



Religious Critique Discourses as Community Quarrels: Friction of Values as Expressed by Tanzanian Adventists¹

Stefan Höschele

Department of Theology, Theologische Hochschule Friedensau,
An der Ihle 2 B, 39291 Friedensau, Germany
E-mail: stefan.hoeschele@thh-friedensau.de

Abstract

This article takes as a point of departure the ‘religious economy’ model and suggests that it may not be able to explain some dynamics in the construction of composite identities in religious movements. By analysing the critique discourses between Tanzanian Adventists, other religious communities, and society, an anatomy of the values underlying these critique discourses is established. Criticisms originating from Tanzanian Adventists as well as those directed at them may be understood as serving several divergent ends and producing contradictory results, including preserving central Christian values, safeguarding aspects of African identities, cementing separation from or in society, and attempting to change the environment. Thus, a community model of religion is suggested as a supplement to the ‘religious economy’ model to explain the necessity of critique and many of its dynamics.

Keywords

Christianity, Seventh-day Adventists, Tanzania, religious criticism, religious economy model, values, discourse

1. Introduction

In spite of a long history of peaceful utopias designed by religious and non-religious visionaries alike, few people would claim today that conflict-free groups of people can actually exist. Since frictions are a reality in families, villages, towns, regions, and societies, this must be reflected in religious movements in

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the biannual meeting of the *Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft* at Bayreuth, Germany, in September 2005, as part of the panel entitled ‘Rethinking African Religions: Reflexivity and the Critique of Religion’.

some way – so much so that among the few who devote a monograph to the complex of religion and critique, John Ackermann comes close to claiming that critique is the only proper function of religion.² Although many would not agree with such a far-reaching conclusion, one may assert, at the very least, that religious critique discourses often satiate what may be called ‘the human need for friction’.

It is so obvious that this need for friction is expressed in the religious realm through organisational differentiation that it hardly needs to be stressed. Rodney Stark, William Sims Bainbridge, and Roger Finke have put considerable effort in explaining this differentiation with their concept of a ‘religious economy’. According to these theorists, such an economy, as the realm of commercial companies, implies competition between what they call ‘religious firms’ that vie for different market segments, which leads to mergers, alliances, splits, bankruptcies, and the like. In religious economies, therefore, one may find sects fiercely competing with other sects, others growing to churches and forming coalitions, some bodies declining, others rather stable, etc.³ When looking at the relationship of religion and critique from this perspective, it should be added that what holds together this economy is a system of critique and counter-critique with which each ‘religious firm’ justifies its position relative to others.

The ‘religious economy’ model has many merits. It is certainly most helpful for explaining macro level dynamics and the way many religious conflicts function.⁴ It also illustrates the *necessity* of religious friction and thus provides a social science rationale for theological differences and, implied in these differences, religious critique discourses. The model therefore develops part of H. Richard Niebuhr’s argument in *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*,⁵ albeit in a more sophisticated and comprehensive way. Moreover, it defines church-sect theory in an intriguing way – by demonstrating that religious movements can be classified according to one single measurable criterion: their tension with society.

² John Ackermann, *Religion as Critique* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985).

³ See, among the many works written by these authors, Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁴ The religious economy model presupposes a ‘free market’, i.e., religious pluralism, as an ideal, and thus emphasises that the market forces usually contain conflicts to be peaceful. At the same time, it suggests that religious monopolies are the result of a regulation that may lead to aggravating conflicts.

⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Holt, 1929).

This is the problem where the argument of this paper begins. The religious economy model with its ‘tension with society’ criterion leaves unanswered the question who defines what society actually is. And this is precisely the issue in many African contexts (and, it seems to me, in numerous other environments as well). Stark and his associates have done us a great favour in defining that only ‘tension’ should define what a ‘sect’ is, what constitutes a ‘church’, and what is in between, thus providing a solution for an old debate. Nevertheless, their way to determine subcultural deviance – measuring difference, antagonism, and separation⁶ – presupposes that there is automatically a well-defined larger culture. This, however, is an assumption which may not hold true in many cases. Rather, cultures are probably better conceptualised as amalgams in perpetual transformation – to such an extent that religious critique may be interpreted to serve very divergent ends, not only some group’s conflict with the ‘society’ or vice versa.

This article analyses critique discourses in the context of such a composite and changing culture. It highlights the criticisms and counter-criticisms that were and are raised in the context of Tanzanian Seventh-day Adventists. Tanzanian Adventism, a movement with more than 300,000 members,⁷ is a community of faith that is particularly interesting in this discussion because of its ambiguous, composite identity, which corresponds to the situation of societies in many parts of Africa.⁸ In principle, this Adventist ambiguity is not different from other African Christian groups and indeed from numerous other religious movements,⁹ but perhaps it is particularly marked in this denomination

⁶ Stark and Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, 49–60.

⁷ The Seventh-day Adventist Church counts more than four million baptized members in Africa as a whole; in 1960, membership was about 500,000. Since children are not baptized, three to four million persons more may be counted as adherents. There is not much academic literature on African Adventism yet, but quite a variety of perspectives and disciplines have been used in the few published works; see Stefan Höschele, ‘Interpreting African Adventism: In Search of a Paradigm,’ in *Misión y contextualización: Llevar el mensaje bíblico a un mundo multicultural* (ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil; Libertador San Martín: River Plate Adventist University Press, 2004), 91–112.

⁸ In a context that resembles some African countries, an anthropologist observed, ‘The Seventh-day Adventist Church of Martinique and Guadeloupe is the syncretistic product of the contact between the local popular religion and the orthodox North-American Adventism.’ See Raymond Massé, *Les Adventistes du Septième Jour aux Antilles Françaises: Anthropologie d’une Espérance Millénariste*, Montréal: Centre de Recherches Caraïbes, Université de Montreal, 1978, back cover (translation by S.H.).

⁹ Udo Kern, ‘Zum Kritikpotential des Protestantismus,’ *Tabula Rasa: Jenenser Zeitschrift für kritisches Denken*, 13 (1997), online: <<http://www2.uni-jena.de/philosophie/phil/tr/13/kern.php>>, believes that Protestantism is a particularly outstanding critical type of religion due to the *sola scriptura* principle, but this notion is not substantiated by a comparative perspective. A lucid

in that relatively many contradictory elements are held together organisationally. Among the paradoxes in this church are the following:

- (1) The Adventist origin in Europe and America and the many inherited 'Western' elements on the one side,¹⁰ and several important features resembling African Initiated Churches, on the other (e.g., sabbatarianism, food taboos, and annual week-long celebrations in summer).
- (2) A strong otherworldly orientation leading to peculiar apocalyptic speculations¹¹ coupled with an impressive this-worldly emphasis visible in the institutional presence of the church in many countries, especially in secondary and higher education and medical care.¹²
- (3) The Adventist ecclesiological concept that this movement represents the eschatological 'remnant church', a faithful minority embodying a rigorous type of Christianity which brings the last warnings from God to the perishing world, and, as a contrast, the reality of Adventist majority churches in some regions of a number of African countries, churches which seem as well-adapted to their particular environments as other religious groups.¹³

analysis of the relationship between critical reason and religion is provided by Richard Schaeffler, *Religion und kritisches Bewußtsein* (Munich: Alber, 1973). Schaeffler demonstrates that 'critical consciousness' is a debatable concept and that religion and critical reasoning are not mutually exclusive; rather, according to him, religion implies particular types of criticism on the basis of the concept of holiness.

¹⁰ Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 1021, notes the Adventist 'made in America' character. This picture is reconfirmed by voices from other non-Western countries. New Guineans, for instance, argued, 'In the past the Boroi were stupid and ignorant. To join the Seventh-Day Adventist church is to be smart and progressive.' See Josephides, 'Seventh-Day Adventism and the Boroi Image of the Past,' in *Sepik Heritage: Tradition and Change in Papua New Guinea* (eds. Nancy Lutkehaus et al.; Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1990), 62.

¹¹ On this phenomenon, see Ronald Lawson, 'The Persistence of Urgent Apocalypticism Within a Denominationalizing Sect: The Apocalyptic Fringes of Seventh-Day Adventism,' in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements* (ed. Thomas Robbins; New York: Routledge, 1997), 207–228.

¹² This has led Winthrop Hudson to state, 'Seldom while expecting a Kingdom of God from heaven has a group worked so diligently for one on earth'; see Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Scribner, 1965), 347. In fact, the Seventh-day Adventist Church boasts the largest Protestant denominational educational network in the world and is well-known in Africa for its colleges and universities, which in several cases were among the first to be chartered by governments.

¹³ On Tanzanian Adventism as a majority church, see Stefan Höschele, 'Christian Remnant – African Folk Church: The History of Seventh-Day Adventism in Tanzania, 1903–1980' (Ph.D. diss., University of Malawi, 2005).

- (4) A similarity to many other traditional mission churches as far as organisation, international connections, and consciousness of theological issues is concerned – while, on the other side, Adventism may also be regarded as similar to other ‘New Churches’¹⁴ with their dynamism, holism, strictness, the demonization of ‘Traditional Religion’, and, indeed, their numerical success in contemporary Africa.

The Adventist ambiguity is important to note because it illustrates well how religious movements in Africa are composites of different concerns and values. Apart from their ambiguous identity, Adventists are a particularly useful example for the question of religion and critique because they are traditionally quite outspoken on issues which they advocate and reject. They self-assuredly stand for a rigid type of religion and habitually criticise others who, in their view, are not as strict as the Christian faith demands. Thus, they fit somewhere in the ‘sect’ side of the spectrum according to the Stark-Bainbridge-Finke model.¹⁵

2. Adventists Criticising: The Anatomy of Rigorous Religion

In what follows I shall analyse what I would like to call ‘the anatomy of critique discourses’ between Tanzanian Adventists, other religious communities, and society. Yet once one attempts to identify the nature of Adventists’ critique vis-à-vis society, one faces the problem to determine *which* society is meant. Is it the Tanzanian nation, a particular region, some ‘tribe’, or a more clearly definable entity such as a village or town? These decisions would bring forth very different results, depending on whether an Adventist majority church at Lake Victoria is being examined, or a town with migrant believers, or a region where the denomination competes with other, larger religious movements.

Thus, the following analysis takes another path. It does not attempt to measure the *intensity* of conflict or critique, for it considers as an established fact that Adventists tend to be rather critical of what they call ‘the world’. Rather, this article takes the composite nature of societies as a starting point and asks

¹⁴ Paul Gifford, ‘Some Recent Developments in African Christianity,’ *African Affairs* 93 (1994): 513–534. Eva Keller, *The Road to Clarity: Seventh-Day Adventism in Madagascar* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 6, considers Adventism as such a ‘new church’.

¹⁵ For a thorough discussion of Adventism in the context of church-sect theory, see Ronald Lawson, ‘Broadening the Boundaries of Church-Sect Theory: Insights from the Evolution of the Non-Schismatic Mission Churches of Seventh-Day Adventism,’ *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 4 (September 1998): 652–672.

what *concerns* may be found in the veil of criticisms raised by these religionists. Moreover, it deliberates possible *configurations* of criticisms directed towards the outside by religious movements.

Interestingly, little has been written so far on this configuration, and to my knowledge, no model exists yet that constitutes a comprehensive attempt at classifying dimensions of Christian conflict with or criticism directed towards the environment in the African context – or even dimensions of religious criticism at large. Seventh-day Adventist attitudes in Tanzania, like the stance among the denomination's adherents in other countries,¹⁶ provide an excellent example for such an attempt not only because of their intensity but also because of their quantity; the many criticisms that emerged in their history provide enough material from which a categorisation can be derived.

The guiding criterion for the following classification is values located in particular groups to which believers belong. Each cluster of values corresponds to an opposite which is rejected and, therefore, criticised in society and other religious traditions along with various practices that Adventists interpret as contradicting these particular values.¹⁷

2.1 *Humanity: Criticising what is Considered Inhuman*

The major items in this category concern any kind of killing and cruelty such as the traditional practice of killing lepers in some areas,¹⁸ slavery, and cannibalism. In the Tanzanian Adventist context, the most outstanding phenomenon that the denomination encountered and criticised was infanticide, which occurred among several ethnic groups where this church had adherents.¹⁹

¹⁶ A comprehensive list of cultural practices that Adventists rejected in Papua New Guinea is provided by Owen McIntyre, 'Seventh-Day Adventist Approaches to Contextualization of Theology,' *Mission Studies* 16, no. 2 (1999), 130. It includes dancing, the giving of fine mats, the eating of pork, non-fish seafood, and raw fish, public announcements of church offerings, tattooing, the giving of pigs, the belief in ghosts and curses, the drinking of kava, tea, and coffee, weddings on Sabbath, and playing cards and rugby.

¹⁷ One could certainly construct a much more extensive inventory of debated issues by including other Christian or other religious movements, but the concrete example presented here may suffice in the context of this limited paper.

¹⁸ Ernst Kotz, *Im Banne der Furcht: Sitten und Gebräuche der Wapare in Ostafrika* (Hamburg: Advent-Verlag, 1922), 216, reports an instance in the environment of Adventist missionary activities in north east Tanzania.

¹⁹ This was practised among the Jita, Kuria, Iraqw, and especially the Pare, in different cases: in some societies, twins were killed, in others, early births, at times those coming out with the legs first, and among the Pare, reasons included (1) eight birth procedure irregularities, (2) twins, (3) deformed children such as those with a harelip or a sixth toe, and (4) teeth coming out in an

Since Traditional Religions were viewed as connected to such practices, they gave Adventists an opportunity of criticising both the practices and the religious systems associated with them in some way.

2.2 Christianity: Criticising what is Considered Incompatible with Christian Principles

Three subcategories exist here:

- a. Practices and attitudes perceived as directly related to Traditional Religion: ancestor veneration, sorcery, practices related to fear of sorcery and witchcraft,²⁰ traditional ways of dealing with spirit possession phenomena, some practices of indigenous healing involving divination or magic, and venerated objects or animals,²¹ traditional sacrifices, and some *ngoma* (dances or feasts) with elements interpreted as demonic.
- b. Taboos, even those cultural taboos which were not particularly ‘religiously loaded’: food taboos,²² social taboos,²³ and various beliefs and ceremonies perceived as ‘superstitious’.²⁴

unusual way, (5) birth with the feet coming out first. For more details, see Höschele, ‘Christian Remnant – African Folk Church,’ 282.

²⁰ Tanzania Union Minutes, 17 January 1965, No. 462, 166, Archives of Tanzania Union of Seventh-day Adventists, Arusha.

²¹ For an example of snake veneration at Majita, see Luise Drangmeister, ‘Aus dem alten Deutsch-Ostafrika,’ *Advent-Bote* 40/6 (15 March 1934): 86; for examples of sacred trees felled by Adventists among the Zanaki, see Benjamin Mkirya, *Historia, Mila, na Desturi za Wazanaki* (Peramiho: Benedictine Publications, 1991), 69, and Elisha A. Okeyo, ‘God’s Hand in the Life of Pastor Elisha A. Okeyo,’ TMs (photocopy), 2000, 3.

²² E.g., the traditional prohibition for Jita women to eat chicken and a delicious fish called *kambaremamba*. According to interviews, Adventists consistently rejected such taboos that were deemed oppressive, for they meant that these attractive kinds of food would be reserved for men.

²³ A notable example is the *metimane* taboo among the Iraqw, which consisted in a ban on visiting a family that had experienced the loss of a member for a period of around one whole year (in some areas, six months, in others, even up to three years). Even the family itself was not supposed to visit others, for they were believed to carry bad luck with them. See Yotham J.B. Fissoo, ‘The Impact of the Christian Religion on the Wairaqw, with Special Reference to the Lutheran Church in Mbulu’ (B.D. thesis, Lutheran Theological College Makumira, 1982), 29–37.

²⁴ Such a ceremony was *litongo* among the Jita; red soil mixed with cow tallow was applied to the face of a bride. The bride was to sit on a goat skin for four days. This was believed to ensure that all the evil spirits were chased away, and no child would die during infancy. However, little children of Adventists hardly died without performing the ceremony, which was a powerful attraction for women to become Adventist Christians (interviews).

- c. Various sexual practices: sex outside marriage, prostitution, homosexuality, some *ngoma* with elements considered as sexually immoral, and traditional festivals with sexually provoking elements.²⁵

Tanzanian Adventists were very decided in rejecting all of these practices and concepts and at times severely criticised what they viewed as a *laissez-faire* attitude among other denominations, for instance regarding their tolerance of ancestor veneration or the continuing fear of witchcraft.²⁶ Thus, at times Adventists put the very Christianity of Catholics and members of Protestant mainline churches into question through their criticism.

2.3 *'Progress': Criticising Traditional Elements of Culture Viewed as Outdated*

An array of different items can be listed here: traditional dress viz. the absence or perceived insufficiency of dress, traditional education, and female circumcision, which were all rejected by Adventists. The latter was criticised mainly for its 'unhealthy' character. Even witchcraft beliefs could be classified in this category, for some rejected them not because of their religious connotation but because of their 'backwardness'.²⁷ Thus, Seventh-day Adventists in a way viewed themselves as African enlightenment thinkers criticising 'religion' and substituting it with a more rational kind of faith, much like the Old Testament prophets who ridiculed religious views in their environment.²⁸

2.4 *Imported Christianity: Criticising Items Incompatible with Western Christianity*

Two major examples are polygamy²⁹ and enthusiastic worship forms, which were both rejected by representatives of official Tanzanian Adventism. In the

²⁵ See Kotz, *Im Banne der Furcht*, 79, and Ernst Kotz, *Sklaven* (Hamburg: Advent-Verlag, 1925), 94, and Höschele, 'Christian Remnant – African Folk Church,' 214–226.

²⁶ I have repeatedly heard Adventist criticism of what they view as syncretistic admission of elements of ancestor veneration among Christians of the larger denominations, for instance among the Luo and Chagga. The prevalence of such elements among the Chagga is criticized even by Christians of other denominations; see the discussion in Heinrich Balz, *Weggenossen am Fluss und am Berg: Von Kimbanguisten und Lutheranern in Afrika* (Neuendettelsau: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 2005), 298–299.

²⁷ Even TANU, the then ruling single party, branded such beliefs as backward and superstitious; see Tanganyika African National Union, *Ujinga wa Mwafrika* (Dar es Salaam: East African Publishing House, 1971), 15–18, 51–55.

²⁸ Cf. Horst Dietrich Preuß, *Die Verspottung fremder Religionen im Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1971).

²⁹ See Höschele, 'Christian Remnant – African Folk Church,' 226–237.

polygamy case, biblical arguments were used, but Western Christian traditions were really the decisive factor in a strict stand, in spite of attempts of some missionary leaders to accept a more accommodating stand. Enthusiastic worship patterns, which appeared in some periods of Tanzanian Adventism and around them in Pentecostal churches, were usually criticised from the background of a Western intellectualist understanding of faith, which is deeply ingrained in African Adventism.³⁰

2.5 *Denominational Identity: Criticising Elements Incompatible with Adventism in General*

Apart from the core of the Christian faith and some elements of Christian tradition which had their origin in, or a special relation to, Europe or America, denominational traditions frequently played a particular role in the construction of African Christian identities. Adventists were no exception to this rule. Although they recognised that Christianity could materialise in different ways, their particular heritage was important enough for them to attach decisive value to it.

Items that were rejected by Tanzanian Adventists in this category related to traditions regarding Adventist lifestyle with its Puritan heritage: the use of unclean meat, alcohol, tobacco, coffee, various kinds of amusement such as dancing and cinemas, jewellery, and activities considered to be work on Sabbath.³¹ Thus, Adventist criticism of those with different positions often served as a means of reinforcing denominational boundaries in a context of competing Christian factions.

2.6 *Local Denominational Identity: Criticising Elements Incompatible with Denominational Concerns in a Certain Region*

In addition to general Christian and denominational traditions, churches in particular regions usually develop their own traditions as well and at times make them mandatory for their members. In the case of Adventists, these were

³⁰ The 'intellectual' nature of Adventist religiosity in Madagascar is emphasised by Eva Keller, *The Road to Clarity: Seventh-Day Adventism in Madagascar* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 85–156.

³¹ In another issue, political involvement, an earlier rejection by the denomination as a whole gave way to a more lenient stance in general and in Tanzania. For Adventists and politics in general, see Ronald Lawson, 'Church and State at Home and Abroad: The Evolution of Seventh-Day Adventist Relations with Governments,' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64.2 (1996): 279–311.

mainly attitudes that attempted to apply Adventist principles in context, such as the avoidance of wedding rings and the rejection of Christmas and Easter celebrations. Criticising other Christians who practise these things served as an instrument to affirm that Adventists were the true church in a context where general Adventist denominational characteristics were possibly not felt to be explicit enough to shape a rigorous type of religion.

2.7 *National Values: Criticising what is Considered un-African or 'un-Tanzanian'*

Imported religious movements at times make additions to the features required from an adherent elsewhere, but in other cases they subtract something. By affirming that they are Africans and, more specifically, Tanzanians, Adventists did the same in some cases, and thus criticised those who brought foreign elements or rules to them. A notable example is the bridewealth issue, where ecclesiastical support in all of Tanzania strengthened a traditional practice in spite of advice against the custom by church leaders on the transnational level. Other specifically Tanzanian issues which imply stress on the African identity of Tanzanian Adventism were the protracted debate on proper Christian women's dress and the vigorous criticism of 'inappropriate' attire,³² the insistence upon male leadership in churches as opposed to the Western Adventist promotion of female leadership activities, and the stress on respectability in weddings.³³ Even though these debates were usually conducted with biblical quotations, the concerns behind were obviously African traditional values.

2.8 *Local or Ethnic Values: Criticising what does not fit in with Ethnic Customs or Local Practices*

To this category belong issues where an overly rigid implementation of denominational traditions conflicted with what was considered local custom, such as vegetarianism³⁴ and non-combatancy (i.e., the non-involvement in the military).³⁵ Even circumcision controversies in several societies can be listed here,

³² The Adventist debate on the right type of women's apparel, which was dominated by strict voices rejecting 'Western' fashions, reflected considerable public discussion on the topic; see Andrew Michael Ivaska, 'Negotiating "Culture" in a Cosmopolitan Capital: Urban Style and the Tanzanian State in Colonial and Postcolonial Dar es Salaam' (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2003), mainly 209–252; Höschele, 'Christian Remnant – African Folk Church,' 243–253.

³³ Höschele, 'Christian Remnant – African Folk Church,' 184–191; 253–258.

³⁴ Especially those groups which kept much cattle, such as the Sukuma and the Kuria, commonly viewed the Adventist vegetarian tradition as impracticable in their context.

³⁵ Military service has usually been advised against by the official church, but especially Kuria

for ultimately male circumcision was sanctioned by Christianised societies in modified forms. In all these cases, local identities relativised traditional Adventism, criticised the shape with which it was brought to Tanzania, and transformed it.

2.9 *Peculiar Interpretations: Criticising what is Perceived as Unscriptural*

A rigorous style of religion means that apart from concerns shared by larger groups, individuals could also advance peculiar interpretations of scripture or positions which were not mainly derived from the categories above. The prohibition of hair plaiting could be listed here,³⁶ as well as the common rejection of ‘idolatrous’ crosses on and in Tanzanian Adventist churches.³⁷ The logic of rigorous religion implies that every detail of life may become the target of criticism and could provide the opportunity to criticise those whose religious views and life differed slightly. Rigorous religious movements with their holistic worldview frequently know few *adiaphora* and therefore feel that they must voice their critique even regarding issues that other consider negligible.

2.10 *Personal Preferences: Criticising what Contradicts some Individuals’ Persuasions*

This means that even in cases where there is no real biblical evidence, denominational heritage, cultural reason, or reference to ‘progress’, proponents of rigorous religion may produce an array of criticisms in order to make their world fit their particular ideology. In the context of Tanzanian Adventism, only few items can be listed here which were usually rather short-lived, such as the rejection of musical instruments and the insistence by some leaders in a few cases that women have short hair – evidently in order to prevent them

Adventists continued to join the army as did many other Kuria, and others were converted while serving in the armed forces. On Adventists and military service in general, see Ronald Lawson, ‘Onward Christian Soldiers? Seventh-Day Adventists and the Issue of Military Service,’ *Review of Religious Research* 37, no. 3 (March 1996): 193–218.

³⁶ For an insightful discussion of this issue among other Christians in the region, see J. E. McDermond, ‘Modesty: The Pauline Tradition and Change in East Africa,’ *Africa Theological Journal* 22, no. 3 (1993): 195–208.

³⁷ Greyson Zephaniah Mtango, ‘A Comparison between the Lutheran Church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church with Special Reference to Doctrinal Issues: A Case Study of South Pare (Same District)’ (M.Th. thesis, Makumira University College, 1999), 35, observes that some Adventists view crosses as ‘images’ that are incompatible with the Decalogue. In my discussions with Adventists in Tanzania, I also heard this opinion frequently. It is interesting, though, to note that the Majita church built in 1910 had a cross on top.

from plaiting it secretly. In the absence of a tangible theological, scriptural, denominational, or customary basis, these positions were most difficult to maintain yet made an impact at certain periods and constituted matters of criticism regarding the supposed earnestness of some Adventist believers and non-Adventists alike.

Summary: Criticisms were motivated by...

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|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Humanity | |
| 2. Christianity | A. Affirm what is most basic to Christians |
| 3. 'Progress', 'modern' attitudes | |
| 4. Imported Christianity | B. Affirm Western ('modern') attitudes |
| 5. Universal Denominational Identity | |
| 6. Local Denominational Identity | C. Affirm denominational positions |
| 7. National Values | |
| 8. Local or Ethnic Values | D. Affirm elements of indigenous culture |
| 9. Peculiar Interpretations | |
| 10. Personal Preferences | E. Affirm items promoted by individual leaders |

It is visible from this summary that Tanzanian Adventist criticisms of society and other religious groups had many reasons and, of course, many more manifestations. Some concerns overlapped and in some cases several categories contributed to a particular criticism, but in other issues, one specific category of values was decisive for a particular position. What emerges clearly from this picture, therefore, is the composite nature of Tanzanian Adventist identity and the analogous diversity of criticisms applied to society and other religious bodies. Such a composite identity makes evident that adherents of a particular religious group choose it and mould it in a way that many concerns are reconciled in a unique way. Religious choice and religious life are eclectic acts; criticisms serve to reinforce personal choice and the lifestyle attached to it,

and they are logical consequences of the stress that is laid upon a particular configuration of values.³⁸

3. Criticising Adventists: Values Working Two Ways

Obviously, the weight given to each of the values identified above vary in different religious communities; thus, Tanzanian Adventists and their religious emphases were and are severely criticised by adherents of other religious groups. Hardly anybody would doubt the sincerity of Tanzanian Adventists as far as their humane spirit is concerned (cf. category 1), but the Christian character of this church has been repeatedly challenged in history and until the present (cf. category 2). To many Protestants, Adventism appeared as 'a church of the law', one that cared only about the Ten Commandments and the Sabbath. Such antagonism existed that Lutherans, Mennonites, and Anglicans of different regions not only considered them as legalists but as a group outside Protestantism, if Christian at all, thus sharing the judgement passed on many African Initiated Churches by the mainstream. At times Tanzanian Adventists were ranked as Jews because of their stress on the Sabbath, and in a connection with distasteful anti-Jewish polemic, they were even called 'murderers of Jesus'.³⁹ One may dismiss this whole issue as childish squabbling, but to the people involved, it was certainly more. What they valued in Christianity was apparently at stake; thus, they had to criticise a movement that claimed equality or even superiority in the Christian sphere. As on the Adventist side, category A above ('what is most basic to Christians') was such a powerful source of criticism that the very definition of what it means to be a follower of Christ became an issue of contention.

In other instances, this was not the issue; rather, category B (Western/'modern' attitudes) became a motive for dispute. Several African Initiated Churches active in territories where Adventists had a strong influence imitated some of the way Adventists organised their religious and every day lives.⁴⁰

³⁸ Some kind of a generalisation of the categories suggested here to fit a large number of religious movements both inside and outside the Christian tradition is certainly possible but lies outside the scope of this paper.

³⁹ Mtango, 'A Comparison,' 31; interviews. Even at Makumira University College, the well-known Lutheran training centre, students told me that they considered Adventists 'more Jewish than Christian'.

⁴⁰ Among these groups are, among others, the Last Church, which operates in several districts at Lake Victoria and competes with Adventists in their self-understanding as an apocalyptic movement, and sabbatarian movements among the Luo; see Marie-France Perrin Jassy, *Basic Community in the African Churches* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973).

Most notable among them is the *Tanganyika Sabato* Church, which celebrates the Sabbath, holds camp meetings like Adventists, conducts Sabbath School similar to the Adventist pattern, likewise emphasizes similarly strict ethical standards, but allows polygamy. Such indigenous religious groups adopted much of the type of Christianity brought by Adventism but differed from them in the value given to imported elements which could not be derived from biblical injunctions, e.g., the rejection of polygamy.⁴¹ Finding such points to be criticised was enough for them to justify a separate existence; the criticism of 'foreign' Adventist elements made a counter-criticism a logical thing to happen.

While these Tanzanian Christians quarrelled with Adventists about the necessary degree of continuity with Christianity outside their continent, non-Christians understandably criticised many more of the 'foreign' elements that the denomination brought. Although Adventists did affirm some dimensions of category D (elements of indigenous culture), there were many of them which they rejected. This had to lead to severe criticism from the side of Traditionalists. Examples are the long-time rejection of Adventist men and women who were not initiated among several ethnic groups,⁴² and the common critique of 'Adventist taboos' regarding dancing, alcohol, tobacco, and some types of meat and fish. More than that, the rigorous type of Christianity brought by Adventists, which prohibited practicing many of the old customs, was a matter of much conflict and critique.⁴³ While Adventism became a respectable identity in some regions and the overwhelming majority religion in a few and thus largely overcame critique by success, in other environments this denomination's reluctance to respond to the people's criticisms meant utter failure in making any impact.

⁴¹ On the beginnings of this church, see T. O. Ranger, *The African Churches of Tanzania* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972), 22–24; on later stages, see Höschele, 'Christian Remnant – African Folk Church,' 384–386.

⁴² Notably the Ikizu, Zanaki, and Kuria. Among the Pare, Jita, and Sukuma, Adventists grew to sizeable bodies in the 1950s, and thus their way of life became increasingly accepted after it been in conflict with traditional religions since the beginning of missionary activities before World War I.

⁴³ See the echo of indigenous feelings in Frans J. Wijsen and Ralph Tanner, *I Am Just a Sukuma: Globalization and Identity Construction in Northwest Tanzania* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 104, and an assessment from West Africa by a Nigerian Adventist scholar, who observed the Adventist 'tabula rasa' policy aiming at 'wiping out and replacing' the local cultural heritage; see Abraham A. Kuranga, 'Seventh-Day Adventism in Western Nigeria, 1914–1981: A Study in the Relationship between Christianity and African Culture from the Missionary Era to the Introduction of African Leadership' (Ph.D. diss., Miami University, 1991), 201.

The last category of value differences leading to friction reflected in criticisms from outside Tanzanian Adventism is E, items promoted by individual leaders. A notable example for such dynamics is the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement, a group of Adventists who came to regard Adventism as a whole as apostate Christianity.⁴⁴ With their peculiar interpretation of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White, the Seventh-day Adventist prophetess, they came to insist upon such practices as vegetarianism, the complete rejection of military service, and the necessity of a kneeling position during prayer in worship, and thus also challenged the very Adventist denominational identity, i.e., the interpretation of items related to category C. Therefore, they carried the logic of rigorous religion to an end; with an even more complete array of prohibitions and criticisms connected to them, they drove the game of mutual criticism to a climax.

4. Dimensions of Religious Critique Discourses

The critique and counter-critique discourses revolving around Tanzanian Adventists demonstrate that religious criticism may imply several dimensions.

4.1 Correspondence

In most cases where Tanzanian Adventists criticised others, corresponding criticisms existed regarding their own type of religiosity, even if this was hardly made a point in discussions. This does not mean that Adventists and other religionists held different values altogether; the basic concerns behind these criticisms were often the same. The major difference was that their relative weight varied. Thus, what was really criticised was the actual configuration of values in Adventism or in its environment.

4.2 Mutuality

Apart from a mere correspondence of the critique discourses, they also related to each other by a mutual process of provocation. The criticism inherent in the rigorous Adventist type of religion provoked other religious groups in the

⁴⁴ For the history of the Adventist Reform Movement, see Herrmann Ruttman, *Die adventistische Reformationsbewegung, 1914–2001: Die Internationale Missionsgesellschaft der Siebentags-Adventisten Reformationsbewegung in Deutschland* (Köln: Teiresias, 2002). In Tanzania, this movement began in the mid-1970s and counted more than 500 members in the 1980s but then apparently failed to grow any further.

environment by challenging their validity, and the perceived absence of strictness among the more lenient groups around provoked Adventists to emphasise a rigorous type of religion even more. In the case of the Adventist Reform Movement, one may even want to infer that the rather critical general attitude of Adventists provoked an even more critical attitude amongst a minority which was not satisfied because of a perceived lack of rigorous religiosity among Tanzanian Adventists at large.

4.3 *Equilibrium*

This mutuality should not, however, be conceptualised as a constant condition of ideological war. Because of the mutuality of criticisms and the packaging of religiosity in well-defined structures in which different styles can be lived out, the two-way street of criticism revolving around Tanzanian Adventists led to a situation that is relatively stable. As the ‘religious economy’ model by Stark and Finke shows, rigorous types of religion as the Seventh-day Adventist Church exist in a dialectical relationship with other types. The very presence of something to be criticised provides the sphere for constructing an identity. Thus, it is natural for mutuality to give way for an equilibrium, a truce, a balance of identity options that is constantly reinforced and enacted by critique discourses.

4.4 *Variety*

Critique discourses may not only create an equilibrium between religious groups, they may as well facilitate a symmetry of concerns inside a religious movement. In the case of Tanzanian Adventists, the variety of values expressed in their criticisms implies that they came to recognise very divergent concerns as valid. Thus, in addition to combining a multiplicity of diverging elements, they construct a patchwork of principles which set up their religious identity in a unique yet composite way. This has important consequences for the debate regarding the continuity and discontinuity of African religious movements with ‘tradition’.⁴⁵ With Joel Robbins and his reflection on Pentecostals and

⁴⁵ Cf. Joel Robbins, ‘On the Paradoxes of Global Pentecostalism and the Perils of Continuity Thinking,’ *Religion* 33 (2003): 221–231; Matthew Engelke, ‘Discontinuity and the Discourse of Conversion,’ *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 34, no. 1–2 (2004): 82–109; and Birgit Meyer, ‘“Make a Complete Break with the Past”: Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse,’ *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27, no. 3 (1998), 340, who argues that Pentecostalism does not really bring a completely new identity but ‘offers members an elaborate discourse and ritual practice to oscillate’ between modern (individualist) and traditional (family) identities.

Charismatics in Africa, it has to be recognised that religious movement always stand in a ‘complex relationship’ with tradition that implies ‘both rejection and preservation’⁴⁶ of some elements in most of categories mentioned above. This complex relationship needs a configuration, and the variety of weight given to values expressed in religious criticism entails the uniqueness of a religious group.

4.5 *Redirection*

Ironically, such configurations and the particular issues which are being stressed in the life of the believers do not necessarily display the values related to them in an evident manner. In fact, many believers may adhere to taboos, reject customs, and thus reverberate criticisms without much reflection on why this is done the way it is. Religious systems come as a packet, and once they are accepted, there may be some variability in certain issues but little or none in others. Thus, the particular values and practices that attract believers come with the necessity to accept some attitudes, restrictions, and critique patterns that do not fully correspond to these values. In this way, religious movements develop their own dynamics and logic and redirect criticisms in unprecedented ways. By filling the human need for friction in a unique manner, they shape such frictions and thus invent new critique discourses and create new conflicts while solving old ones.

4.6 *Discrepancy*

This, finally, implies that religious criticism often remains a paradox. A movement attempting to reconcile Christian, ‘modern’, denominational, ‘African’, local, and individual values will ultimately always fail to do justice to all of them. Adventists experience an ambiguous stand towards Tanzanian society because the criticisms they raise serve several ends which often diverge. This paradox can probably not be resolved. What Paul Tillich viewed as the principle of Protestantism, that it embodies *both* criticism *and* the shaping of society,⁴⁷ or, as Joel Robbins puts it for contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Africa, ‘world-breaking’ and ‘world-making’,⁴⁸ is true for Advent-

⁴⁶ Joel Robbins, ‘The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity,’ *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33, no. 1 (2004), 137.

⁴⁷ Paul Tillich, *Der Protestantismus als Kritik und Gestaltung* (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1962).

⁴⁸ Robbins, ‘The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity,’ 119.

ism and certainly for many other religious movements as well. Frequently religious critique implies the will to build an alternative community which, in turn, will influence society as a whole. Yet establishment will then inevitably lead to criticism from those who are not among the privileged who determine the configuration of majority values. Thus, the circle of critique and counter-critique never ends.

5. From an Economy to a Community Model

This article started from the ‘religious economy’ model. In this concluding section, I wish to suggest a complementary perspective on religions from the insights presented here. The potency of the economy model is obvious, yet as a metaphor that emphasises the buying and selling of products, it sheds relatively little light on the communitarian character of religion. Moreover, the economy model of religion may not account for the way religious criticisms function on micro and intermediate levels. Therefore, the economy metaphor should not be overstressed and must be applied to those levels to which it corresponds: the level of larger societies. Its limitations, however, become visible when one deals with smaller entities, such as regional or local religious setups. On such micro and medium levels, the economic model of religion may have to be supplemented by a model that corresponds more closely to these realities.

With the dynamics of religious criticism in mind which have been outlined above, an alternative outlook could conceptualise religious groups similar to local communities. A local community habitually quarrels over issues which relate to values; it does not only sell ‘products’ (even if they may be construed as being partly identical with values) or engage in power struggles. These quarrels about values, packaged in critique discourses, are enacted along the lines of various interest groups – religious ‘clans’ or ‘families’, factions inside such groups, and certainly between larger communities. A community model would also elucidate the intensity with which religious groups that resemble each other criticise each other; neighbours, or indeed brothers and sisters, who know each other intimately and are very much alike for an outsider, may feel the need for differentiation even more exactly because of this fact. Certainly there is a human need for friction, and religion often constitutes a fitting way of dealing with it.

The fact that different values are emphasised on the various levels of criticism corresponds to the insight that a community is constantly in transition and, therefore, that all these need to be discussed again and again.⁴⁹ In other

⁴⁹ Eva Keller perceptively observes that Malagasy Adventists are ‘involved in an endless process

words: religious movements catalyse transitions in value systems since values can blend in manifold ways; in a way, a community is constantly reinvented. Furthermore, all the dimensions found in the critique discourses above – correspondence, mutuality, equilibrium, variety, redirection, and discrepancy – are dimensions which are typical for a community which debates its identity and components. This implies that a community model of religion serves well to illustrate micro dynamics.

The strength of the Stark-Bainbridge-Finke model is that it takes serious the fact that religions offer ‘products’. At the same time, a community model would point to the fact that religions do more than that; they offer identities which are much more composite than simple commodities which one buys in a supermarket. A community model, therefore, takes serious the fact that identities are constructed in the context of complex societies held together and torn apart by symmetries of criticism. These criticisms are necessary because communities always face the challenge of reconciling old and new, local and translocal dimensions, ultimate values and idiosyncrasies, and, religious and general values.

Finally, what emerges from the variety of processes in which the religious criticisms discussed here occur, is that they serve very divergent ends and thus lead to a system of provocation and counter-provocation both in society at large and inside religious groups. Many religious movements attempt to reach several contradictory goals, such as preserving central religious values, safeguarding aspects of cultural identities, upholding sectarian traditions, cementing separation from or in society, and attempting to change the environment. Because of this multiplicity of the *Sitz im Leben* of critique discourses, there will necessarily be rigorous and less rigorous types of religion which stabilise each other through mutual criticism. This is what the ‘religious economy’ model hints at as well, and in this sense, a community model is not an alternative but a supplement to it.

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of decision making’ because of their ambiguous stance regarding cultural traditions; see Keller, *The Road to Clarity*, 235.

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