

Wanjiru M. Gitau, *Megachurch Christianity Reconsidered: Millennials and Social Change in African Perspective*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018. pp. 118.

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In the book *Megachurch Christianity Reconsidered: Millennials and Social Change in African Perspective*, Wanjiru Gitau extensively analyses the Nairobi Chapel and its daughter, the Mavuno Church. The book explores the renewal of a declining church through contextualisation. Once a prominent church, the Nairobi Chapel had lost its appeal to successive generations and the local community but was revitalised and expanded to other daughter churches such as the Mavuno Church. Gitau's work highlights the pivotal role of the Mavuno Church in bridging the generational gap, with millennials emerging as the driving force in the church's revival. They are portrayed as active participants, converts, conformers, and adaptors, shaping the church's future. In an in-depth examination, the book begins with factors that led to the decline of the once-lively Nairobi Chapel, a key feature of Gitau's study. The revival of the old church was achieved by integrating with contemporary society and addressing fundamental communal perceptions of the church. However, the main focus of the book is the Mavuno Church, where millennials played a central role in its revival (1-65).

Gitau's unique position as an 'insider' in the megachurch story is a significant aspect of her analysis. Her interactions with both Oscar Muriu and Muriithi Wanjau, pastors of Nairobi Chapel and Mavuno Church, respectively, and her active involvement in the reconstruction of the Nairobi Chapel provide her with a firsthand perspective. While it is acknowledged that biases may arise from this insider perspective, Gitau leverages this position to offer a more nuanced understanding of the Mavuno Church (14-15).

In the first chapter, we are introduced to Oscar Muriu, a young man who assumes the role of pastor and achieves the remarkable feat of growing the church from a modest following to a congregation of approximately three thousand within a span of ten years. His leadership aptitude is tested in the face of historical colonial legacies and ongoing political turbulence that have significantly impacted the country. A significant challenge Muriu faces is engaging the younger generation, particularly the millennials, who perceive the church as incongruent with their contemporary experiences. This perception

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has led to a disinterest towards the church's relevance in their lives, a challenge Muriu grapples with.

In Chapter Two, the author delves into a comprehensive exploration of the disparities between the church and local communities using empirical research. The author characterises these disparities as 'crossroads' and 'checkpoints.' Despite Christianity's status as the predominant religion in Kenya, the research revealed that only a minority of individuals attended church services on Sundays. The church appeared entrenched in an 'old world' paradigm disconnected from contemporary society, failing to resonate with the latter. The Mavuno church, in particular, faced significant challenges. It emerged as a beacon of hope for millennials, who were grappling with the adverse economic conditions prevalent at the time, a predicament experienced by numerous African nations. The Mavuno church envisaged a future that would imbue significance and purpose into the lives of this demographic, aiming to ameliorate the harsh realities they faced.

In the third chapter, Muriithi faces numerous obstacles that pose significant challenges. However, his strategic outreach to the millennial demographic produces a positive response. This approach is particularly important as it engages a disillusioned younger generation, many of whom have distanced themselves from the church due to the worldview shaped by the tumultuous circumstances in Kenya. Muriithi's strategy not only establishes a framework but also offers guidance for other churches facing similar challenges or seeking to enhance their growth.

Chapter Four focuses on the topic of leadership, exploring it through the lens of an African country that has experienced significant challenges, including economic difficulties, which have left its youth feeling hopeless. Leading in such a difficult community, Muriithi learnt to hybridise the mission and produce an African-Western church experience. Muriithi learns 'Disciplined Leadership' from Muriu, his mentor. He is taught to think and generate ideas, to see leadership as problem-solving, raising leaders and delegating responsibility. The young man built a robust system of leadership, the 'Mavuno marathon' that does the 'magic' of bringing the church to a place where everyone would want to belong.

In Chapter Five, the book examines the profound impacts of the Mavuno church on the local community and its wider sphere of influence. It discusses how the church nurtured congregants to develop sustainable networks, foster Godly families, establish ethical businesses, and positively influence their communities. The author highlights that

individuals who join the Mavuno Church undergo a comprehensive transformation in their lives, often expressing this change as “My life is under new management” (115).

Chapter Six examines the intersection between Christianity and modernity, particularly emphasising the ambiguity inherent in this relationship. The author observes that many new Christians grapple with the dilemma of rejecting success and wealth as incompatible with Christian principles or embracing material prosperity regardless of ethical considerations uncritically. Widespread issues such as poverty, deprivation, injustice, economic disparities, and political upheavals, typically categorised by Western nations as “Third World Problems,” emerge as pertinent subjects for contemplation within the context of African Christianity. Rather than succumbing to this prevailing sense of hopelessness, Mavuno Church emerges as a beacon of holistic Christian teachings, instilling a sense of optimism among its members.

Wanjiru Gitau’s analysis of the megachurch phenomenon offers valuable insights. However, the focus on millennials as the primary audience overlooks the presence and needs of the older generation in Kenya. It is clear that many megachurches are ill-equipped to cater to the requirements of the older demographic and people with little or no Western education, resulting in their marginalisation and increased vulnerability. This challenge is not confined to the Mavuno Church but is indicative of the broader difficulties faced by many megachurches in Africa. Identifying and proposing recommendations for this discrepancy would have been essential for the church to fulfil its mission and establish an inclusive environment for intercultural and intergenerational faith development. This notwithstanding, this book is a great addition to the literature on African Christianity and a must-read for scholars of theology and mission, church leaders and those in the seminaries.