those who are illiterates is higher among the Pentecostals than among other Christian denominations. This fettered circumstance of the rural and urban poor provides the background for the drift of such a vulnerable genre of Sierra Leoneans into the Pentecostal Churches, possibly for a mix of socio-economic and spiritual ascendancy. Thus, men are forced to pledge their destinies in the hands of religious organisations and institutions to better themselves and their communities.

Suffice it to say that Christian heterogeneity in Sierra Leone is not only undergoing an injection, but it is taking on forms that had appeared to be virtually extant. Alternatively, new forms of Christianity are creeping into the old forms of Christian activity as a means to modernise the faith, which, to borrow Max Weber's parlance, is referred to as disenchantment. For generations, the traditional catholic faith seemed capable of maintaining, answering and revitalising their follower's faith in divine providence or the mystic of atonement as a guarantee against dark life through images or statutes. The new forms of Christianity, on the other hand, constantly appeal to the sense of worldly intervention to the things of this world and not that of images or statutes. Most Christian followers began to cast aspersions about the disenchantment of Christian society- that irreversible process of socio-cultural change by which images and statutes are abandoned. It seems the Catholic Church perceived this unexpected turn in people's beliefs and delivered itself to the Born Again. To the 'Born Agains,' the bodily incorporation of the Holy Spirit extinguishes follower spirit consciousness adhering to its conservative form of catholic superstition.

The fact is that society has been incapable of solving chronic and emerging problems carved by its components. The situation is so severe that the Christian society is now obliged to avail itself of a wide variety of socio-religious means as a way of curbing the many problems of their dying and affected 'new generation' of followers. To this 'new generation' of followers, the traditional Christian faith in catholicism has failed in the direction of follower sociability and timeliness as society has evolved. Nonetheless, the Christian faith, which possesses a robust repertoire of the prosperity gospel, is demonstrating a remarkable ability to flourish in this problematic, superstitious, irrational and opinionated society, as put by Karl Hendriech Marx with its reliable alternative of spiritual solution of material hope, prosperity and comfort.

At this stage, the 'modern' Christian followers are seeking this re-enchantment confronting the fact that society, however remote it may be, has already incorporated certain fundamental elements of modernity to such a degree that it becomes impossible to imagine the churches stripped of the scientific and rational apparatus that sustains them. The question is, how does the level of education of Christian heterogeneity influence divergent groupings of this disenchanting religious enclave?

3. Christian Catholicism in Makeni

The Christian Catholic population of Makeni is the smallest in the northern Bombali district. A reason for this can be found in the long secular tradition of the district. According to the 2005 census, 61.2 Percent of the population declared themselves to be Muslims; 37. 2 percent described themselves as Christians, Traditionalists 1.9 and Catholics made up 1.7 percent (Statistics Sierra Leone).

Makeni Christian Catholicism began with the arrival of Xavarian missionaries from Italy in 1986. The Makeni case restates on a smaller scale what has happened in other districts, that is, the hegemony of Catholicism among traditional cohorts.

Despite the scarcity of hardcore data about Catholic hegemony, it is possible to point out some indicators, although indirect. For example, Catholicism has become highly visible, showing an intense presence in the news, media and the township landscape itself. Catholic churches are sophisticated places of worship in the township of Temnes, where more than half of the population of Sierra Leone lives. Compared with other districts, Makeni Catholicism is strong and scholarly studies about it are still in an incipient state.

Community leaders highlight the influence of Catholicism and its educational institutions. The settlement of the Xavarian missionaries began with the opening of the first local Diocese in Makeni in 1986. As in other districts, Catholic churches wage a 'Christian spiritual war' against traditional religion, which points to the intense and conflictive presence of Catholicism in Makeni. The arrival of the Xavarian missionaries and their partnership with local leaders seem to be decisive in the conflictive profile of Makeni Catholicism, but, at the same time, the success of 'community' catholic churches in other districts stimulates a native Makeni Sierra Leonean Christian catholic revivalism. The competition among these groups brings about a series of alliances and conflicts. As a result of these dynamic new elements such as spectacularisation of worship, mass campaigns and the presence of foreign missionaries convened by the local catholic churches, until then, absent in Makeni, have been introduced. These developments have brought the catholic phenomenon to the fore of Makeni communities and to the 'Obai's' (Paramount Chief) attention.

4. Methodism in Kenema

Kenema Pentecostalism differs from the cases discussed earlier, for it has incorporated local components. Since 1980 the Methodist church of Kenema has been very active in what we call the birth of Kenema Methodism. The Kenema case was part of the process of creation and development of an international network of denominations, especially the Methodist one. In 1987 the Kenema protestant church adopted a Pentecostal identity.

Besides that, this process took place in Kenema with autonomy from its Freetown peers, another factor that helps to explain the autochthonous traits of Kenema Methodism. Some Kenema priests, attracted by religious liberalism, opposed the rigid foreign missionaries mentality and showed sensitivity not only towards the supernatural aspects of the biblical accounts but also to indigenous religiosity. The new church expanded rapidly, building three churches in 1989 and 5 in 1999 in a period characterised by several splits, the most significant of which was the creation of the Pentecostal Evangelical Church in 1999. Kenema Methodism witnessed the foundation of three new churches. Thus, a good part of Kenema Pentecostal churches that sprang from the Pentecostal Methodist Church has kept the autochthonous features of Kenema Methodism. The success of these Neo-Pentecostal institutions affects the evolution of the traditional churches by catering to a segment of the Kenema community largely neglected, the middle class and youth. Their success, in turn, has contributed to establishing certain patterns of pastoral guidance, methods and styles of speech legitimated by their own success. The impact of Neo-Pentecostal denominations in Kenema has 'Kenemanised' the religious field to the extent that different Protestant denominations aligned themselves as being for or against Neo-Pentecostalism.

4.1 Heterogeneities of Social Subjects Addressed by the Christian message

There is a connection between Christianity and the traditional and indigenous Sierra Leone in the social discourse of the nation. Conteh's remarks about Christian Sierra Leone have inspired in-depth social research about the specificities of the emergence of Christianity in the nation. For example, Conteh points out the continuity between traditional religiosity and Christianity and the importance of the Christian message as a social discourse impeding the emergence of indigenous social identity. The gift of revelation preached by Christianity keeps alive and active the role of Christian's early missionaries and their dreams, allowing them to confront Sierra Leonean secularism. In turn, (Moiba, 2016) shows that the religiosity of Sierra Leonean Christian tradition creates a mechanism that transforms the economic exclusion they experience as a result of the expansion of Sierra Leonean capitalism into ideological social integration. Similar conclusions were reached by Skinner (1996) and Schinder (1980) in their study about the affiliation of Limba Sierra Leoneans to Christianity. Several tribal and traditional cohorts have already converted to Christianity, although the number of studies about these cohorts is still limited.

The literature on urban Christian heterogeneity is more abundant and exposes its social, cultural and institutional diversity. Its ascendance among the middle classes is incipient but systematic. Conteh (2011), Bangura (2019), Moiba (2016) attribute this trend to the upward mobility of some members of the church, social reorientation of evangelization and a more acceptable image of Christianity among the middle classes. This is a relevant point because an expanding diversity of Christian constituency would challenge assumptions about the growth of Christianity as being restricted to low income classes.

Recent studies have also indicated Christian cultural, ethnic and gender social differentiation. Here research perspectives look into the social evolution of different churches and make it possible to appraise current understandings of appropriation and diffusion of Christian messages. A good example of this is the growing incidence of Christianity among Temnes, which accounts for the ethnical variability of appropriation (Conteh, 2011), and the conversion of young Rastafarians, which shows the flexibility of social trajectories. Christians success among these cohorts tells, above all, about the many possibilities for Christian interpellation (Conteh, 2016). From denominational networks and churches to small communities, it is possible to perceive the emergence of nuclei for expansion and aggregation with divergent social, age, cultural composition, ritual styles and theological stresses.

Christians have developed specific Evangelic strategies targeting women. Conteh (2011) has studied such specificity and the linkage between women – the church. His study shows that, despite the church's androcentric discourse, the adoption of Christian beliefs and cohort activity minimises, to some extent, the perverse effects of patriarchy. Mcferson (2012) shows that Christian women gain, on the one hand, autonomy vis-a-vis their husbands and families, and, on the other hand, they perceive themselves as being responsible for the salvation of their partners and families as well as for their prosperity.

Conteh (2011) has explained the success of Christianity among the youth in Freetown by its capacity to open and re-elaborate the urban cultural codes. Similarly, Mcferson (2012) has studied the cultural changes of Christian churches emerging from the 1980s in Freetown.

Diversification also encompasses a different way of institutionalising the Christian believers' social identity. Different authors have analysed various institutional endeavours in which Christian Churches join efforts among themselves and with other Christian denominations, resulting in new forms of Evangelic interpellation for cultural and social undertakings. From lawyer meetings CLHR to rock bonds that bring the young generation together (YMCA, 2002), there is a wide spectrum of organisations articulating the Evangelical culture about which very diminutive is aware. In his analysis of CLHR, he analyses the process of social identity formation and shows the efficacy of strategic diversification that generates alternative groupings.

Christianity, thus, appears as a diverse and vital social phenomenon. This quality stems from its active adaptation to the most different cultural climates without being weakened or voided by them. Women, youth, businessmen and, football players, comedians can be identified as Christian believers and Evangelical. The network between Christianity and the nation has transformed in significant dual aspects: Christianity is becoming more secular, and the fragmented and secular diversity assumes a Sierra Leonean Christian identity.

5. The Evolution of Neo-Sierra Leonean Christianity

Because Christianity has undergone such an intense process of transformation in recent years, a few scholars have proposed to refer to the two currents, historical Christianity and Neo-Sierra Leonean Christianity. According to Conteh (2011), the main traits of Neo-Sierra Leonean Christianity are the following. Neo-Christian leaders have strong personalities (sometimes charismatic). Neo-Sierra Leonean Christianity stimulates emotional expressiveness, pursues exclusive affiliation and makes intense sense of the media. Assumed divine cure and exorcism, as well as requests for money donations, are pivotal rituals (Conteh, 2011). To this list, Mcferson (1996) add a certain degree of liberalisation of customs and transforming criteria of assumed holiness in the Christian tradition.

Western Urban and Western Rural Neo-Sierra Leonean Christianity are the channels through which Theology of Prosperity and Spiritual War penetrates into the Evangelic churches, although this by no means a process of mechanical reception. These theologies are re-created and filtered through the views of local agents. Western Urban and Western Rural churches have developed their own projects of national expansion. The researcher pointed out earlier that Christian churches have influenced the growth of Neo-Sierra Leonean Christianity. As mentioned before, Sierra Leone Pentecostal churches have been established in Makeni, Bumbuna and almost the entire Bombali district in northern Sierra Leone. Thus, Neo-Sierra Leonean Christianity appears to be the fragment of the global Christianity most exposed to transnational social dynamics, not only a sensitive receptor but also an active producer.

What has been referred to as the 'culturalisation of customs' or the lowering of ecclesiastic demands is a trait that can be discussed vis-a-vis previous phenomena. Neo-Christian churches strive to establish themselves as the religious mediation that legitimate and advances secular goals attuned to other tendencies of modern culture. In turn, this endeavour- framed by the Spiritual War – energizes local religious culture. Therefore, antagonism between the secular and the sacred lies at the core of Neo-Sierra Leonean

Christianity. By transposing holiness – the distance between the nation and divine affiliations – into a sort of guaranteed protection and success, Neo-Christianity makes inroads in various communities. Overcoming successive splits in its own social history, Neo-Sierra Leonean Christianity makes it available to provincials in Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Magburaka inhabitants and becomes part of their cultures.

As mentioned previously, Neo-Sierra Leonean Christianity makes very extensive use of the media. Because of this, authors like Conteh (2011) affirm the existence of an Evangelicalcultural industry that accompanies the believer in his or her home and amplifies the message transmitted by the churches. This cultural industry expands through its capacity to tune into believers' cultures, and we can assume that this industry articulates Evangelical cultural identity. Neo-Sierra Leonean Christianity has undergone its own process of bureaucratisation and management organisation, as well. In fact, the agility to set up new churches and standardise the worship styles is the most visible aspect of an institutional practice able to regulate Christian Sierra Leoneans. All these considerations demonstrate the current importance of Neo-Christianity within the Evangelical social context in Sierra Leone. However, it is significant to keep in mind that Christian expansion rests largely upon the fact that its social bases reject and admit only a part of the Christian tenets.

6. Politicisation of Sierra Leone Christianity

Studies on Christianity in Sierra Leone have not ignored its involvement in politics. It is fair to say that the conceptualisation of Christian involvement, as suggested by Shyllon (2009) and Conteh (2011), has been combined with the preoccupations of the observers and analysts themselves. Sierra Leone Christianity has been accused of political immobility as well as of affinity to colonialist interests and manipulations. In the districts where Christianity has expanded the most (Bombali, Tonkolili and Western Area), it has been portrayed as a threat to the community and cultural pluralism. Politicisation constitutes a steady tendency in Christianity and encompasses a variety of elements and styles that make it difficult to accept uncomplicated answers.

In his study about Christianity in Sierra Leone, Conteh (2011) points to the existing tension between political mobilisation and the Christian message of indifference towards the communities. Christian rejection of Sierra Leone's culture or tradition, its extreme dualistic theology and the type of organisation of its churches make the material and ideological politicisation of its followers difficult. However, Conteh observes some tendencies that could lead to Christianity political involvement in the long run. The main tendency is the articulation of clientelistic networks that place Christian leaders as mediators between the state or political parties and their followers. Their quest for religious respectability, as well as material and institutional benefits, stimulates political activity on the part of the church leaders. This corporative tendency towards political involvement and the context of social conflict prevailing in Sierra Leone in the 1990s contributed to shaping Sierra Leone's Christianity as a conservative force.

Both Conteh (2011) and Moiba (2016) argued for the increased flexibility of Christianity's conservative passivity during the National Provisional Ruling Council (2016). In fact, Christians were initially less conservative than non-Christians from the same social class but not different in terms of their sympathy for the popular revolution. This proclivity disappeared with the military takeover. As the Anglican Church sought to distance itself from the government, the military council sought Catholicism out as religious interlocutors. The military social discourse, admonishing the council steered up by Pan-African and advocating a socialist renewal, won over the leaders of the main Catholic denomination. In turn, they showed their appreciation for the regime and their conservatism was reactivated.

Among the studies about the political involvement of Sierra Leonean Christians between the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, Skinner stood out. He recognised two tendencies. First, Christian's political choices varied, although right wing leaning was more common. Second, the articulation of reciprocity networks among religious and political leaders was particularistic and corporative. During the 1980s and 1990s, however, Evangelists' participation in electoral politics increased, leading to the formation of the Evangelical Fellowship Society.

The Christian political behaviour in crucial elections highlights Christian conservative alignment in cultural, political-institutional, social and economic matters. When Christians turn to politics, it opens up an unforeseen channel for political participation to the lower classes. Finally, Christian adaptation to the existing rules of the game, as well as its capacity for exploiting the positions acquired through ecclesiastical expansion and cultural influence, mainly through better access to the mass media. The political behaviour of Christian churches during the presidential campaign of two thousand and seven supports this claim. Their initial sympathy for the All Peoples Congress (APC) candidate, Ernest Bai Koroma, turned into intense and expansive activism managed by the most important Christian churches in Sierra Leone during the second electoral round. The leaning of the Christian electorate towards Ernest Bai Koroma was not inevitable: the incumbent could have changed the circumstance or even won the Christian ballots. What was at stake was not the univocal conservative disposition on the part of the Christians but the successful interpellation of their political sensibility by the conservatives. The relation of Christians with politics in Sierra Leone is not established by their electoral options but by their antipolitical views (neither apolitical nor against the Sierra Leone political system) that place the solutions for national problems in a 'metasocial order'. With respect to democratic politics, Christians constitute an exteriority that can only penetrate it by changing itself.

A general balance of the political behaviour of Christians in Sierra Leone indicates that their political behaviour varies. Although conservatism prevails, it is more the consequences of specific historical circumstances than a fossilised essence of the Christian message. Individuals do not always regulate their political behaviour according to their religious beliefs, and even their beliefs may influence their political behaviour in divergent ways. The political behaviour of Christian leaders appears to every concrete. They are sought after by political parties or governments, trying to increase or diversify their bases of support legitimacy. Christians are very aware of such political calculations and exert their own political leverage, although their own political action is not univocal. The church's reaction to political pleas vary in content and degrees of institutionalisation.

It varies in content because Christianity is open to different events opposite political calls. Regarding their degree of institutionalisation, Christian political actions range from acceptance of cooptation by different political parties to the formation of autonomous organisations for political and social mobilisation to an exhortation to vote for a particular candidate. The corporate and material interests of the church can be instrumentalised either through clientelistic practices or by stressing equality and citizenship. Conservatives manage to create a common theme with the Christian electorate by making religious values such as the family or community, or neighbour an important part of the political agenda. The conservative instrumentalisation of what is presented as the traditional mandate of 'respect for authority' shows, paradoxically, apoliticism can be broken, even by a call from the left. Although the researcher does not speculate about the relationship between the leaders' political decisions and supporters' political behaviour (assuming that a direct link exists), the researcher can affirm that the historical predominance of conservative currents is based more upon the ability of the conservative to find better cues into the political subjectivity promoted by Christianity rather than upon the existence Christian 'essence'. It is the relationships between established political actors and the Christians which determine the more or less conservative trait of their politicisation as well as the more or less conservative social orientation adopted in their political actions.

7. Sierra Leone Christianity and the Media

Many Christian churches, especially Neo-Christian ones, utilise mass media, chiefly radio and television. But, they can be called 'electronic churches' only by drawing analogies with Nigerian churches. Historic protestant churches such as Methodists, Catholics, and Baptists have made use of the media, too, especially the press. What is special about Sierra Leone's Christianity today is the great emphasis placed on mass media. Most denominations also distribute their own magazines.

Social data about Sierra Leone illustrate the use of electronic media by Christian churches. The Catholic Church radio Maria broadcasts about 1000 religious programmes on the radio every day. Through its project, Methodists airs about 500 programmes on the radio every day. The presence of Christianity and historic evangelism in the media shows that there is, in fact, a 'cultural Evangelical industry', and Freetown is the producer of television programmes.

Sierra Leone Christian churches convey multiple meanings to their followers and preachers via the media. Some of those meanings, for example, economic (request of donations to defray the expenses of radio and television programmes); proselytising (television and radio programmes aim to attract people to the churches and convert them); and legitimising meaning (the use of the media confers legitimacy on Christian churches and even the reputation of being modern, adaptive and more suited to present Sierra Leone).

8. Christianity and the Changes in the Religious Domain

From the studies by Conteh (2011) on the north, Skinner (1965) on Freetown, Bangura (2016) on peace, Sesay (1998) on Bumbuna and Kamara (1999) on Kambia, one can conclude that the Christian rise affects transforms in the relations among the protestant cohorts. The fact that in the last decades, Christianity has become the largest Evangelical religious domain indicates a sort of 'Culturalisation' of historic protestant institutions. One can confirm that Christian charismatic and proselytizing practices are reproduced by some fractions of missionary and historic Protestantism. Another symptom of this is the emergence of new dividing lines among the Evangelical blocs. Theology of prosperity, styles and meanings of politicisation has promoted the creation of 'inter-denominational' alliances in Sierra Leone that compete among themselves to gain hegemony and representation within the Evangelical field. Denominational identity continues to be a relative matter in these fractions; it is possible to find Christians, missionaries and historic Protestants in the various groupings.

These appropriate currents coalesce in a steady tendency observed in all the cases. Increasingly, Christians define themselves and are perceived as Evangelicals, and a portion of the Evangelicals become more 'Culturalised'. Unlike its beginnings when it was a group marginalised from the established cultural idealisations, in the last decades, Christianity has experienced a momentous ascent and is in the spotlight of Evangelical tensions.

Another relevant aspect of the transformations effected in the religious field by Christianity is its branch in the cultural hegemony and, more important, the representation attributed historically to the Catholic church; Catholic publishing houses began to issue 'clarifying literature' about 'sects'. As mentioned before, the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone uses devotional and charismatic

practices aiming to halt believers' withdrawal from Catholicism. Concomitantly, this circumstance has produced transformations within the Catholic Church. For example, Christian expansion has contributed to questioning progressive Catholic cohorts like the Knight of Saint John in Freetown.

Christian presence has also altered the system of relations with other forms of religiosity. If one takes into account the tolerance towards traditional cults or religions by the Catholic Church historically, one can see escalating tension in those districts where Catholic missionaries have settled. In this particular conflict, one can observe a specific economy: the expansion of some Neo-Christian churches is based upon their battle with traditional cults or religion. Conversely, in Sierra Leone, Christianity has established a positive *vinculum* with pre-existing local Conteh (2011) spirituality.

Christian expansion prompts transformations in the relations among different religiosities. In general terms, it is possible to contend that Christianity introduces a divergent logic into the economy of the religious field. Christianity presses for exclusive and proselytizing membership; a plurality of religious loyalties of the traditional sort still prevails.

This social phenomenon is in the context of the transition from a religious syncretic and hierarchical market where multiple references are organized after the acceptance of Catholic hegemony to another market where the claim of religious exclusiveness draws followers from other religions. Conteh (2011) regarded Christianity's anti-syncretic stand as related to a process inwardly, resignifying and overpowering the pre-existent concept of the sacred in the lower classes.

Christianity rewrites the Sierra Leone traditional or culturalist domain of popular religiosity based on ethical categories, which, in fact, counter its own standing. Christianity coexists with Sierra Leone's cultural and religious community but subordinates it to a concept of exclusiveness, which, in turn, nurtures antagonism with popular religiosity.

9. Approaching the Theoretical Social Insight

A good deal of the best theoretical work on Sierra Leone Christianity has been written by non-Sierra Leoneans. Among the 'classics', William, Raymond, and John deserve special notice, not only because they have written early scholarship on the subject but also because their hypotheses and conclusions continue to be fundamental to construct Christianity as a sociological problem to traditional Sierra Leone.

William (1967) argues that Christianity grants rationality, social identity and guidance to its followers, easing their insertion in urban modern Sierra Leone. Raymond (1970) built upon the relation Christianity – contemporaneity and suggested that Christianity creates a double social movement of rejection and substitution of modern society by restoring the relationships and hierarchies of the rural community. This movement blesses isolation from the urban community within an ethics that turns rejection into social positivity and political and cultural conformity. Although these two hypotheses highlight the role of Christian churches vis-a-vis the anomic condition of modernisation, it is significant to make distinctions between them. While Raymond stresses the individual aspects and 'symbolic protest', John holds onto the classical version of the deterioration of a prescriptive nucleus common to a social group or cohort. In turn, Raymond (1985, 1989) appraised the reintegrative force of Christianity; but subordinated it to the analysis of social composition and the process of the social formation of Sierra Leone. From the Marxist structuralist point of view, he stressed the presence of Christianity among the dominated classes, although not specifically the working class, by arguing that Christian ideology fosters capitalist social relatives.

Rejection or adjustment to contemporaneity? Is Christian Sierra Leone subscribing to African traditions or merely keeping up with the religious and cultural styles of the nation? These questions spring from the classic works and continue to direct current works. During the 1980s, scholarly works were very ethnographic, and researchers strove to operationalise the fundamental hypothesis and compare diverse social and religious cohorts. These studies coincide in stressing the emergence of a new circumstance. Christianity itself has transformed and effected a transformation in the religious field of those cultures where it had settled.

Current studies point out the inherent tensions in the religious field by comparing William and Raymond's propositions. Hair (1997) showed that the values promoted by Christianity (individualism, rationality, sense of integrity) constitute a key factor in the survival of the popular cohorts. Conteh (2011), in turn, discussed how Sierra Leone Christian emotionality allows for the assertion of a place and social dynamics divergent from modern and democratic politics.

Tensions, contradictions and disagreements are steady features in the literature on Sierra Leone Christianity. Shyllon (2009) says that it can be explained by the very paradoxical nature of Christianity itself. Conteh (2011) pointed out the Janus-like trait of Christianity, both rejecting and adopting contemporaneity. Reed and Robinson (2013) considered this to be linked to the dualistic trait of traditional Sierra Leonean communities.

Regarding the continuity and rupture of previous religious traditions, Conteh (2011) argued that Sierra Leone Christianity provides an institutional frame in which traditional Sierra Leone popular sensibility and religiosity can be expressed and allows for the process of identity formation. Conteh (2011) pointed out that Sierra Leone Christianity is a renewal of, and an adaptation to, the

practices and values of popular religiosity rather than a process internal to popular Catholicism or Protestantism. Sierra Leone Christianity is a renewal that goes beyond blending different traditional cults and actually assembles a new and original religious profile.

In the counter point between the nation and the sacred, Sierra Leone Christianity intervenes in the religious and cultural fields beyond bringing traditions together. Christianity creates a specific cultural atmosphere with its own values and sensibilities as a consequence of its own ability to elaborate original synthesis attuned to diverse audiences. With its innovative practices, use and adaptation of modern means of organisation and communication, Christianity is not occupying a space left empty by Culturalism. On the contrary, Sierra Leone Christianity generates a religious and cultural project that creates its own demands and proves capable of disarticulating existing constituencies deemed as captive.

Finally, Christianity is a phenomenon at the crossroads of the national and the global, not because cultural specificities are in the process of dissolving but because the dialectic between the local and the global affects the constitution of the Christian culture.

10. Conclusions

The proliferation of the Christian faith is not a novelty as the practice dates back to as far as the periods following the passage of Christ, especially with the dismantling of the Catholic institution in Europe. The wave of Christian heterogeneity stirred high during the slave trade, used mainly by the slaves as a form of reactionary endeavour. This resulted in numerous splinter Christian groups which spread across Europe and Asia and penetrated into Africa with electrifying vivacity. Sierra Leone was not an exception to this blossoming religious heterogeneity. It did not only introduce a new way of life and worship for the native Sierra Leonean, but it summarily overshadowed their very religious traditions and way of worship, stripping them of their religious heritage. The reader should figure these painful facts in mind having perused rigorously through this piece, because religion, and all its accouterments, are the heart and cronies of human existence. It is this path that you, the readers, are directed towards.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

- [1] Bangura, M (2019) *Sociology of Religion: A Sierra Leonean Inquiry*. TalNet Independent Publishers, Zimbabwe.
- [2] Bangura, I (2016) We Can't Eat Peace: Youth, Sustainable Livelihood and the Peace Building processes in Sierra Leone. 11(2). See <https://www.tandfonline.com>. Accessed on the 16th of November 2022.
- [3] Bouteneff, P. (2010) *Unity in Diversity: The Opportunities and the Challenges*. St Basil the Great, Epistle 94.
- [4] Fladmark, J.M (1998) "African Heritage: The Assets of Sierra Leone," (1 ed.), In *Search of Heritage as Pilgrim or Tourist*, Don Head: The Robert Gordon Heritage Library.
- [5] Fairbairn, R and Ryan, M (2019) *Creeds and Confessions: Tracing the Development of the Christian Faith*. Baker Publishing.
- [6] Conteh, P.S (2011) The Role of Religion During and After the Civil War in Sierra Leone. *Journal for the Study of Religion*. Vol.24. No. 1.pp. 55-70. Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa (ASRSA).
- [7] Conteh, P.S (2011) *Inter-religious Encounters and Dialogue in Sierra Leone: Historical & Contemporary Endeavours*. Xlibris Corp.
- [8] Conteh, P.S (2009) *Traditionalists, Muslims, and Christians in Africa: Interreligious Encounter and Dialogue*. Cambria Press.
- [9] Conteh, P.S (2006) *The Place of African Traditional Religion in Interreligious Encounters in Sierra Leone since the Advent of Islam and Christianity*. PhD Dissertation.University of South Africa.
- [10] G, C (2020) *Religion in Sierra Leone*. See <https://www.Google.com>. Accessed on the 21 of November 2022.
- [11] Graybill, L (2017) *Religion, Tradition, and Restorative Justice in Sierra Leone*. University of Notre Dame Press.
- [12] Hair, P.E.H (1997) *Christian Influences in Sierra Leone Before 1787*. *Journal of Religion in Africa*.
- [13] Jalloh, A (1999) *African Entrepreneurship: Muslim Fula merchants in Sierra Leone*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies.
- [14] Jalloh, A (1998) *The Fula and the Motor Transport Business in Freetown, Sierra Leone*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- [15] Jalloh, A and Skinner, D.E (1997) *Islam Trade in Sierra Leone*. Africa World Press, Trenton, New Jersey, United States of America.
- [16] John, H (1970) *The Reconstruction of Christian Belief for Today and Tomorrow*. See <https://journals.sagepub.com>.
- [17] Joseph, R (2001) *Global Philosophy of Religion*. One World Publications.ISBN: 185168235X.
- [18] *Religions of the World Comparative Studies: Encyclopedia of Beliefs Volume 4*.
- [19] Mcferson, H (2012) *Women and Post Conflict Society in Sierra Leone*.*Journal of International Women Studies*. George Mason University.
- [20] Marx, K (1961) *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- [21] Mason, H (2021) *Working with pastors and imams (Moyamba Sierra Leone) to share COVID-19 preventive commandments*. See <http://www.unicef.org>.
- [22] Moiba, J.G Rev. (2016) *Religion and Peacemaking in Sierra Leone*. See repository.uwtsd.ac.uk.
- [23] Office of International Religious Freedom (2021) *Report on International Religious Freedom: Sierra Leone*.

-
- [24] Porter, A. T (1953) Religious Affiliation in Freetown, Sierra Leone. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* Vol. 33. No.1. See: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1156028>.
- [25] Richards, P (2006) An Accident Sect: How War Made Belief in Sierra Leone. *Review of African Political Economy*. Vol.33. No. 110. Religion, Ideology & Conflict I Africa.
- [26] Raymond, C (1970) Christianity and Sociopolitical Change. See <https://www.works.swarthmore.edu>.
- [27] Reed, T and Robinson, A.J (2013) *The Chiefdoms of Sierra Leone*. Harvard University Press.
- [28] Tice, R et al. (2002) *Christianity Explored*. The Good Book Company. USA.
- [29] Said, R (2017) *Religion in Sierra Leone*. Gooyaabi Templates.
- [30] Seddall, H () *The Missionary History of Sierra Leone*. Moulton Library. Bangor Theological Seminary.
- [31] Scheinder, R (2012) Christianity's distasteful reality hard to swallow. See: <https://www.rstar.com>. Accessed on the 12th of October, 2022.
- [32] Shaker, M (1988) *Sierra Leone: citizens of Muslim peoples in Africa*. Noor books.
- [33] Shyllon, L (2009) *Two Centuries of Christianity in an African Province of Freedom Sierra Leone, A Case Study of European Influence and Culture in Church Development*. Print Sundries and Stationers.
- [34] Statistics, S (2020) *Statistics*. See <https://www.statistics.sl>. Accessed on the 21st of November, 2022.
- [35] YMCA (2002) *Young men Christian Association*. See <https://www.ymca.com>. Accessed on the 1st of October, 2022.
- [36] William, J.K (9167) *The Religion of Man*. See: <https://amazon.com>. Accessed on the 8th of November, 2022.
- [37] Weisenfeld, J. (2015) *Religion in African American History*. ORE of American History. Princeton University. Oxford Index.