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# African Theological Journal for Church and Society



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Okorie, ON & V Umaru 2023, 'Breaking the Cycle of Poverty for Developing a New Africa: Insights from Genesis 41:33-40', *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 1-27

## **Breaking the Cycle of Poverty for Developing a New Africa: Insights from Genesis 41:33-40**

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### **Abstract**

The focus of the United Nations 'Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' initiative since 2015 has been "Eradicating extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030," if not wholly, then at least reduce it to an ambitious 3% of the world's population. These concerns have been a reality in Africa, home to 34 of the world's 48 poorest countries, and about two-thirds of the world's developing countries are in Africa. Furthermore, of the 32 countries in the world with the lowest levels of human development, 24 are in Africa. Even in other continents, where poverty levels have declined dramatically over the past four decades, Africa's population of poor people has increased. Therefore, if poverty is to be reduced to 3% globally, Africa would be at the forefront of this movement. This paper seeks to contribute to this ongoing discourse through the description of the nature of African poverty, the comparison of African perceptions of poverty in the past as they relate to the present, the consideration of factors militating against African growth, and the presentation of a Biblical framework for developing a new Africa. Through the historical-critical method, the paper revealed that African history demands that a new generation of African leaders detach themselves from the failed cultures and policies of the past and engage in the global struggle to eradicate poverty. Only when Africa becomes a model for prosperity and dignity can it be acknowledged

that a new Africa has emerged to take her place at the forefront of global progress and development. Finally, the paper recommends that Africa accept, recognise and identify her challenges and seek solutions from within; leadership development has to be prioritised; trustworthy, visionary, and God-fearing leaders be given opportunities; the need for electoral processes to be open and accommodating for everyone.

## **Introduction**

The focus of the United Nations 'Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiative since 2015 has been "Eradicating extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030." The apex body's well-articulated goal is to eradicate poverty, if not wholly, then at least reduce it to an ambitious 3% of the world's population. Given Africa's human and material potential, it can be argued that the continent should focus on wealth creation and prosperity beyond the global poverty eradication agenda associated with the MDGs while reducing crippling corruption and inequality. In other words, as Africa develops a consistent growth trajectory in its own right, such growth should benefit all sections of the people and be environmentally sustainable (Bicaba et al., 2015).

The global movement to eradicate poverty by 2030 has been widely recognised. It has gained consensus among global establishments, particularly in light of the vigorous debates that have characterised the unveiling of the UN post-MDG goals. Furthermore, in 2013, the World Bank and its governors endorsed two interlinked targets: (i) to end poverty by 2030 and (ii) to ensure shared prosperity for everyone. The explicit targets were: (i) to bring the ratio of the global population living on the verge or below a standard poverty level to less than 3 percent; and (ii) to promote the "per capita income growth of the poorest 40 percent of the population in each country." In like manner, poverty eradication has always been highly prioritised in the plans and policies of the African Development Bank, and this has also been reflected in agencies

charged with growth in both developed and developing countries (Bicaba et al., 2015).<sup>1</sup>

About two-thirds of the world's developing countries are located on the continent of Africa. Therefore, if poverty is reduced to 3% globally, Africa would be at the forefront of this movement. This paper seeks to contribute to this ongoing discourse through the description of the nature of African poverty, the comparison of African perceptions of poverty in the past as they relate to the present, the consideration of factors militating against African growth, and the presentation of a Biblical framework<sup>2</sup> for developing a new Africa.

## Defining the Concept of Poverty

Etymologically, the words “poverty” and “poor” are derived from the Latin word *pauper*, which has been employed to mean “poor.” *Pauper* has its

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<sup>1</sup> The 2022 Africa Sustainable Development Report comprehensively analyses Africa's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063 objectives. The report highlights the need for investment in developing more resilient education systems, adopting robust development planning strategies, and prioritizing digital technology, free primary education, and sustainable financing. Despite declines in maternal and child deaths and HIV/AIDS incidence, poverty rates remain high across Africa, and the majority of the world's multidimensionally poor people live in Africa. The report highlights slow progress in providing quality education, gender equality, and women empowerment, as well as the threat of pollution, acidification, waste dumping, urbanization, and poor coastal infrastructure management. Life below water faces pollution, acidification, waste dumping, urbanization, and poor coastal infrastructure management. Small Island Developing States face threats from tourism. Life on land faces loss of forest cover, biodiversity, and land degradation. Climate-smart policies could decrease carbon emissions. Africa is progressing on universal primary education targets, but coverage and quality remain low. Gender equality and women's empowerment have seen mixed progress (ASDR, 2022, xiv-xxiv; UN-SDG, 2022, 1-40).

<sup>2</sup> A Biblical framework refers to a system or perspective through which individuals interpret and understand the world, human existence, and morality based on the teachings and principles found in the Bible, which is the holy scripture of Christianity. This framework is rooted in the belief that the Bible contains divine revelations and guidance from God, and it serves as the ultimate authority for understanding the nature of God, humanity, and the purpose of life.



roots in two Latin words *pau-* and *pario*, which offer a combined sense of “giving birth to nothing,” typically employed to refer to unproductive livestock and farmland (Westover, 2008). Several sources offer further insight into the term “poverty.” For instance, in its most extreme form, poverty is the lack of the basic human needs necessary to sustain a dignified existence. This includes suitable and nutritious food, clothing, housing, clean water, and health services. The United Nations Human Development Report (1998) asserts that poverty is a complex phenomenon that generally refers to inadequate resources and the deprivation of choices that enable people to enjoy decent living.

According to Balogun (1999:11-16), poverty could be defined as a state where a society hardly attains what would broadly be recognised as a basic survival level. Additionally, such a state would be characterised by limited access to the necessities for functional existence, such as clothing, food, and suitable accommodation (World Bank, 2007). In the view of the World Bank (2007), conditions could be described as ‘poor’ if the more significant percentage of any given society lives on a per capita income lower than US \$370 at any given time or as being moderately poor if living on less than US\$2 per day, and extremely poor when living on less than US\$1 daily (World Bank, 2007). The report projects that in 2001, “1.1 billion people...had outlays below US\$1 a day, and 2.7 billion survived on less than US\$2 a day”. Poverty as a condition, while appearing to be primarily confined to developing nations, is a general phenomenon that may be evident in developed countries where it is most apparent in social contexts defined by problems such as penury and the tenacity of “ghetto” housing clusters (World Bank, 2007).

In the language of Englama and Bamidele (1997: 315-331), poverty refers to a state where an individual is not intelligent, skilled, or financially buoyant enough to fend for or provide sufficiently for vital human necessities such as clothing, food; decent lodging; the contentment of social and financial responsibilities; access to industrious service; and such others. Furthermore, such individuals are typically constrained from admission to pecuniary and social infrastructure comprising access to health, schooling, potable water, and sanitation. These preclude the individual from accessing welfare, and as such, they are limited by scarce economic and social infrastructure availability.

They conclude by labelling individuals in this situation as subject to a “lack of capabilities.”

Fallavier, as cited by Addae-Karankye (2014), considers poverty a structure of seclusion from society and groups devoid of acceptance within a productive setup. In his view, poverty denies one access and is suitable for an industrious society. He stated that people experiencing poverty have limited access to good food if they do not manage to grow it themselves, thereby threatening their security. One can infer from this definition that poverty impedes the ability of individuals to transcend subsistence living and embrace the productivity that leads to sustained prosperity. Indeed, another definition of poverty stresses economic opportunity. This concept is the most difficult to measure empirically, but it is typically central in the theories and public policy debates on poverty eradication. Therefore, poverty in this paper is considered to be individuals' inability to access the basic amenities, necessities, and opportunities required for a dignified existence.

## **The Nature of Poverty in Africa**

Africa has typically been the centre of focus of global discussions on poverty. However, such discussions must acknowledge the nuances inherent in considering poverty in Africa. For instance, there are apparent variations in the experience of poverty by various countries in Africa, with nations such as Uganda, Mali, Nigeria, Zambia, Niger, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Burundi, and Rwanda, having more than 50 percent of their populace living below \$ 1 a day in 2002. This can be compared to 1999, when these countries were characterised by greater rural poverty than urban poverty, with 37 percent living below two-thirds of their national mean per capita income. Indicators for 2005 point to South Africa at 86 percent and the Central African Republic at 77 percent as the countries in Africa with the highest rural poverty rate, respectively (*World Bank, African Development Indicators 2005*). Socio-economic pointers such as per capita revenue, life anticipation at birth (years), access to well-being care services, access to pure water, access to education, and access to hygiene facilities also depict the degree of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the World Bank focuses on eight goals to be achieved from 2000 to 2015: extreme poverty and hunger eradication; achievement of universal primary education; promoting gender parity and empowering women; reduction of child mortality; improvement of maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.<sup>3</sup> Five years later, the World Bank’s African Development Indicators show that nearly 700 million people in 47 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa present the world with its most formidable development challenge. Africa is home to 34 of the world’s 48 poorest countries. Furthermore, of the 32 countries in the world with the lowest levels of human development, 24 are in Africa. However, it is not all doom and gloom for Africa, as a few countries are on track to meet many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In contrast to other regions, where poverty levels have declined dramatically over the past four decades, Africa’s population of poor people has increased. For instance, from 1981 to 2001, the number of Africans living in poverty nearly doubled from 164 million to 314 million (*World Bank Database, African Development Indices, 2005: xxi*). Sadly, by 2015, not much evidence for the attainment of the MDGs was visible in Africa, although it cannot be denied that the project has contributed to the growth of Africa.

The poverty reduction struggle has undeniably been negatively impacted by the pandemic that ravaged Africa. On October 14, 2021, a World Bank statement confessed, “Now, for the first time in a generation, the expedition to end poverty has suffered a setback”.<sup>4</sup> Globally, extreme poverty rose in 2020 for the first period in over 20 years as the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by the forces of conflict and climate change, slowed the poverty reduction progress. Now, about 100 million additional people live in poverty due to the plague.<sup>5</sup>

In 2018, four out of five individuals below the global poverty line lived in rural areas. Half of the poor were children, while women represented most people experiencing poverty in most sections and among some age groups. About 70

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www5.worldbank.org/mdgs/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview#1>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview#1>

percent of the poor aged 15 and older worldwide have no primary education or basic schooling. Almost half of the people experiencing poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa live in five nations: Nigeria, Tanzania, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Madagascar. To put that into perspective, it is estimated that these countries account for about 10 percent of the world's population. Additionally, in 2020 more than 40 percent of Africa's poor lived in economies distorted by conflict, fragility, and inequality, and those numbers are expected to rise to 67 percent in the next decade.<sup>6</sup>

Numerous people who had just escaped extreme poverty could be forced back into it by the convergence of COVID-19, conflict, and climate change. This has created another level of poverty, what the World Bank called the "new poor," this will probably be more urban than the extreme poverty related to the rural poor. In other words, this new poverty will more likely be related to informal services and manufacturing contexts, livelihoods dependent on very small-scale agriculture, choked urban sceneries, and work in the areas most affected by lockdowns and mobility restrictions. This will directly affect middle-income countries such as India and Nigeria, which studies have shown are home to about 80 percent of the innovative poor.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, studies estimate climate change will drive 68 million to 132 million into poverty by 2030. Climate change is an acute threat to Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia nations — the countries where most global poor are. In several African countries, including Cameroon, Liberia, and the Central African Republic, many poor live in areas affected by conflict and face high flood exposure.

The latest research predicts that the effects of the present crisis will almost surely be felt in most nations through 2030. Under these circumstances, reducing the global poverty rate to less than 3 percent by 2030, previously at risk before the crisis, is beyond reach without swift, significant, and substantial policy action.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview#1>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview#1>

## Africa in the Past and the Present

Scholars greatly dispute the origin of the name “Africa.” Most believe it stems from words used by the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans. Significant instances include the Egyptian term *afru-ika*, meaning “Motherland”; the Greek term *aphrike*, meaning “without cold”; and the Latin term *aprica*, meaning “sunny”.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, as the second-largest continent, Africa and all things African appear to be synonymous with poverty, corruption, hunger, war, disease, illiteracy, inequality, environmental degradation, and bad governance.

Other voices, in contrast, argue that the name ‘Africa’ is of relatively new coinage, and the continent had been known by other names and graced with a loftier reputation than present appearances seem to suggest. In the words of Edmund Burke, as cited by Causa et al. (2022), “A people will never look forward to posterity, who never look back to their ancestors.”

In Henry Cabot Lodge’s (1096) *The History of Nations, Vol. 18*, the author writes that the African nations are no new finding; Africa was not a newly discovered continent in the likes of America or Australia. While Europe was the home of itinerant hunter-gatherers, one of the greatest civilisations on record had started to work out its purpose on the banks of the Nile. Africa was not just an existing continent but a global leader in the arts and sciences. Gurowski (2005) asserts that many of the “architects, artists, merchants, mechanics, operatives, sailors, agriculturists...” of the ancient world originated from Egypt (Diop, 1974: xiv)<sup>9</sup> (one of the African countries). Weatherwax

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/africa-human-geography/>

<sup>9</sup> Cheik Anta Diop believes Ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization. He claims that the history of Black Africa will remain suspended in the air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt. In particular, the study of languages, institutions, and so forth, cannot be treated properly; in a word, it will be impossible to build African humanities, a body of African human sciences, so long as that relationship does not appear legitimate. The African historian who evades the problem of Egypt is neither modest nor objective, nor unruffled; he is ignorant, cowardly, and neurotic. Imagine, if you can, the uncomfortable position of a western historian who was to write the history of Europe without referring to Greco-Latin

(1962) confirms this assertion by stating that “modern canons, flying missiles, ship propellers, automatic hammers, gas motors, meat cleavers, and even upholstery tack hammers were developed in Africa’s early use of power.”

In 1893, a renowned French geographer, Jacques Élisée Reclus (1994: 193-95), wrote that Africa had been a “great civilised power during the period in which savage tribes overrun Europe. Arithmetic, architecture, geometry, astrology, all the arts, and nearly all of today’s industries and sciences were known while the Greeks lived in caves. The pattern of our thinking originated in Africa.” One of the seven wonders of the Ancient is located in Egypt. The great Pyramids, which were the products of ancient African ingenuity manifested in the architectural and engineering skills displayed in their making, provided the platform for the origin of modern calculus. According to Paul Johnson (1978), many things were manufactured in Africa. He asserts that Africans did “manufacture and wear large quantities of fine jewelry, rings, diadems, earrings, anklets, bangles, and girdles featuring gold, silver,...feldspar, cornelium, amethyst, jasper, lapis-lazuli, garnets, and haemorites” (Johnson, 1978).

William Kelly and Henry Bessemer have traditionally been credited with modern carbon steel production. However, the Haya people of modern-day Tanzania had been producing high-grade carbon steel for at least two millennia prior to the advent of the Industrial Revolution. However, the flooding of Africa with cheap European steel ensured that the ingenious process employed by the Haya people of Africa to produce high-grade carbon steel was almost lost to time. Fortunately, anthropologist Peter Schmidt helped recreate the Hayan process for steel before those who knew it had passed from life and memory (Shore, 1983: 157-162). Additionally, African ingenuity was evident in the study and employment of herbs for medical applications and the construction of bridges, roads, and other such civil

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Antiquity and try to pass that off as a scientific approach. The ancient Egyptians were Negroes. The moral fruit of their civilization is to be counted among the assets of the Black world. Instead of presenting itself to history as an insolvent debtor, that Black world is the very initiator of the “western” civilization flaunted before our eyes today. Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of the four elements of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean materialism, Platonic idealism, Judaism, Islam, and modern science are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science.

engineering works. In his famous(or infamous) book *How Europe Under Developed Africa*, Walter Rodney (2011)notes that the “art of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia was known to the rest of the world at an early date.”

Furthermore, Matthew Ashimolowo (2007: 51) asserts that in times past, Africa’s vast and sometimes legendary wealth had earned it the name of “the ‘Golden Continent.’” There were records of the wealth of Egypt, Ethiopia, Timbuktu, and South Africa from as far back as 2000 BCE to CE 1500” (Ashimolowo, 2007: 54-57). Prior to the recent discoveries of oil in a number of the African states, the continent had been reputed to be endowed with exceedingly vast mineral resources, including gold, silver, diamonds, cobalt, beryllium, chromium, manganese, vanadium, titanium, lithium, platinum, uranium, copper, zinc, phosphate, granite, quartzite, dolerite, marble, limestone, gypsum, bitumen, iron, lead, petroleum and so on (Ashimolowo, 2007: 58). Ashimolowo adds that “the wealth of Africa was so great” that European colonisers fought among themselves for possession of these vast stores of wealth. One such struggle led to the “Boer War when the British fought the Dutch settlers from 1899 to 1902 over who owned what in Africa” (58).

Unfortunately, despite all the facts and reality about Africa, the continent is still arguably the world’s poverty capital. The continent has become the dumping ground for Western consumerism. Ali Mazrui (n.d.) notes, “Africa is producing what they do not use and using what they do not produce.” What could have been the cause? Rodney (2011: 27-28) offers one opinion when he asserts that:

The question of who and what is responsible for African underdevelopment can be answered at two levels. Firstly, the answer is that the operation of the imperialist system bears major responsibility for African economic retardation by draining African wealth and making it impossible to develop the continent’s resources rapidly. Secondly, one has to deal with those who manipulated the system and those who are either agents or unwitting accomplices of the said system. The capitalists of Western Europe were the ones who actively extended their

exploitation from inside Europe to cover the whole of Africa. In recent times, they were joined, and to some extent replaced, by the capitalists from the United States, for many years now, even the workers of those metropolitan countries have benefited from the exploitation and underdevelopment of Africa.

Scholars of this school of thought believe colonialists should be held responsible for African destitution and underdevelopment. Others argue that failure in accountable leadership significantly affected Africa's backwardness. Former Liberian President, the late Charles Taylor, once said in an interview with BBC World Service (December 10, 1998), 'I am an African leader, and I can do as I wish.' Many Africans would probably refer to the lack of accountability of African heads of state if they were asked to explain the continent's political problems. The many presidents who have stolen and squandered vast sums of money, changed constitutions to perpetuate their rule, and ruined their countries for a few more years in power are too well known to need repeating. Although leaders with scrupulous respect for the law do not appear to advance in African politics quickly, this does not mean that all of the continent's political leaders lack integrity. Like other politicians globally, some have made terrible mistakes with the best intentions. Nevertheless, whether or not they are temperamentally inclined to be tyrants, Africa's heads of state have been surrounded by courtiers, relatives, and supporters whose interests they cannot ignore (Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar, 2004: 141).

Lack of credible leadership has increasingly become the critical inhibitor to African development and, therefore, the primary cause of poverty and underdevelopment in the continent. Maxwell (2011) asserts, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." Therefore, if Africa will rise, the leadership development of African citizens must be prioritised. While affirming Acemoglu and Robinson's thoughts, Adeyemi (2022) asserts that the significant variation between developed and developing nations is political evolution. Developed nations have political and economic structures that are inclusive and offer opportunities for most people to create wealth. If Africa is to come out from crippling poverty, then leadership development needs to be prioritised because the political structures that are prevalent now must be renewed. Adeyemi (2022) further notes that cultivating leaders with exceptional



character and skills is critical to Africa's development. The ineptitude in leadership evident in most African nations is not only a problem of the political class who leech off government appointments; it also reflects a decayed leadership culture.

## **Biblical Framework for Breaking the Cycle of Poverty in Africa.**

The Evangelical perspective adopted by this study views the Bible as the word of God and the wisdom He decided to share with humanity (Deut. 29:29) and acknowledges that it is packed with strategies and wisdom for times such as these in Africa. In the following section, this study intends to offer a biblical framework for developing leadership and ending poverty in Africa from an analysis of Genesis 41:33-40.

### ***The Context of Genesis 41:33-40.***

Genesis is the title given to the first book of the Old Testament, and the name was taken from the first word in the book בְּרֵאשִׁית, which the Septuagint Γενεσις translates as 'Genesis.' The book, traditionally ascribed to Moses, provides significant insight for an understanding of the other books of the Bible. Kenneth Mathews (1996: 31) asserts that:

Genesis stands second to none in its importance for proclaiming 'the whole will of God.' It presents the literary and theological underpinning of the whole canonical Scripture. If we possessed a Bible without Genesis, we would have a 'house of cards without foundation or mortar. We cannot ensure the continuing fruit of our spiritual heritage if we do not give place to its roots.

The entire book reveals the beginnings of everything that God created, and it unfolds the record of the beginning of the world, human history, family, civilisation, and salvation. It is the story of God's purpose and plans for his creation. As the book of beginnings, Genesis sets the stage for the entire Bible. It reveals the person and the nature of God, the value and the dignity of human beings, the tragedy and the consequences of sin, and the promise and assurance of salvation (NIV, 2011: 2). The book is divided into six different

narratives (stories); the story of creation 1:1-2:3; Adam 2:4-5:32; Noah 6:1-11:32; Abraham 12:1-25:18; Isaac 25:19-28:9; Jacob 28:10-36:43; and Joseph 37:1-50:26 (NIV, 2011: 3-4).

Eventually, the passage under review falls into the last section, Joseph's story. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and unjustly imprisoned by his master. The primary lesson offered by the narrative of Joseph is that Yahweh is sovereign even over suffering and that suffering, no matter how seemingly unjust, can develop leaders with characters of steel. It is also instructive to note that Africa plays a prominent role in the Joseph narratives.

### **Exposition of Genesis 41:33-40.**

Text and Translation:

33 וְעַתָּה יִרְא יַרְעָה אִישׁ נְבוֹן וְחָכֵם וַיְשִׂיתֶהוּ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

34 וַיַּעֲשֶׂה פַרְעֹה וַיִּפְקֹד פְּקָדִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַחֲמֹשׁ אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּשָּׁבַע שָׁנֵי הַשָּׁבַע:

וַיִּקְבְּצוּ אֶת־כָּל־אֲכָל־הַשָּׂנִים הַטֹּבֹת הַבָּאֹת הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּצְבְּרוּ־בָר תַּחַת יַד־פַּרְעֹה אֶכָּל בְּעָרִים 35 וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ:

וְהָיָה הָאֶכָּל לְפִקְדוֹן לְאֶרֶץ לְשָׁבַע שָׁנֵי הָרָעָב אֲשֶׁר תִּהְיֶינָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְלֹא־תִכְרַת הָאָרֶץ 36 בְּרָעָב:

37 וַיִּיטֵב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי כָּל־עַבְדָּיו:

38 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־עַבְדָּיו הֲנִמְצָא כָּהֵן אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רֹיחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ:

39 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף אַחֲרֵי הוֹדִיעַ אֱלֹהִים אוֹתָךְ אֶת־כָּל־זֹאת אִין־נְבוֹן וְחָכֵם כְּמוֹךָ:

40 אֶתְּהַ תִּהְיֶה עַל־בֵּיתִי וְעַל־פִּיךָ יִשָּׁק כָּל־עַמִּי כִּי הִכְסֵּא אֶגְדֵּל מִמֶּךָ:

<sup>33</sup> Now then, let Pharaoh select a man *who is* discerning and wise, and let him set him over the land of Egypt. <sup>34</sup> Let Pharaoh do *this*, and let him appoint supervisors over the land, and let him take one-fifth from the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. <sup>35</sup> Then let them gather all the food of these coming good years and let them pile up grain under the hand of Pharaoh *for* food in the cities, and let them keep *it*. <sup>36</sup> Then the food shall be as a deposit

for the land for the seven years of the famine that will be in the land of Egypt, that the land will not perish on account of the famine.”<sup>37</sup> And the plan was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants.<sup>38</sup> Then Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this in whom is the spirit of God?”<sup>39</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all of this known to you there is no one as discerning and wise as you.”<sup>40</sup> You shall be over my house, and to your word all my people shall submit. Only *with respect to* the throne will I be greater than you.”

### Textual Analysis

1. The text features Joseph as a budding visionary leader with gifts of both foretelling (Vv. 25-32) and forth-telling (Vv. 33-36). He speaks to the future and the present. For instance, he suggests, always speaking to the Pharaoh in the third person, that Pharaoh appoints an intelligent וְנָבִין and wise וְחָכָם man over the land of Egypt. Later, Pharaoh uses these two words to describe Joseph himself (v. 39). They also appear together in Deut. 4:6; Hos. 14:10; Prov. 10:13; 14:33; 16:21. The “intelligent and wise man” is “capable of planning and carrying through important economic measures” (Westmann, 1984).

It is not apparent that Joseph is pointing to himself here: “An intelligent and wise man — myself!” However, by using וְחָכָם, the narrator may be implying a bit of sarcasm. Pharaoh has already consulted with the best of Egypt’s חֲכָמִים (“cleverest” magicians, v. 8), and they failed him miserably. Let the Pharaoh not make the same mistake twice!

The second part of Joseph’s plan is that this individual will have a cadre of overseers throughout the land who will oversee the storing of grain in granaries during the years of prosperity. The store city would be where storage houses were built to stockpile various government supplies. In the OT, they are always mentioned in connection with the royal activity (Frick, 1977: 136, 168, 312). Knowing the unpredictable behaviour of people facing starvation and trying to cope with existence, Joseph urges that such supplies be protected from public access and possible looting.

Some scholars have suggested that this part of chapter 41 has some literary problems. In v. 33, Joseph recommends the appointment of a single official

over Egypt. However, in v. 34, he suggests a group of overseers. In v. 34b, Joseph urges Pharaoh to “take one-fifth of” (the literal translation of Mexi) the harvest. In contrast, the following verse urges the gathering of the entire harvest for Pharaoh (Skinner, 1910: 468-69). Such analysis is hardly correct. Joseph first suggests the appointment of one person (v. 33). who will be supported by a vast network of employees spread throughout the country (v. 34). As noted above, Mexi means dividing into five parts. Hence, verse 34 does not conflict with verse 35.

2. Application of תִּכְרַת *perish* (v. 36). Interestingly, the verb Joseph uses to describe Egypt’s future if Pharaoh disregards his advice is the Niphal of כָּרַת. One may be familiar with this verb in this stem, especially in cultic literature like Leviticus and Numbers, describing a person being “cut off” from the community for violating community standards. It had been used twice in Genesis (9:11; 17:14) to describe a potential exclusion from the community for either moral sins (9:11) or cultic sins (17:14). Joseph does not say that Egypt will “die (of starvation),” but rather, Egypt “will be cut off.” The consequence of rejecting Joseph’s counsel is judgment. This moves Joseph’s words to Pharaoh out of the options category and into a mandate.

3. The phrase וַיִּטֵּב הַדְּבָר בְּעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי פֶּהָרֹאֵשׁ *Pharaoh ... found the suggestion acceptable*. Nowhere does Pharaoh respond to Joseph’s interpretation of his dream(s). One might have expected a statement from him between Joseph’s interpretation (vv. 25-32) and Joseph’s counsel (Vv. 33-36). It appears that he is as impressed, if not more, with Joseph’s counsel (Vv. 33-36) as with his interpretations (Vv. 25-32), and the advancement in political office he bestows on Joseph is stimulated by Joseph’s suggestion to reorganise the Egyptian bureaucracy. To Joseph’s credit, his contribution is interpreting Pharaoh’s dream, including the revelation of a forthcoming and frightening seven-year famine, and then some practical counsel on preparing for those seven years and thus avoiding mass starvation and death throughout the land. Joseph is a dream interpreter, sage, and counsellor.

4. The reference to אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ: *—a man in whom is God’s Spirit?* Pharaoh suggests that it is most unlikely that a nationwide search for a viable candidate for this ad hoc position be launched since a more competent occupant for that office than Joseph could not be found. The Spirit of God that

soared over the watery mass (1:2) rests upon and stands in Joseph (Wold, 1979:1-45).

The unwitting description of Yahweh in Pharaoh's speech should likely be read as a theological statement on understanding pneumatology. It demonstrates that Pharaoh understood Joseph's skills manifested via his rhetorical declarations: Joseph had no intrinsic ability to explain his practical insight and counsel. For Pharaoh, Joseph had been divinely equipped and gifted. That Pharaoh's exclamation follows Joseph's guidance rather than his clarification of the dream infers that Pharaoh identifies God's Spirit more with the former than with the latter. Therefore, on Pharaoh's lips, the expression "God's Spirit" denotes an "outstanding ability in the areas of political economy and statesmanship" (Westmann, 1984: 93).

5. The statement of Pharaoh אַתָּה תְהִיָּה עַל־בֵּיתִי *Pharaoh tells Joseph: You shall be over my palace.* The word בֵּיתִי means "my house," This is the third "house" in which Joseph has been placed. He has gone from Potiphar's house to the jailhouse to Pharaoh's house. Only one thing is withheld from Joseph's possession — Pharaoh's throne. Thus, Joseph's relationship with Pharaoh parallels his relationship with Potiphar. Potiphar placed Joseph over his house, except for his food (the narrator's version) and his wife (Joseph's version).

That Joseph was placed over Pharaoh's house may mean he was given control over the king's estates. Concerning the entire land of Egypt, Pharaoh says וְעַל־יְשָׁרְךָ יִשָּׁקוּ כָּל־עַמִּי *and all my people shall follow your word.* A literal translation is: "And on your mouth, all my people shall kiss (you)." Some modern scholars have looked to the Egyptian language for clarification. One Egyptian idiom for "eat" was "kiss one's food." So understood, the phrase would be read as "According to your word shall my people eat" (Adcock, 1956: 383). Others have appealed to the Egyptian idiom, literally, "kiss the earth," meaning "render homage." So understood, the phrase would be read, "According to your commands shall all my people kiss (the earth in submission)" (Kitchen, 1957: 30). Redford (1978:113-19) avoids Egyptian analogies altogether and identifies פִּיךָ with שִׁוְךָ and by your command shall my people order themselves.

## **Inferences and Strategies for Breaking the Cycle of Poverty in Africa**

The passage offers several practical inferences for the African society and government to end the cycle of ravaging poverty that appears synonymous with Africa. As stated earlier, Africa is richly blessed with natural and human resources, which the continent must learn to utilise for its rehabilitation and growth. Here are some of the deductions from the initial analysis of the passage.

### ***Accept, recognise and identify one's challenges and seek solutions.***

One of the apparent truths revealed in the passage is the act of acceptance, recognition, and identification of reality by Pharaoh. He had an unusual dream, which he did not take as an ordinary nightmare; instead, he understood it for what it was: an impending doom awaiting the nation. Subsequently, he was restless until the solution was found. Africa and her leadership must be humble enough to accept that the continent is locked in a vicious cycle of extreme poverty, conflict, and underdevelopment. Accepting this fact should lead Africa's leaders to seek authentic, long-lasting solutions to Africa's perennial problems.

Kwame Nkrumah, a statesman of Ghanaian descent, delivered a speech in Addis Ababa on May 23, 1963<sup>10</sup> during the founding of the Organization of African Unity. He believed that the people of Africa supported the various fights for independence "because they believed that African governments could cure past ills in a way that could never be accomplished under colonial rule. If, therefore, now that we are independent, we allow the same conditions to exist that existed in colonial days, all the resentment which overthrew colonialism will be mobilised against us."

He believed that Africa had the resources to develop herself. He argued, "It is for us to marshal them in the active service of our people. Unless we do this by our concerted efforts, within the framework of our combined planning, we shall not progress at the tempo demanded by today's events and the mood of

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<sup>10</sup> <https://newafricanmagazine.com/3721/>

our people”.<sup>11</sup> Seeing the future of Africa 59 years ago, Nkrumah declared, “The symptoms of our troubles will grow, and the troubles themselves become chronic. It will then be too late for pan-African unity to secure stability and tranquillity in our labours for a continent of social justice and material well-being”.<sup>12</sup> This statement is now a reality. If Nkrumah were to be alive today, possibly, he would have confessed like Job (3:25, NIV) and claimed, “What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.” Africa must accept the reality of her condition and realise that the former ways of doing things that have proven counter-productive in the past must be jettisoned for new solutions. Africa’s development is bolstered by its abundant natural and human resources, a growing population, and a diverse ecosystem. However, the continent faces poverty, political instability, and inadequate infrastructure. Africa needs to adapt and embrace new ideas and strategies to overcome these. Innovative solutions, such as renewable energy, improved education, and entrepreneurship, can help overcome these issues. Collaborating with other nations and international organisations can contribute to Africa’s growth. Effective governance and leadership are crucial for realising Africa’s potential. With the right strategies and commitment, Africa can realise its potential and improve its people’s well-being.

### ***The need to seek, identify and develop new leaders.***

According to Eckert and Rweyongoza (2015: 2; Ugwuegbu, 2001), the demand for effective leadership and systematic leadership development in Africa is growing more rapidly. A critical shortage of upcoming leaders is responsible for the underdevelopment of organisations in many African countries. They are underperforming compared to their potential and could improve their performance by strengthening their leadership. Pharaoh began to search for a solution from within by inviting Egypt’s magicians. Eventually, when they all failed, he still found one whose only apparent weakness was that he happened to be a prisoner. Against all odds and prejudices, Pharaoh was humble enough to listen despite Pharaoh’s status concerning Joseph. He allowed Joseph to do the one thing he did better than anyone he had encountered until that point – lead with courage, ingenuity, and wisdom.

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<sup>11</sup><https://newafricanmagazine.com/3721/>

<sup>12</sup><https://newafricanmagazine.com/3721/>

Africa is blessed and endowed with men and women such as Joseph (Moti, 2019:483-504). The old ingenuity and skill of ancient Africa still run true in the veins of this generation. Africa needs once again authentic leaders such as Pharaoh who will look beyond themselves and seek, find, identify, and partner with God in developing the next generation of African leaders who are born of God, forged like steel in character and disposition, tempered by suffering, and dignified by wisdom, when these leaders are ready for service rather than craving to be served, the Pharaohs of Africa who are blessed with an understanding of the times will use their influence to provide platforms of service for the Josephs of a new Africa.

***The need for trustworthy, visionary, and God-fearing leaders.***

Lack of vision kills and destroys (Taylor et al., 2013: 566-583). Joseph did not hide the truth from Pharaoh; instead, he told him to take urgent action, or the land would perish. Joseph told Pharaoh to look for intelligent and wise men who could be trusted with the public coffers for the gathering and tending to what belonged to the public. Without a doubt, Africa needs the kind of leadership characterised by a dependence on the leadership of the Spirit of God. If Africa's leadership issues had been adequately addressed, Africa would be on the verge of eradicating poverty and providing prosperity and a dignified existence for her people. Indeed, Africa is in particular need of trustworthy and visionary leadership.

***Electoral processes need to be open and accommodating for everyone.***

One thing that remedied Egypt's dire situation was the openness of Pharaoh to everyone. After all the magicians failed to interpret his dream, he listened to his cupbearer and Joseph without considering the relative status levels at play within this narrative. African ingenuity means that someone somewhere who perhaps has been excluded from the power structures of self-perpetuation by greed and corruption may possess the knowledge and skill necessary to transform Africa (Dare, 2013:11-18; Olu-Adeyemi, 2012: 167-171). Like Pharaoh, authentic African leaders must strive to break down such structures of exclusion and promote inclusion and equity in Africa's social, political and economic discourse. Only through a commitment to inclusiveness can African ingenuity be unleashed once again.



## Conclusion and Recommendations

Africa is too blessed to be shattered and scattered. Africans must be reminded once again of their rich heritage and, therefore, find in such stories of African ingenuity, power, and glory the courage to confront the existential challenges that face the continent today. That all development must necessarily rise and fall on leadership should spur authentic African leaders to seek, find, recognise, and partner with God in developing new leaders for a new Africa. This study considers the Biblical framework from Genesis 41:33-40 provides essential principles for breaking Africa's poverty cycle, emphasising long-term planning, leadership, economic diversification, resource allocation, collaboration, education, and compassion. By applying these principles in a contemporary context, African nations can work towards sustainable development and poverty reduction. Indeed, African history demands that a new generation of African leaders detach themselves from the failed cultures and policies of the past and engage in the global struggle to eradicate poverty. Only when Africa becomes a model for prosperity and dignity can it be acknowledged that a new Africa has emerged to take its place at the forefront of global progress and development.

Therefore, breaking the cycle of poverty through a biblical framework, particularly referencing Genesis 41:33-40, offers valuable insights, principles and recommendations for development in Africa, which, when properly applied, will enhance Africa's development and liberate her from the shackles of poverty:

First, long-term planning and preparedness (Genesis 41:33-36). Joseph advises Pharaoh to appoint a discerning and wise man to oversee the collection and storage of food during the years of plenty. This principle emphasises the importance of planning for the future. Governments and organisations should invest in strategic planning and resource management in Africa. This includes building infrastructure, storing surplus food, and diversifying the economy during times of abundance to prepare for periods of scarcity. Infrastructure investment, including economic growth, trade, and transportation, is crucial for long-term planning and preparedness. It is also essential for efficient movement of goods and services, especially during scarcity periods. Promoting sustainable agriculture and supporting local farmers contributes to long-term

food security. Diversifying the economy by developing multiple sectors can cushion economic fluctuations and provide additional revenue during scarcity. Preparing for natural disasters like droughts and floods requires early warning systems and resilient infrastructure. Prioritising sustainable resource management ensures critical resources are available for future generations and reduces vulnerability to scarcity.

Second, leadership and governance (Genesis 41:37-38). Pharaoh recognises Joseph's qualities and appoints him to lead the efforts. This highlights the significance of wise and competent leadership. In Africa, effective governance and leadership are essential for sustainable development. Leaders who prioritise the welfare of their people, combat corruption, and make informed decisions can contribute to poverty reduction. Wise and competent leadership, as demonstrated in Genesis 41:37-38, is essential for sustainable development in Africa. Effective governance and leadership that prioritise the welfare of the people, combat corruption, make informed decisions, and promote inclusive and long-term development can contribute to poverty reduction, economic growth, and improved living standards for the continent's population. Africa's potential for growth and progress depends significantly on the qualities and actions of its leaders and their commitment to the well-being of its people.

Third, resource allocation (Genesis 41:49-53). Joseph manages the distribution of resources to ensure they reach those in need. In the African context, equitable distribution of resources, access to education, healthcare, and social safety nets can play a crucial role in breaking the cycle of poverty. The equitable distribution of resources and access to education, healthcare, and social safety nets are essential elements in the fight against poverty in Africa. Effective resource allocation, good governance, and policies addressing the root causes of poverty can contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering sustainable development in the continent. Joseph's example of managing resources during times of abundance and scarcity in Genesis 41 is a valuable lesson on the importance of efficient and equitable resource allocation to meet the population's needs.

Fourth, an international collaboration (Genesis 41:54-57). The famine affected Egypt and the surrounding nations. This encourages cooperation and trade

during times of crisis. The importance of international collaboration, trade, and regional partnerships in addressing everyday challenges like food scarcity and economic instability. African nations can benefit from working with neighbouring countries and international organisations to build resilience, ensure food security, and promote economic stability during difficult times. Africa can better address the continent's complex poverty and development issues by fostering cooperation and implementing effective policies.

Fifth, education and skills development (Genesis 41:38-45). Joseph's appointment was based on his wisdom, knowledge, and administrative skills. This underlines the importance of education and skill development. In modern Africa, investing in education and skill training can empower individuals and communities to escape the cycle of poverty by increasing their employability and entrepreneurial opportunities. Education is crucial to modern workforce development, promoting employability, productivity, and economic growth. It equips individuals with the necessary knowledge, skills, and capabilities, fostering entrepreneurship and innovation. Higher education levels often lead to higher-income jobs, improving earning potential and enabling individuals to support their families and invest in their communities. Education is linked to poverty reduction, as a well-educated population is more likely to escape poverty, leading to improved living standards, better health outcomes, and reduced dependence on social safety nets. Education empowers women and promotes gender equality, allowing them to participate more fully in economic activities. Lifelong learning and skill development are essential for sustainable poverty reduction.

Sixth, compassion and welfare (Genesis 41:55). The famine brings excellent suffering, and people come to Pharaoh for help. This emphasises the moral responsibility of leaders to care for the vulnerable. African governments and organisations can implement social welfare programs to support vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, disabled, and families in need. These programs can include cash transfers, food distribution, and other forms of social support. Investing in healthcare infrastructure, improving access to services, and ensuring affordability can protect the population's well-being during crises and reduce the financial burden of health emergencies. Implementing poverty reduction policies, prioritising vulnerable communities, and promoting education about social welfare programs are essential.

Collaboration with NGOs and community-based organisations can enhance the impact of welfare efforts. Ensuring transparency, accountability, and good governance in welfare program management is crucial to prevent corruption and ensure resources reach those in need.

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## **An African Hermeneutics Re-Reading of Luke 18:1-8 and its Implications for Social Justice in Angola**

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### **Abstract**

Social inequality was a great concern in the context in which Jesus told the parable traditionally known as “the parable of the Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow.” Jesus’s society was clearly marked by socio-economic and cultural imbalances between different social groups under the Roman rule. This was a common characteristic for all societies in the ancient Mediterranean world. Social injustice is also one of the greatest contemporary issues in Angola where the vast majority of the population have been living in extreme poverty for decades. The history of reception regarding the interpretation of this parable shows that for centuries it has been interpreted as an allegory or a metaphor of prayer and divine response, and very little attention is given to the issue of injustice. This article aims to highlight the implication of re-reading this parable in the Angolan context through the African hermeneutics lens with a liberation perspective. It also seeks to unveil the liberationist-educational function of the parable, identifying a Lukan model for social justice in the Angolan context.

### **Introduction**

The reception and interpretation history of Luke’s gospel shows that Luke 18:1-8, commonly referred to as the “Parable of the Widow and the Judge,” has traditionally been interpreted as an allegory of prayer and divine response (Dickerson 2017:16). From the Patristic era to the Reformation, this parable was mainly viewed within the relationship between God and the church, and God and our souls (Augustine 1989:620; Cyril of Alexandria 1983:478; Wailes

1987:262; Luther 1987:484). The widow was depicted as either the image of the desolate church awaiting the return of her spouse, or the human soul seeking vengeance against her oppressors – Satan or heretics, while the judge usually stood for the deity. However, reading the parable against allegorical hermeneutics, this article holds that injustice is the main motif of Jesus’ parable. Focusing on the widow’s ability to challenge injustice, the article shows how marginalized people can succeed in gaining justice through one of the most improbable means – persistence.

Therefore, in order to ignite the parable’s liberationist-educational power and making it a reflection and analytic instrument of the socio-historical reality of both Jesus’ and Luke’s listeners as well as for contemporary Angolan readers, the parable is re-read in this article through the African hermeneutics lens with a liberation perspective. Liberation hermeneutics is a circular process with three different moments, as proposed by Gerald West (2015:1980): *See*, which consists in contextual analysis; *Judge* which is the theological reflection moment; and *Act*, the praxis. So, firstly the article analyses the Angolan socio-historical context, that of corruption and impunity, extreme poverty, discrimination against women and children and other marginalized groups (see). Secondly, the paper focus on the interaction of Luke 18:1-8 and the Angolan context (judge); and finally, it highlights the implications of re-reading Luke 18:1-8 through the African hermeneutics lens and of course the pastoral actions to be adopted by the Angolan church (act).

## **African Liberation Hermeneutics**

Liberation is a very dynamic concept, and it is manifest in times of desperate need. In this context it is understood as removal of all that keeps Africans in bondage, all that makes Africans less than what God intended them to be (Nwadiakor & Nweke 2013:83). African contemporary reality, characterized by bondage to several social-cultural, political, and economic evils fostered by injustices, poverty, marginalization, ignorance, and exploitation, makes liberation a very serious and urgent matter for the African people in this twenty-first century.

Croatto (1978:vi) defines liberation hermeneutics as a way or a process of “re-reading the Bible from the standpoint of our own situation.” It is an

interpretive process which consists in reading the biblical text through the eyes of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized, with the aim of discovering and activating the *transforming energy* of biblical texts (Boff & Boff 1987:34). From the African perspective it is a “critical reflection on the experiences of the African people down through the ages and a total commitment to the process of development and the building of a new social order, all in the light of the gospel” (Nwadiolor & Nweke 2013:83). As an interpretive tool, African liberation hermeneutics takes the African context of struggle as the ground for interpretation of the Bible by the believing community. In other words, this is a hermeneutical approach that aims at presenting Jesus in terms of his intention to set Africans free from all forms of oppression. It is not just a reflection on the experience of the people but also a commitment to a practical process of building an equitable humane society having the Bible as a yardstick (Nwadiolor & Nweke 2013:83).

So, its primary function is to lead the readers to take actions that must change reality. As Herzog (1994:46-47) observes, “Theo-praxis has to be the starting point and ultimate court of appeal.” This means that the Christian message has to be placed in and evaluated on the basis of its practical application to the ethical, social, political and economic agenda left by Christ himself (Nwadiolor and Nweke 2013:86). The fundamental idea is that action is at the heart of liberation hermeneutics. And action here, according to West (2015:1981), refers to actual action in a particular struggle. Different kind of actions can be proposed by liberation hermeneutics which includes, but not least, actions such as education, health and sanitation programs, professional training centres, orphanages, rehabilitation centres which can accommodate even women who have been abused, advocacy programs, peace and conflict resolution centres, and many other programs that could empower the people and generate funds and employment for the masses. It is important to understand, as reminded by Ukpong (2006:275), that modern Liberation Theology, like African liberation hermeneutics, appeals to peaceful reformation and not violence. Therefore, in the context of this article, the Angolan church is expected first of all to empower its people through educating the masses as a liberative action; then to reform the theological training curriculum; and finally advocating for constitutional reforms for political and economic changes.

## The Socio-Historical Context of Angola

The current socio-political and economic context of the country seems to reflect its historical background as an independent Republic, founded in 1975, at the end of the Portuguese colonial regime present in the country for almost five centuries. The proclamation of the independent country was immediately followed by a period of civil conflict from 1975 to 2002 and a post-conflict period from 2002 to date. A one-party state political regime prevailed in the country up to 1991 with the inauguration of the multiparty system leading to the first democratic elections in September, 1992. A centralized economic system inspired by a socialist Soviet and Cuban model that included a high degree of state participation in the economy drove the country's economy up to late 80s and early 90s with the emergence of the "open" market economy (Faria 2013:n.p).

Angola has a population of between 30 to 33 million people in a territory of 1.246.700 km<sup>2</sup>, and one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of mineral resources. It is the second largest oil producer in Sub-Saharan Africa (U.S. ENERGY INFO. ADMIN. [EIA] 2021:n.p). However, the country is characterized by one of the highest levels of social inequality in the world. The vast majority of the population cannot even afford their basic needs, while a tiny elite share among themselves the "goods of the land". Poverty, illiteracy, high levels of unemployment and corruption are among the biggest social evils putting the country among the poorest in the world. As stated by Porter (2017:n.p) and Santos (2015:101), most of the population cannot access basic infrastructure and health services; infant mortality rates are among the highest in the world; periodic epidemics of infectious and contagious diseases such as malaria and cholera; limited access to public services such as birth certificates for children, and identification cards for adults, are all part of the chaotic reality. Unlawful deprivation of life; judicial inefficiency; forced evictions without compensation; limits on freedoms such as speech and press; official corruption and impunity; lack of effective accountability and prosecution in cases of rape and other violence against women and children; discrimination against indigenous communities, are among the most significant and prevalent human rights issues (USDS 2020:1).

Societal discrimination against women and children, and other marginalized groups, is widespread. In a similar fashion with the Lukan context, women have their legal rights to inherit property negatively impacted by the customary law which in many places prevails over civil law. As a common thing in most missionary founded congregations, women, especially single mothers and those women who have not had their marriages solemnized in and by the church, in many places are still not allowed to sit at the Lord's Table, to baptize their children, or to take up leadership roles. In some communities, women and children are victims of abuse due to accusations of the practice of witchcraft. Despite all the constitutional provisions, with only some exceptions, women are still operating outside the centre of power, generally holding low-level positions and earning lower salaries in the workplace (USDS 2020:21, 22). The economy of the country has been almost completely dependent on the extractive industry (oil and mining). The already fragile economic system has been badly impacted by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw the prices of the main driver of the economy – oil, being brought to the lowest level. As a result, it also reduced the country's capacity for importing goods in an economy which relies largely on imported goods, and consequently lowered people's level of consumption.

Politics of intimidation, exclusion, and marginalization is the order of the day. According to Faria (2013:n.p), the relationship between the state and society is characterized by the existence of an authoritarian postcolonial elite of rent seekers maintaining a state system of client to patron relationships by virtue of parallel and unofficial channels. Despite the constitutional provisions for an independent and impartial judiciary, the judiciary is still the weakest link of the government, being kept hostage by the executive, and its decision-making process interfered with by political influence. In summary, most scholars agree that, simply put, the socio-political context of Angola reveals the authoritarianism of the political regime and the disenfranchisement of the ordinary population.

### ***Forty-Six Years of Corruption and Impunity***

Angola is among the most corrupt countries in the world. Studies revealed that corruption is endemic in Angola. Corruption in Angola occurs at all levels, ranging from petty corruption (which occurs at a smaller scale in small places like registration offices, police stations, state licensing boards, etc.) to grand

corruption (which occurs at the highest levels of government in a way that requires significant subversion of the political, legal and economic systems). Petty corruption is widespread in Angola, happening mainly in form of bribery, best known locally as “*gasosa*” – (soft drink). As suggested by Badlam and others (2021:1) “corruption schemes have been wide-ranging, including widespread petty corruption as part of the ‘*gasosa* culture.’” *Gasosa* became the guarantee for accessing basic public services including health, education, justice, and other administrative services. Levying additional charges for bureaucratic services became the norm for public servants (Santos 2018:3). Corruption in high offices – grand corruption, is also factual and rampant, involving high ranking government officials, including the presidency, posing a major threat to the sovereignty of the country (Morais 2012:26).

It is believed that impunity is one of the main reasons for the prevalence of such levels of corruption in the country. As suggested by Santos (2018:1), corruption in Angola became highly rewarding since people involved in acts of corruption are not lawfully punished. On the same note, Sakala (2021:n.p) states that it flourished within the superstructure of the one-party system, which unlawfully enriched a minority of Angolans and, for decades created strong tentacles abroad and internal complicity on the basis of personal interests. Therefore, it seems to have become a generalized belief that misappropriation of public funds is very normal. “At a certain stage in the history of the country, the abnormal became normal and the immoral was a pandemic, but a minority with the political power told the populations that everything was normal and moral” (Neto 2021:n.p). Very few, among the so called “big fishes” have been brought to book for malpractices of corruption, since it is done in a selective and discriminatory manner – selective impunity.

### ***Corruption and poverty***

According to the Angolan *Instituto Nacional de Estatística* – INE (National Institute of Statistics) 2020 Report, around 54.0% of the Angolan population live in multidimensional poverty, meaning that they are deprived from the basic social services which include, among others, health, education, quality of life and employment (INE 2021:45). In terms of monetary poverty, around 40.6% (about 41 out of every 100 Angolans) have a level of consumption below the poverty line, less than USD \$1.00 per day (INE 2021:15). An extremely huge gap exists between a tiny rich elite and a vast majority poor, who are “often

ignored or despised both by false discourses and by the unfair practices of the State policies and the elite of predators” (Santos 2015:103). These people live without a minimum of dignity, calling for immediate reforms to the country’s social context. Poverty in Angola is not merely an academic subject but the ugly existential reality. According to Transparency International (2020:n.p) apart from eroding trust, weakening democracy and hampering economic development, corruption exacerbates inequality, poverty and social division. In Angola, associated with these issues are inequities in the judicial system, nepotism, cronyism, and patronage networks (Badlam and others 2021:1). According to Justino Pinto de Andrade (2021:n.p), the socio-economic ideologies implemented by the political regime, in power for almost five decades, “led to the almost absolute impoverishment of Angolans.”

### ***The Church: A Voice of the Voiceless and the Culture of Silence***

A culture of silence has been installed within the Angolan context throughout different phases of the history of the country. Fear of direct reprisal or retaliation has kept people from expressing their sentiments and fully exercising their rights – not only during the colonial period, but even after independence. A criticism of the social situation leads someone to be identified as opposing the regime, resulting in retaliation (Martins & Cardina 2019:59). Very recent cases with religious leaders, especially from the Roman Catholic Church, can attest to that. Scrutiny by the political regime, at all levels of public pronouncement (including sermons and homilies), led most of the people to maintain a culture of silence for fear of being reprimanded.

For decades the church has actively spoken on behalf of the most vulnerable on the social margins. According to Jensen and Pestana (2020:42), churches in Angola (traditional Catholic and Protestant) have maintained their critical voice and work towards creating an engaged citizenship. On the other hand, however, in his criticism Jensen (2018:21) observes that the Angolan church has demonstrated the capacity for peace and addressing the social issues of the post-war period through an ecumenical movement. But the church has been facing some challenges in this new dispensation, not being able to effectively advocate its positions vis-à-vis the government. Acts of corruption including misappropriation of church funds and property (land, houses, cars, etc.), power struggle and tribalism, have become common within the church (Cristóvão, 2017:n.p). As seen above, discrimination against women, especially

single mothers who in many places are still not allowed to sit at the Lord's Table, to baptize their children, or to take on leadership roles, is also part of the present reality of the church.

When it was expected for the church to have the plight and the liberation of the oppressed on the topmost in their agenda, many of its leaders choose to side with the oppressor and become part of the elites against the poor and outcast. This is reinforced by Blanes and Zawiejska (2019:39), stating that the church in Angola has been discredited in many circles, being identified as aligning with the State, providing moral and social legitimation to the government's unjust policies. The "Gospel is the power of God for salvation" (Romans 1:16). However, some are preaching it to exploit the poor instead of setting them free both spiritually and physically. The Angolan church is therefore called to move its theological discourse beyond exploitation so that she can become the voice of the voiceless poor and oppressed. The church must not hesitate becoming the voice of the poor and oppressed since the Angolan government and civil society see the church as a credible voice that can make an impact on peace building, reconciliation, human rights, citizenship and improving moral and ethical values (Ajayi 2015:n.p). She must not only question the roots of poverty and injustices but also promote actions to empower the poor and marginalized to speak for themselves against injustice and poverty, and any other kind of social evil hindering them to live life in its fullness.

## **Luke 18:1-8 and the Quest of Social Justice**

As stated by Weaver (2002:219), even though this parable occupies a mere eight verses of Luke's gospel, it opens out onto a vast and challenging world of theological reflection. Its interpretation has been a subject of intense disputes concerning its authenticity and structure (the unity of the entire text). There is no specificity about the precise setting of the parable in the ministry of Jesus. Scholars are divided in this matter, some regarding the entire pericope as being a unit from Jesus, others from Luke's own material (L), while others see a disjunction in it, where one can listen to Jesus *ipsissima vox* (vv.2-5) and Luke's interpretation or narrative frame at same time (vv.1; 6-8) (Curkpatrick, 2002:117; Herzog, 1994:215). However, the analysis of the literary background



of the parable has led some scholars to look at Ben Sirach 35:15-25 as the prototype of Luke 18:1-8.

On the other side, scholars also disagree regarding the main point of the parable, since it seems difficult to reduce the tensions between what is believed to be Jesus *ipsissima vox* (vv.2-5) and Luke's frame (vv.1, 6-8). Traditionally and following Luke's interpretive frame (vv.1, 6-8), through a *minori ad maius* (lesser to greater argument) analogy to God, the parable has been interpreted as an allegory of prayer and divine response. However, Curkpatrick (2002:109) points out that the frame (Luke 18:1, 6-8) has altered the focus of the parable from the widow to the judge in a *minori ad maius* analogy to God, making the judge as the centre of the meaning of the parable. He suggests that it is possible that the parable may have never been about prayer but could have been concerned with justice, which, according to him, fits well into the theme of Luke (Curkpatrick 2002:108). Apart from divorcing the parable from its original *sitz-im-leben*, traditional interpretations also raise a theological concern, that God can be pestered to action, and reinforce stereotypes.

Luke opens the pericope in a way that is very characteristic to him with the imperfect tense Ἐλεγεν δὲ παραβολὴν... (he told a parable...) (cf. 5:36; 13:6; 14:7), even though in most cases he uses the aorist tense εἶπεν, such as in 6:39; 8:4; 12:16; 15:3; 18:9; 19:11; 21:29. The phrase πρὸς τό with δεῖν (the present active infinitive of the impersonal δεῖ "in order to" or "so that") introduces the motif of the parable (for Luke). This generally calls for a verb that identifies what needs to be done, which is, in this case, προσεύχεσθαι – to pray. Though the adverb πάντοτε implies the continuous sense of προσεύχομαι, the exhortation πάντοτε προσεύχεσθαι (*to pray always*) with μὴ ἐγκακεῖν, do not suggest intermittent or continuous prayer, rather, to pray "consistently and persistently", again and again without "losing heart" or "giving up", getting tired or discouraged (Edwards 2015:497, Johnson 1991:268-269).

The plot of the parable is introduced in v.2 with a negative description of the judge as τὸν θεὸν μὴ φοβούμενος καὶ ἄνθρωπον μὴ ἐντρέπόμενος (neither feared God nor had regard/respect for people). To fear God and keeping his commandments was a mandate in Hebrew Scripture. In a context where a judge was meant to be a stock character and was expected to stand up for

justice and execution of the law according to God's moral standards, the negated participles in verse 2, τὸν θεὸν μὴ φοβούμενος καὶ ἄνθρωπον μὴ ἐντρέπόμενος paint a very negative picture of the judge in terms of character (Matsoso 1992:92). This shows his moral decadence, since the word ἐντρέπόμενος (present participle passive of τρεπω – put to shame) belongs to the vocabulary of shame, meaning, in the active voice, “to make ashamed.” The action of the story, however, starts in v.3 Ἐκδίκησόν με ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀντιδίκου μου (grant me justice against my opponent), and comes to its conclusion in v.5 with the decision of the unjust judge to grant the widow her request “I will grant her justice”.

Luke describes the widow in v.3 as persistent, who was repeatedly coming to the judge demanding for justice ἤρχετο...λέγουσα. The imperfect iterative ἤρχετο (from ἔρχομαι – to come) indicates an action performed repeatedly by the same person. In this verse, Luke makes use of the technical language of the court: ἐκδίκησόν με ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀντιδίκου μου (do me justice against my opponent). The verb ἐκδικέω (to avenge in the LXX) in judicial process means to fight for someone’s cause or to help someone to get justice by securing the rights of the wronged person or by punishing the offender (Marshall, 1978: 672). According to Freed (1987:45) the 2<sup>nd</sup> person aorist imperative ἐκδίκησόν με (avenge me, do me justice) demands that the judge deliver her from her adversary (ἀντιδίκου) for the sake of justice to which she is entitled. The noun ἀντιδίκου refers to a legal opponent or adversary in a lawsuit (Hicks, 1991:216). So, Marshall (1978: 672) observes that “what the widow wants is not the punishment of her opponent but the payment of whatever is due to her” (restoration).

The widow’s demand was for a while denied by the judge. The imperfect ἤθελεν (of θελεν – wish, want, desire) is negated with οὐκ, rendering the sentence as “for a while he did not want” or “he refused for a while”. However, if the imperfect ἤθελεν is interpreted in the light of ἤρχετο in v.3, an imperfect iterative, it means that the refusal of the judge was a repeated action, he refused over and over again. According to Hicks (1991:216), ἐπὶ χρόνον (for a time) refers generally to an undefined length of time. However with the preposition ἐπί plus the phrase μετὰ ταῦτα (after these things; afterwards) which follows, it gives a temporal sense as “for a ‘while’ the judge refused”, implying that an end is in view (O’Connor, 2019:56). In his interior monologue

the judge decides finally to attend to the widow's plea. The reasons for his move are introduced by the combination *διὰ γε* (because). Because "she keeps bothering me" by continually coming (*τὸ παρέχειν μοι κόπον*) the judge will render her justice, as indicated by the future indicative *ἐκδικήσω αὐτήν*.

Luke shows that the judge is not just moved by the fact she keeps coming (what bothers him), but by what might happen if she continues coming: *ἴνα μὴ εἰς τέλος ἐρχομένη ὑπωπιάζη με*. The main verb in this clause *ὑπωπιάζω* (*ὑπό* + *ὤψ* – face just under the eye) means, literally "to hit under the eye," "give a black eye to," in a metaphor drawn from boxing (Marshall, 1978:673). It has to do with a physical assault on one's face. Many translations adopt the metaphorical meaning "to wear out". According to Derrett (1970:190), "'blacken my face' for *ὑπωπιάζω* is synonymous of 'loss of prestige' thus incurring shame and dishonor," based on a later use of the word and a common Oriental expression "to slander or destroy one's good name." Johnson (1991: 270), on the same note, shows that the term can also mean "to damage the reputation." Derrett and Johnson's proposals fit in the context of this parable, in the sense that the judge was much worried about his own reputation. Since he has no regard for humans (vv.2, 4), he may depend on some sort of reputation to continue being a judge (Johnson, 1991:270).

The narrator then redirects his hearers' attention to the lesson to be learnt from the judge. As it was said above, many scholars argue that v.1 and vv.6-8 are Luke's addition on the main parable (vv.2-5). According to Hicks (1991:210), *εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος* (then the Lord said) may be considered as Luke's editorial notation in order to set the parable off from its application (vv.7-8). Forbes (2000:204) points out that Luke's use of the post-resurrection title *ὁ κύριος* adds authority to the pronouncement. The expression *ὁ κριτῆς τῆς ἀδικίας* the judge of injustice or the unrighteous judge) represents a Semitic idiom in Luke's text, with a similar characterization applying to the "dishonest manager" in Luke 16:8 (Hultgren 2000:256).

The application of the parable is applied by means of a rhetorical question, with an emphatic negative future (*οὐ μὴ*) employed to accentuate the situation. Combined with *ποιήσῃ* (an aorist active subjunctive of *ποιέω* – to do, to execute), the clause becomes a very strong imperative, rendering "will he (God) not certainly do justice..." or "will not God *absolutely* bring about

justice?” (Edwards 2015:499; Forbes 2000:204). According to Marshall (1978:673) οὐ μὴ construction is normally used to ask a strong question, expecting an emphatic affirmative “yes”. The temporal genitives ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός (day and night) presuppose a description of incessant or uninterrupted prayer. Reiling and Swellengrebel (1993:598) observe, however, that the order of “day and night” reflects a Gentile idiom, while “night and day” reflects a Hebrew idiom (as in Luke 2:37). Luke suggests that the elect ones (τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν) are expected to wait patiently καὶ μακροθυμεῖ ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς. The term μακροθυμέω, etymologically from μακρό + θυμος (long-tempered), can mean: to wait patiently, to be slow to get angry, or even long-suffering.

As observed, the emphatic negative οὐ μὴ construction normally expects an emphatic affirmative answer. So, the question of v.7 is answered affirmatively in v.8 with the Lord’s authoritative affirmation that God will do justice to or will vindicate his elect (ποιήσῃ τὴν ἐκδίκησιν αὐτῶν) and that it will be done quickly or speedily (ἐν τάχει) (O’Connor, 2019:69).

The question in v.8b πλὴν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἔλθων ἄρα εὕρησιν τὴν πίστιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; (will indeed the son of Man find faith on earth when he returns?) marks an abrupt shift in Jesus’ teaching from faithfulness of God (v. 8a) to human faithfulness. Jesus seems concerned if the disciples can remain faithful amidst of tribulations and delaying in the response of their prayers. “The concern indicates awareness of the tendency of faith to falter as time passes – what will the Son of Man find when he comes?” (Parsons, 2015:265). The expression ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (the Son of Man) has an eschatological character and seems to mark a link between this parable and 17: 22-37. “The Son of man is the eschatological vindicator of the elect” (Marshall, 1978:676). The particle ἄρα (indeed) is an interrogative particle implying anxiety or impatience, acting here as an interrogative intensifier, which different from οὐ μὴ, expects a negative answer. As the application of the parable, “it is meant as an exhortation to take seriously the lesson of the parable that God will certainly act to vindicate them. Thus an interval before the Parousia is presupposed, but the sense of imminent expectation is not abandoned” (Marshall, 1978:677).

### ***The Judge of injustice and the Abuse of Power***

According to Stephen Wright (2002:84) fearing God and respecting people is a phrase that is formulaic and proverbial, and abuse against both elements condemns the judge as dishonourable and shameless: “not fearing God is unequivocally negative in biblical terms.” He not only represents a contradiction to the primary expectation, but also, his resolute lack of fear of God would make it almost impossible to expect justice in his judgment. In the Hebrew tradition he is a quintessential expression of resistance to Yahweh’s justice (Curkpatrick 2002:220).

In his examination of the Roman judicial system, Harries (1999:171) observes that it was a tight circle of ambitious judges (elites) eager to amass greater wealth and enhancing personal reputation. Non-elites like the widow were left outside that circle, which would provide prestigious contacts or wealthy connections: “lowly *judices* needed powerful friends.” As observed by Herzog (1994:227) and Cotter (2015:332) the judge in this parable seems not to be an exception; he represents the rule, well versed in iniquitous dealings using his position to line his pockets.

### ***Injustice to the Widow and The Widow’s Agency***

The widow of the parable is victimized in many different levels: i) she is part of an androcentric socio-cultural world which discriminates her on the basis of a gender (female) and her marital status (widow); ii) she was expected to be protected by a judicial system which is now described as systematically corrupt and discriminates her on the basis of her economic status (poor); iii) she is victimized by an opponent (not identified in the parable) who takes advantage of her powerlessness to strip her of are means of survival (O’Connor, 2019:95); iv) finally, and for her misfortune, it gets worse as she brings her case to a judge who admits by his own to have neither respect for God nor for people, and which for a long time refused to attend to her appeals. So, she is a victim of an ongoing structural injustice.

Conventionally, women in general and widows in particular, were seen as captives within vulnerable and compromising situations (Dickerson 2017:18). According to Herzog (1994:228) the widow of our parable is self-motivated, takes the initiative, and is unrelenting with persistence, the only weapon she possesses. She must have no one to speak for her. She knows her rights; she

knows that God's law is on her side. Therefore, like the woman with a haemorrhage (Luke 8:43-48) she proactively assumes unusual responsibility for her own well-being, trusts in her own capacity, and with steadfast faith keeps coming continually until the judge's attention is drawn to her rights and is moved to action (Green 1997:640). In her obstinate and resolute determination to achieve her purpose, she breaks all the protocols, the culture of silence, and other cultural boundaries that make her captive, and she speaks for herself. In view of O'Connor (2019:86), the way Luke draws out the inner dynamic of the parable reveals how skilful the widow becomes in navigating her difficult course through this crisis. It is her persistence that draws the judge's attention to her rights.

This widow of Jesus' parable belongs to all ages and all cultures. She represents the masses – the outcasts of our society. Luke assigns to her an agency role which is a model to demonstrate the way to justice in an unjust world. Her accomplishment makes her not only the central motivator, but also, as Schottroff (2006:92) describes her, an instructor who demonstrates what is essential to get justice in an unjust world. She overcomes patriarchal constraint and impels the judge to administer justice. Her persistence accomplishes; she shames the judge into action (Ringe 1998:244). Persistence pays off. As Marshal (1978:672) observes, it is those who endure who will rejoice at the end.

The current context of Angola is in many ways an authentic picture of Luke's world. After almost five decades of independence all the former oppressive structures are still operating effectively in the country. As Blanes (2019:220) attests, the country has embarked in a process of degeneration, "going back to the inequalities, injustice and exploitation proper of colonial times, in becoming the very thing they fought against in the liberation wars." Therefore, in line with Matsoso's (1982:105) argument, Luke 18:1-8 becomes a source of renewed hope for the suffering people in Angola. The widow's victory teaches the Angolan people that justice delayed is not justice denied. Jesus guarantees that justice shall be served to those who cry to God day and night (v.7), as long as they persistently pursue their endeavour without losing heart (v.1). The widow's (marginalized people in Angola) unrelenting and persistent pursuit for justice from an unjust judge (structures of power boss in the State and church)

becomes, as Gowler (2021:n.p) would say, a paradigm for how we should unrelentingly pursue justice for those denied justice in our society.

## **Practical Implications of Re-reading Luke 18:1-8 in the Angolan Context**

How would an Angolan audience have heard the parable of the Widow and the Judge? What would be the effects of this liberative reading for social justice in Angola? According to Meleshko (2013:65) issues of justice and the right attitude to the poor and oppressed, to poverty and human rights provoke believers to read the Bible with the purpose of finding answers to the hard questions of life. Therefore, a liberative reading of Luke 18:1-8, through the African hermeneutics lens in the Angolan context, consists in reading this parable in a way that the Angolan readers are empowered and influenced by the power of the Gospel to be actively involved in a life-transforming mission, which brings forth hope and justice to the Angolan communities, especially the poor and marginalized. Through this reading the reader not only see how the Lukan Jesus addressed the issue of injustice, but also how this parable is applicable to their local social and religious context.

It is important to remember that historical studies have demonstrated that Luke's Gospel was a great encouragement to Africans under European imperial rule. According to Mbefo (2010:12) their aspirations were to see that its message becomes a reality in their lived experience. Luke's gospel has also been of great relevance in the emancipatory fight against the patriarchal systems prevalent in the continent. Matsoso (1992:96) points out that this parable has, in a way, laid roots for the struggle of women worldwide, and especially in the so-called Third World, where women are fighting for their liberation and attempting to build a wholistically new humanity.

This gospel provides a transformative force for the Angolan people, especially the poor and marginalized. The holistic theology emphasized in it is appropriately suited to approach the contemporary Angolan crisis. Like first century Palestine, contemporary the Angolan social-economic context is one marked by great inequalities between a small minority of rich elite and a majority poor, who consequently operate on the margins of the society. Luke's gospel, therefore, challenges Angolan leaders, both political and religious

leaders, to urgently deal with the structures of poverty and oppression and their causes. Luke unveils a new world of possibilities for the marginalized in Angola.

Despite providing a picture of the Palestinian context under the Roman rule, the parables of Jesus raise awareness and expose the ugly face of the exploitation and settings of social oppression of the peasantry by the elite, calling into question the established status quo (Herzog 1994:29; Oakman 2008:172, 173). They “fulfill a liberationist-educational function for the first listener by becoming a reflection of and analytic instrument for societal reality” (Herzog 1994:29).

Therefore re-reading Luke 18: 1-8 through the African hermeneutics lens in the Angolan context, above all, allows this parable to speak to the hearts of the Angolan people and offers them an opportunity to construct a biblical model to curb injustices in their own context. Angolans need the power to speak for themselves against the social evils which keep on enslaving them in their own land. Like the widow in the parable, Angolan people are expected to not grow weary, not to give up, but to stand firm, to be persistent in their pursuit for justice and freedom from all forms of evil and oppression. The church on the other hand, through this parable can also recover Luke's holistic view of salvation and so, expand its limited theological praxis to better reflect the mission of Jesus. Then it will be equipped to exercise the holistic gospel that is transformative for the whole Angolan community, in particular the oppressed and marginalized.

By rejecting the metaphorical and allegorical interpretations of the parable and reading this parable through the African hermeneutics lens raises awareness and exposes the ugly face of human exploitation and all the oppressive structures hindering the majority of Angolans to live life in its fullness. Consequently, this will provoke the Angolan readers to read the Bible with the purpose of finding the right answers for their current situation and to question the established status quo. Not speculative answers, but practical ones to be practiced by every believer in the basic communities in their daily lives (Meleshko 2013:65). The parable of the Widow and the Judge poses a huge challenge to the Angolan political and religious leaders and their current practices. It is an authentic call to political and economic as well as religious



repentance. Reconciliation with God and others is an imperative in the current context of the country. Contextualizing the words of Buffel (2010:7), theological reflection and pastoral actions in the country's context cannot afford to proceed unchallenged with their usual apathy towards the socio-economic and political conditions and the plight of the poor and marginalized. The church is therefore called to not only reflect but do theology. Finally, re-reading of Luke 18: 1-8 from the standpoint of the Angolan situation will unveil and activate the transforming energy of the parable and consequently compel them on the way of liberation.

So, in view of all this, the Angolan church must capitalize on empowering the poor and marginalized to demand for social justice through educating the masses. Advocacy for constitutional reforms for political and economic changes is another pastoral action to be practiced by the Angolan church. Alongside with its advocacy role, the church should also empower the people to emulate the widow's agency, whose voice breaks the culture of silence, and bring about the justice she fought for, and speak up for themselves. The church is called to continue using the Bible as a source of power for its liberative mission. The church in Angola is to rethink its God's given mandate and realign its discourse on social justice with its praxis. The Angolan church must also capitalize on investing more in theological education and to uptake and integrate into the theological curriculum subjects on African hermeneutics.

## **Conclusion**

The presence of social injustices is very evident both in the context where the parable was initially told and heard as well as in the Angolan context. This article has shown that the encounter between the widow and the judge in Luke 18:1-8 presents an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that an understanding of the socio-historical environment behind this text can highlight possible ways to deal with the quest of social justice in the current context of Africa and Angola in particular. Through this parable Jesus shows how one of the most unlikely approaches to gaining justice can succeed (Herzog 1994:229). The parable leaves it clear how in seeking justice, while confronted with institutional corruption even at the judiciary level, a vulnerable widow is yet able to effectively take up her cause (O'Connor 2019:98). For this reason this article has concluded that this parable is a

liberative text, serving a liberationist-educational purpose. Therefore, a re-reading of this text through the African hermeneutics lens has not only revealed features of the parable often ignored by the traditional hermeneutists, but also contributes towards empowering Angolan readers to overcome the problem of social injustices being perpetuated in their own time and place. It offers a biblical model to curb injustices – persistence.

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## **Appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutical Concept towards Reformulating Christian Theological Education Curriculum via Vernaculars in Africa: Examples from Hausa- Positive-Contexts**

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### **Abstract**

This study appropriates Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of language and hermeneutics toward reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education in vernacular contexts of Africa, using Hausa-Positive Contexts as an example. Three research questions guide the study. First: How can Gadamer's hermeneutical concept be appropriated via translation and communication in support of reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa? Second: What emerging questions need to be addressed in appropriating Gadamer's hermeneutical concept in reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa? Third: What strategies need to be engaged consequent to appropriating Gadamer's hermeneutical concept towards reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa? The study concludes that those going through formal theological education in many vernacular contexts of Africa have a more effective hermeneutical experience when an appropriate vernacular is engaged as a pedagogical facility for curriculum delivery.



# Background of the Study

## ***Introduction***

Though the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer can also be appropriated in other areas of theory and practice, as attestable by other studies, this paper focuses on appropriating Gadamer's concept of language and hermeneutics as a step towards reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education in vernacular contexts of Africa, using Hausa-Positive Contexts as an example. An important area to which Hans-Georg Gadamer pays attention in his seminal work *Truth and Method* is the ontological shift of hermeneutics guided by language. The major focus of this important work is on language and hermeneutics. Gadamer's main thesis is that *language is the medium of hermeneutic experience*.

Gadamer is a strong proponent of the relationship between language and hermeneutics. At the opening of his discourse in this area, he borrows the words of Schleiermacher to express the strength of his advocacy: "Everything presupposed in hermeneutics is but language" (Gadamer, 2006:383). Biblical hermeneutics is an attempt to understand verbal communication made through the use of language; Scripture is a written record of such communication. Understanding the essential role of language in hermeneutics, according to Gadamerian thought, is key to doing hermeneutics.

An immediate example comes to mind in discussing the relationship between language and hermeneutics, in line with Gadamer's advocacy. A significant number of those who desire and pursue theological education in Hausa-Positive-Contexts have a better hermeneutical experience when Hausa is engaged as a pedagogical facility for delivering the curriculum. Although theological students and even teachers are forced by circumstances to "function" using English or other foreign languages, Hausa is the language that makes them to feel most at home in the formal learning environment. In support of these students and teachers this paper attempts to appropriate Gadamer's concept of language and hermeneutics toward reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education in Hausa-Positive Contexts. In Northern Nigeria, Hausa is even replacing some of the people's native languages and is fast becoming their "heart language" to the extent that their

worldview is being affected in various ways. As Richards and O'Brien (2012:71) note, "Linguists generally conclude that our *heart language*—the language we learn first (up to about age seven)—sets most of the parameters of our worldview."

### ***Thesis Statement***

In line with the Gadamerian concept of language and hermeneutics, this paper argues that vernaculars, such as the Hausa language, are qualified in both hermeneutical and pedagogical terms to deliver curriculum in post-secondary, graduate, and post-graduate theological education in African contexts where they are the dominant language of communication—either as a person's first or second language.

### ***Purpose of Study***

This study first aims considers how Gadamer's hermeneutical concept can be appropriated via translation and communication in support of reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as a case-study. Second, the study discusses emerging questions that need to be addressed in appropriating Gadamer's hermeneutical concept in reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, engaging Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example. Third, the study aims to develop strategies that can be engaged as a consequence of appropriating Gadamer's hermeneutical concept towards reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, with Hausa-Positive-Contexts engaged as an example.

### ***Research Questions***

Three questions guide this study:

1. How can Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical concept be appropriated via translation and communication to support reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as a case study?
2. What emerging questions need to be addressed in appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical concept in reformulating the

curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example?

3. What strategies need to be engaged consequent to appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical concept towards reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example?

### ***Significance of the Study***

This study will benefit theological schools, language development and literacy agencies, and Bible-translating agencies in Hausa-Positive-Contexts. Theological schools in vernacular contexts of Africa will find this study helpful for engaging languages other than English in effectively delivering the curriculum. Hausa language will be used as a model to facilitate such delivery. This study will motivate theological schools to review and reformulate their curricula to allow integrating various local and regional vernaculars in regular pedagogical processes and to design and construct new courses that could be delivered through various linguistic channels.

This study will help language development and literacy agencies in the creation of literacy materials for use in formal teaching-learning processes in schools. One such agency is the Kuvori Language Development and Literacy Project in Kuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State. This study comes at the right time as countries like Nigeria are putting more emphasis on engaging local languages for teaching-learning, especially at primary school levels. Learners in Hausa-Positive Contexts already have an advantage in that most of them can speak Hausa (second language) and their mother tongue (first language). This study will encourage the development of necessary literacy materials to facilitate such teaching-learning processes for participants from first or second language backgrounds.

This study will also benefit Bible-translating agencies working in Hausa Positive Contexts, such as Wycliffe Bible Translators and Nigeria Bible Translation Trust. These agencies will benefit from suggestions that may help solidify their various Bible translation initiatives.

### ***Delimitation of Study***

The study limits itself to Gadamer's seminal work *Truth and Method* in a manner that can be applied towards discussing the interconnection that runs through theological education, curriculum, and language (in this case, Hausa as a case-study language) in vernacular communities of Africa. This means, for brevity, the study does not concern itself with other works by Gadamer, just as it also does not concern itself with other influential regional languages of Africa that could also serve as case-studies. The researcher is more conversant with the interconnection between Hausa and other vernaculars over or within which it has influence, which is the the reason for using Hausa-Positive Contexts as a linguistic exemplar in this study. Furthermore, the study is limited to the relationship of the English language to other vernaculars in Africa, especially in Hausa-Positive-Contexts. Other international languages, such as French, do not attract close attention in this study.

### ***Operational Definition of Terms***

Key operational terms in this study are: Hermeneutics, Curriculum, Theological Education, Vernacular, and Hausa-Positive-Contexts.

*Hermeneutics.* In this study, the term “hermeneutics” is used to refer to the process and reality of understanding. Jensen (2007:2) also defines hermeneutics in this broadest possible way as a “reflection on how we understand, usually with regard to text or speech, and what we need to do in order to avoid misunderstanding. In this respect, hermeneutics is understood as the identification, analysis and removal of obstacles to understanding”.

This study does not consider the complex and fundamental obstacles that need to be addressed towards achieving understanding— “our understanding is always impeded, even our self-understanding” (Jensen, 2007:2). Rather it considers aspects of hermeneutics which relate to language.

*Curriculum.* “Curriculum” refers to the encapsulation of everything considerable as a learning experience. However the learning experience should be justifiable in educational terms based on particular educational criteria set for such justification (Kelly, 2010:3). As Onwuka (1996:3) notes: “[Curriculum] embraces purposeful experience provided and directed by educational institutions to achieve predetermined goals”. This study considers

churches and their agencies as educational institutions that are part of the total environment in which education takes place.

*Theological Education.* In line with the Apostle Paul's instruction to Timothy, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2), theological education can be defined as the communication of biblical truth from "Paul" to "others" or from generation to generation.

Theological education is all the Bible studies and/or communication that is done contextually by the "Pauls," "Timothys," "Trustees" and "others" in every generation of Christians, either professionally and/or formally in theological institutions, educational and research contexts, or generally in churches, Christian and church educational ministries, families, individual basis, and other similar situations with a view to strengthening Christians, both individually and as a church, to be, prepare, and express themselves locally, nationally, internationally, globally and relevantly in Christ's ambassadorial services (Dogara, 2018:24).

*Vernacular.* According to Crystal (2008:511), "vernacular" is "a term used in sociolinguistics to refer to the indigenous language or dialect of a speech community." In this study "vernacular" refers to the indigenous languages or/and other languages excluding English, French, or other colonial languages that are accepted for day-to-day communication in speech communities in Africa. Some vernaculars such as Hausa have already developed qualities acceptable for consideration as a lingua franca.

*Hausa-Positive-Contexts.* In this study the term "Hausa Positive Contexts" refers to

Situations in which the limited or unlimited use of the Hausa language is often considered necessary. Within such situations, Hausa is called to use consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or by the dictates of the circumstances, with a view to communicating ideas, facts, information or

knowledge. The said contexts also refer to situations, whether within or without the Hausa world, where Hausa has already achieved definition, qualification, and currency as the language of the people (Dogara, 2018:24).

## **Methodology and Procedure of Study**

The study uses the document analysis approach of the qualitative research methodology. Specifically, Gadamer's *Truth and Method* is a primary document from which relevant sections are extracted for the study. The extractions are organized into three groups, corresponding to the three research questions. The first group engages selected parts of Gadamer's thoughts on language and hermeneutics to address how Gadamer's hermeneutical concept can be appropriated via translation and communication in support of reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as a case study. The second group deals with selected parts of Gadamer's thoughts which are questionable when considered from the perspective of evangelical Christianity. The selected parts are engaged to consider emerging questions that need to be addressed in appropriating Gadamer's hermeneutical concept towards reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as a case study. The third group focuses on the application of relevant Gadamer's points in reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example.

## **Discussion of Research Questions**

### ***Appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutical Concept***

*Research Question 1:* How can Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical concept be appropriated via translation and communication to support reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example?

Here the study focuses on how "Gadamerizing" can be done via translation and communication in relation to text, so as to provide support for reformulating

the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa. The study uses the term “Gadamerizing” to refer to the application of Gadamer’s ideas on language and hermeneutics in general, and on language and hermeneutics as they relate to Scriptural understanding, which is a focus of this study.

## **Translation**

Four key statements from Gadamer, as they relate to translation, are being considered. Each has implication for hermeneutics.

First, “The translation must establish its validity within the new language in a new way” (Gadamer, 2006:386). In other words, the meaning to be understood must be translated into the context in which the speaker of the language into which the text is being translated lives. In simple terms, while every translation needs to represent the translated work as accurately as possible, it also needs to be readable and conscious of the linguistic context of the people for whom the translation is being made. When it becomes necessary to translate books for curricular use via a vernacular in Africa, the translation must communicate knowledge in the language of the learners without compromising the source language.

Second,

Every translation is at the same time an interpretation. We can even say that the translation is the culmination of the interpretation that the translator has made of the words given him (Gadamer, 2006:386).

This leads to the question: an interpretation from what or from whose perspective? For example, the various versions of the Hausa Bible were generally translated from English versions, which are themselves translations from what are considered the original languages of the Bible. Thus, it can be said that the Hausa Bible is an *interpretation* of the Bible from an English-speaking or Western perspective. This interpretive consequence should be noted in handling works translated from more recognized international languages into vernacular contexts of Africa.

The same thing can be said of the English versions that are based on the original languages. They are also an *interpretation* from the perspective of the original speakers of the Biblical languages. In this sense, then, the Hausa Bible is a *reinterpretation* of an interpretation; it is a book that represents how speakers of English interpreted what speakers of the biblical languages originally said. Furthermore, if one were to understand the exchanges of speeches between Moses and Pharaoh or between Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the book of Exodus, as occurring in a language *different* from the Hebrew language, it would amount to Moses *translating* the speeches from a different language to Hebrew. The consequence is that it can be said, with reference to such passages, that the Hausa Bible is a reinterpretation (of English version) of a reinterpretation (of Hebrew original) of an interpretation (language from which Moses interpreted to Hebrew). The same outlook applies to the translation of theological textbooks and resources from other languages to Hausa or any other vernacular in Africa.

Third,

Where a translation is necessary, the gap between the spirit of the original words and that of their reproduction must be taken into account. It is a gap that can never be completely closed (Gadamer, 2006:386).

If the gap of translation can never be completely closed, how can it be further shortened? Perhaps, with respect to the Hausa Bible as an example of a curricular facility for theological education in a vernacular it is to attempt to produce a translation of the Bible that is relevant to contemporary readership directly from the original languages instead of translating from the English versions. This also applies where a necessity arises for the translation of theological books from English or other languages into Hausa.

Fourth,

To understand a foreign language means that we do not need to translate it into our own. When we really master a language, then no translation is necessary—in fact, any translation seems impossible (Gadamer, 2006:386).



Gadamer argues that translation is not necessary where there is understanding. The evidence of understanding is not translation but speech. Is there any need, then, for translating the Bible to vernacular languages for people living in the Hausa-Positive Contexts since many people in these contexts are conversant and conversationally at home with Hausa *more* than they are with their native languages? This question is more relevant given that many vernacular-speaking people groups in Hausa-Positive Contexts show interest in having a Bible translation in their vernacular languages just to have a permanent document of their language, even when the *aliveness* of the language is not evident in their daily communication. In such situations, the need for Bible translation into these native languages may not really be there, unless, of course, there is a corresponding active use of the language in *living* communication by the native speakers concerned. But if native speakers of a language—for example, Kuvori-Surubu in Kuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Northwestern Nigeria—understood both spoken and written Hausa, though it is their second language, so well, in fact better than their first language, would that amount to *thinking* in Hausa? In terms of biblical hermeneutics, would that amount to thinking and arriving at Scriptural understanding in a non-native language? Gadamer's response to this question is in the affirmative:

Every language can be learned so perfectly that using it no longer means translating from or into one's native tongue, but thinking in the foreign language (Gadamer, 2006:386).

## **Communication**

Four key statements from Gadamer related communication are considered. Each has implications for hermeneutics.

First,

It is well known that nothing is more difficult than a dialogue in two different languages in which one person speaks one, and the other person the other, each understanding the other's language but not speaking it (Gadamer, 2006:386).

Linguists David Crozier and Stephen Dettweiler also ask: “Do speakers of two or more different language varieties understand each other when they each speak in their own way?” (David Crozier and Stephen Dettweiler, 2005:42)

The difficulty above, especially for vernacular speakers in Africa, can be explained with a few examples from Hausa-Positive Contexts. A great number of Hausa speakers in both English-speaking and Hausa-speaking theological schools do not *speak* English language with competence, though they can read English language materials with reasonable understanding and can hear and understand English reasonably well. This could mean that English language theological textbooks and other resources can be used in Hausa-speaking theological schools. But in the Gadamerian conception, real understanding only comes through speech. While it is possible for a Hausa speaker to read English language materials with reasonable understanding, real understanding comes when the Hausa speaker translates his grasp of English materials into coherent speech or conversation in Hausa.

There are many former and current theological students who cannot reasonably communicate in English, but who can read English language Bibles and textbooks in a manner that assists them to do proper interpretation of Scripture in Hausa language. For this category of students, hermeneutics means getting a working grasp (although not necessarily a full grasp) of the contents of the English language materials, then *translating* (which Gadamer considers as reinterpreting) them to Hausa language.

Second,

Understanding how to speak is not yet of itself real understanding and does not involve an interpretive process; it is an accomplishment of life. For you understand a language by living in it—a statement that is true, as we know, not only of living but dead languages as well (Gadamer, 2006:386-387).

To interpret is to achieve a proper understanding of the subject matter.

Thus the hermeneutical problem concerns not the correct mastery of language but coming to a proper understanding

about the subject matter, which takes place in the medium of language (Gadamer, 2006:387).

In view of the connection between mastery of language and real understanding, this question needs to be raised: do theological students in Hausa-Positive Contexts, who are at home with communication in Hausa properly understand the content of their teaching in a manner that they can also communicate it to others? Some case studies from Hausa-Positive Contexts show that some preachers, who have been trained in an English language-based theological education system, are more “at home” preaching in Hausa than they are with preaching in English. A key process of understanding is through communication, which in this case, is what is happening. This is possible because, according to Gadamer, they are now “living” in a language of their interpretive process; this also warrants saying that for the English language-trained theologian who communicates more and better in Hausa language, the language of his or her hermeneutical understanding is Hausa.

At least one more question needs to be asked with regard to the connection between mastery of language and real understanding: What does it mean to master a language? From the Gadamerian perspective, mastery of language is the situation in which the speaker has no need of an interpreter because he or she is now the interpreter; he or she can also engage in reasonable conversation with others who presumably communicate in the same language.

Every conversation obviously presupposes that the two speakers speak the same language. Only when two people can make themselves understood through language by talking together can the problem of understanding and agreement even be raised. Having to depend on an interpreter's translation is an extreme case that doubles the hermeneutical process, namely the conversation: there is one conversation between the interpreter and the other, and a second between the interpreter and oneself (Gadamer, 2006:387).

Third, communication is basically verbal even when represented by a written text. Communication is a verbal tradition handed from one generation to

another, and, as in the case of Scripture, made “permanent” through writing. As such, Scripture is a written text which symbolizes a verbal text or speech.

Gadamer notes this about the verbal nature of all communication:

What has come down to us as verbal tradition is not left over but given to us, told us—whether through direct retelling, in which myth, legend, and custom have their life, or through written tradition, whose signs are, as it were, immediately clear to every reader who can read them (Gadamer, 2006:391).

Gadamer’s conception here, when considered within the context of divine communication, should be readily understandable to Africans who are very familiar with “tales by moonlight.”

The things which God said and the knowledge of other events were passed from one generation to another by word of mouth (oral tradition). Perhaps it took place in much the same way that stories are passed from one generation to another around the fire at night in African villages. There were no written scrolls or books at that time (O’Donovan, 1997:31).

The implication of Gadamer’s view on the verbal nature of communication for biblical hermeneutics, particularly in theological schools in vernacular contexts of Africa, is that whenever we read the written word of God, we should focus on hearing His voice, the verbal utterance which brought about the written text. A key goal of hermeneutics is to understand the verbal tradition, using the written text as a bridge. Ultimately, it should lead us to divine speech acts and God himself, who is the source of such speeches: How can we study “the many and various things done with words” (Briggs, 2008:75) in the Bible so as to hear God’s voice through the text?

There arises a key question from a Hausa-Positive Context of theological education: are Hausa-speaking people using the Hausa Bible and theological resources—many of which have been translated from English—also capable, when compared with their English-speaking counterparts, of understanding

the written text in a manner that leads them to hear God's voice speaking through the text? The response to this question is, no doubt, affirmative as is attested by the many excellent expository sermons one hears from pulpits in various Hausa-speaking churches, based on the Hausa Bible which, for close to ninety years now, has achieved recognition as the "book of the people".

Following the publication of the complete Hausa Bible in 1932, an inter-missions conference was held at Miango in 1935. Turaki notes that at the conference a resolution was passed which made the Hausa translation of the Bible "the book of the people" of Northern Nigeria and other Hausa-speaking contexts (Turaki, 1999:445). Like other translations of the Bible into African languages, this "book of the people" has contributed much to advancement of Christianity in Africa. As Molola (2006:1315) writes: "There can be no doubt that the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Africa owes an enormous debt to Bible translation".

It should also be noted that the written text in Hausa has captured and represented God's verbal communication in a manner that ensures credibility and effectiveness in Hausa-based hermeneutical processes and preaching. Nevertheless, it has not exhausted all of God's communication. In fact,

it does not capture the full richness of the language, cannot capture either the full richness of personhood, or the full richness of God the infinite person in whose image we human persons are made (Poythress, 2009:369).

Fourth, there is a need to consider this question that Gadamer asks: "How can we possibly understand anything written in a foreign language if we are thus imprisoned in our own?" (Gadamer, 2006:403) In Nigeria,

Talking of literature and instructional material, a majority of the literature available in theological institutions in Nigeria today are Western imported. The concepts and reasoning patterns are foreign. Both students and teachers have to wrestle with them and even bend some of the ideas to fit their own cultural contexts (Kafang, 2009:2).

Accordingly, Gadamer notes that the ability of a person to reason in any language constitutes one's capacity to achieve hermeneutical experience. If a person cannot reason in a language in which he is at home with, there is no guarantee that he will do that in a different language.

The question of understanding in a foreign language can also be asked with reference to Hausa-Positive Contexts of theological education: How can people who are more at home with Hausa possibly understand anything pertaining to education in general, and theological education in particular, that is written in English, French, or any other foreign language, if they are thus imprisoned in their own? Many people in these contexts are still struggling with the ability to reason in Hausa language, nevertheless these are the same people who are found studying in English language-based theological schools in Hausa-Positive Contexts. In line with Gadamer's thoughts, there is no guarantee that they can achieve any meaningful hermeneutical experience in their foreign language situationx.

### ***Questions Arising in Appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutical Concept***

*Research Question 2:* What emerging questions need to be addressed in appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical concept in reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example?

The section focuses on "de-Gadamerizing" language and hermeneutics, based on selected issues from Gadamer's thoughts that could be questionable from a Christian perspective in terms of the interconnection between language and hermeneutics. The term "de-Gadamerizing" refers to those areas of Gadamer's ideas on language and hermeneutics that this study considers either questionable or in need of further clarification. Four of these issues shall be considered.

First, Gadamer holds that a key goal of interpretation is to "make" the text to communicate on our behalf; that is, it must "speak for us".

The text is made to speak through interpretation. But no text and no book speaks if it does not speak a language that

reaches the other person. Thus interpretation must find the right language if it really wants to make the text speak (Gadamer, 2006:398).

From a Christian perspective, especially with reference to Scripture, the text—whether in oral or written form—has always been speaking. There is no need to “make” it speak again. On the contrary, the need is for people to learn to hear the voice of God as he speaks through the text; herein lies a key point of Christian hermeneutics. If humans can “make” the text to speak, that would amount to exercising authority over the text and possibly over God, the divine and ultimate author of Scripture. We can then “make” Scripture say whatever we want—which effectively means, hearing our own voice as we speak. For Gadamer “to interpret means precisely to bring one’s own preconceptions into play so that the text’s meaning can really be made to speak for us” (Gadamer, 2006:398).

Second, Gadamer holds that the text, by virtue of its being fixed, has no connection either to its author or to its history.

What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships. Normative concepts such as the author’s meaning or the original reader’s understanding in fact represent only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding (Gadamer, 2006:397).

Gadamer holds that to understand, in a hermeneutical sense, does not mean primarily that one should reason his or her way back into the past, such as through a reader relating with the authors of the written text. Oeming (2006:55) explains the linguistic-structuralist method in a manner that illumines this Gadamerian concept:

A text must exist on its own as a linguistic world, a world of language. The interpreter should not loose himself in an obscure reconstruction of history, nor in an author’s inner life only guessed at, nor in chaos of personal subjectivity. Only the

concentration on the text itself brings security and objectivity.  
We can take back only what exists black and white.

For Gadamer understanding is to have a present involvement in what is said. It is about sharing in what the text shares with us. It does not really matter whether the text gives us a picture of the author or whether we want to interpret the text as a historical source. What matters is that we are participating in a conversation and sharing in a present meaning. Consequently, “the horizon of understanding cannot be limited either by what the writer originally had in mind or by the horizon of the person to whom the text was originally addressed” (Gadamer, 2006:396).

Especially with reference to Scripture, evangelical Christian hermeneutics differs from this position, which detaches the text from the author and its authority. Understanding the author and original recipients is essential to Scriptural understanding. Otherwise, interpretation denigrates into *eisegesis*, reading into the Scripture whatever we desire to read out from it.

Third, Gadamer holds that the reader is the basis for the validity of a written text. The reader achieves this position when he is able to reawaken the written word and bring it back to live by detaching it from its author. From a Christian perspective, the tenability of Gadamer’s placement of the reader as the arbiter of a text’s claim to truth is, when applied to the Scriptural text, groundless. Scripture originates from God and

God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? (Numbers 23:19, NIV).

As such there is nothing to arbitrate in matters of Scriptural validity or authority. Furthermore, the fact that human beings are themselves sinners makes them thoroughly unqualified to be arbiters in matters concerning the truthfulness of Scripture. Gadamer, however, says otherwise: “It does not occur to people who are not used to reading that what is written down could be wrong, since to them anything written seems like a self-authenticating document” (Gadamer, 2006:396).



Fourth, Gadamer holds that interpretation is fundamentally accidental. The interpretation itself does not replace the interpreted work, the written word, which is fixed and permanent. Gadamer (2006:402) holds that “since interpretation as a whole is made up of a thousand little decisions which all claim to be correct” it is most possibly by accident that one can arrive, if ever, at a correct interpretation. Consequently, says Gadamer (2006:398),

There cannot, therefore, be any single interpretation that is correct “in itself,” precisely because every interpretation is concerned with the text itself. The historical life of a tradition depends on being constantly assimilated and interpreted. An interpretation that was correct in itself would be a foolish ideal that mistook the nature of tradition. Every interpretation has to adapt itself to the hermeneutical situation to which it belongs.

Contrary to Gadamer’s view of the accidental nature of interpretation, evangelical biblical hermeneutics subscribes to a hermeneutico-historical process of interpretation. This means interpretation is not guesswork. When propositions or conclusions with regard to the meaning of texts are made, they are made in a manner that appropriately represents the meaning of the text as intended by the author and as understood by original recipients of a text— as faithfully, *not accidentally*, as possible. However, it is not necessarily always true that evangelical hermeneutics subscribe to the hermeneutico-historical process of interpretation; there are occurrences misinterpretations of Scripture was made by evangelicals either consciously or obliviously.

### ***Consequences of Appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Hermeneutical Concept***

*Research Question 3:* What strategies need to be engaged consequent upon appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutical concept towards reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example?

This study now discusses strategies to apply relevant Gadamerian concepts to the reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa. Four possible strategies are discussed below.

First, more theological textbooks of key importance need to be translated from an international language such as English into local languages such as Hausa. Since every translation is an interpretation from the perspective of the translator, it is appropriate that those who translate English language materials represent an evangelical Christian point of view and be people who are theologically grounded because “translators are regularly called upon to make choices regarding meanings, and their choices are going to affect how you understand” (Fee and Stuart, 2003:19). Without credible translators, evangelical Christianity will be misrepresented by the misinterpretations of translators.

Second, teachers in English language-based theological schools need to translate their class notes and key resources into the vernacular to supplement both English language materials and the verbal process of teaching in the class.

Third, there is need to create conditions in English-speaking theological schools in which students can be more adequately prepared for various Christian ministries via vernaculars. Many students of these theological schools are involved in Hausa-Positive ministries after they graduate. In line with Gadamerian conception, to understand a language is to live in it. For the Hausa-Positive Contexts, this calls for teaching Hausa as a core general course in pre-degree and degree programs of English-speaking theological schools. This should be supported by appropriate practical ministry experiences in Hausa-speaking areas. In this manner, conditions will be created in which students are trained for Christian service in Hausa-Positive Contexts, thereby giving them practical preparation for post-graduation ministry in such contexts.

Fourth, there is need to employ Hausa in teaching in English-speaking theological schools in vernacular contexts. This takes into consideration the Gadamerian concept that communication is basically verbal, even when it is in written text.

All societies, including those having a highly literate segment, have oral communication at their core. Oral communication is the basic function on which writing and literacy is based (Network, 2009:314).

Accordingly, teachers in English-language theological schools should consider making regular summaries or remarks in Hausa to help their students *think* in terms that are closer at home to their native languages.<sup>1</sup>

## **Conclusion**

### ***Summary***

A noteworthy category of those who go through formal theological education in many vernacular contexts of Africa have more effective hermeneutical experience when an appropriate vernacular is engaged as a pedagogical facility for delivering the curriculum. This statement is without prejudicing the awareness that there are theological students and even teachers in this category who are forced by circumstances to learn, teach, or communicate using English or other foreign languages. Nevertheless, learners and teachers in this category still find the vernacular more appropriate to make them feel at home in the formal learning environment. This study highlighted the need to reformulate the curriculum of theological education in vernacular contexts of Africa so that this category of academic participants have the support necessary to be more effective handlers of knowledge.

### ***Recommendations***

The following recommendations, resultant from appropriating Hans Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutical concept, are targeted at stakeholders in reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa..

#### **1. Recommendation to Theological Schools in Vernacular Contexts of Africa.**

A basic Pauline church edification principle holds that “whatever builds the church up—enlarges its understanding, deepens its worship, strengthens its love—is to be encouraged” (Stott, 1994:101). Lamin Sanneh (2002:174) notes that, “God, who has no linguistic favorites, has determined that we should all

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<sup>1</sup>Distinguished Professor Janvier, an English-speaking American, was re-known for applying Hausa language in a very effective manner, to facilitate teaching-learning while he taught at the prestigious English-speaking Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS) in Plateau State Nigeria, which is located in a Hausa-Positive Context of Northern Nigeria.

hear the Good News ‘in our own native tongue,’. Vernaculars of Africa are also a church-building language. They are *equally*, and at many times *better*, able to facilitate the achievement of effective hermeneutical experience in learning situations that English or other foreign languages. Therefore, they should be encouraged in theological education in African vernacular contexts.

This recommendation could be achieved if the curriculum is reformulated to include at least three provisions. First, there should be two versions of each course guide: one using an international language facility such English, and a second engaging a vernacular such as Hausa language. This would allow students with more competence in vernaculars to be well-oriented to the course right from its commencement. Second, a five-minute summary of the course material should be delivered in a vernacular at the conclusion of each class clock hour where teaching-learning processes are conducted in English or other international languages. This will allow learners with less competence in international languages to better comprehend the content of learning. Third, an alternative set of assessment could be given in each course: one option in an international language, and another option in an appropriate vernacular. Depending on the provisions of the course guide, learners could take one or both alternative; this would allow learners to reveal their best, while also giving teachers a more effective tool of knowing whether learning has actually occurred.

## 2. Recommendation to Language Development and Literacy Agencies.

It was observed in the study that many vernacular-speaking people groups in vernacular context show an interest in having a Bible translation in their vernacular languages just to have a permanent document of their language, even when the language is not evident in their daily communication. In order to make such languages active in *living* communication, language development and Bible translating agencies need to consider developing and/or translating additional materials into the vernacular concerned: Bibles, hymnbooks, Christian educational ministry materials etc. These should be provided in hard-copies, soft-copies, as well as audio and video versions. If this is done, it will be a foundation block for designing and constructing the curriculum for church-based theological education using local vernaculars.

### 3. Recommendation to Bible Translation Agencies in Hausa-Positive Contexts.

Generally, people in Hausa-Positive Contexts are closer to Hausa cultural contexts than they are to English or Western cultures. Even if they cannot have a Bible translation in their local vernaculars, it is recommended that they use the Hausa Bible and Hausa resources. Given that a large number of people in Hausa Positive Contexts are conversant and more conversationally at home with Hausa than they are with English or their native languages, Bible translation agencies should assist them to have Bibles and other theological education resources in Hausa. While the number of Hausa-speaking theological schools in Hausa-Positive Contexts has been reducing since the end of the twentieth century, Bible translation agencies in Hausa-Positive Contexts should liaise or partner with churches in said contexts to ensure the survival of some of the Bible schools, supported with a specially reformulated curriculum that is designed to fit the contexts. This step should further help in consolidating Biblical Christianity via African vernacular contexts.

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## **Eschatology as New Creation: A Reflection on Oliver O'Donovan's Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

This essay is a theological reflection on the reception of Oliver O'Donovan's two main contributions to theology and ethics namely *Resurrection and Moral Order* and *Desire of the Nations*, with special interest on his discussion in chapter three on eschatology and history. In this reflection I have explored his thoughts on eschatology and how it relates to creation and history in the modern contexts, and also how his thoughts on Christian and political liberalism converge in order to make a united argument on the creation of a new social order that is rooted in Christian biblical vision and morality. His creative moves have been acknowledged in how he approaches and argues his points on the subject. My own argument is that O'Donovan has opened a new vista of appropriating the idea of eschatology to the redemption of life and the transformation of creation. Furthermore, I have discovered his sustained realism on the influence and role of Christianity in giving birth and rise to the modern civilization and the need to sustain such influence within the idea of just judgment and freedom in dignity. His eschatological vision goes beyond the popular notion of eschatology as the end time, or time of the end; rather, from his ideas we see eschatology as the end of time.

### **Introduction**

What is eschatology? How does eschatology relate to the phenomenon of creation and the moral order of life? And how do we speak about eschatology in this modern time in the face of the moral crises of our time? These are



questions that cannot be exhaustive in this short essay but in one way or another there would be responses to them. One of the major works of Prof. Oliver O'Donovan namely, *Resurrection and Moral Order* ([1986] 1994) is the main material that will be the guide in this reflection. The method of this study is basically a theological reflection on O'Donovan's perspective on the idea or doctrine of eschatology, and how that stimulates in us the need for new sense of moral reasoning in the modern world. I will not go into any depth in trying to know how *Resurrection and Moral Order* (hence RMO) has been extensively received by other thinkers, whether this be theologians, philosophers, or social critics around the world, but rather from my own African socioreligious context; with special emphasis on Christian thinking, I wish to reflect and respond to some of the patterns or challenging views that O'Donovan has brought to our horizon. This would point out the influence of Christianity in the construction of moral theology and the need to move beyond the horrors of life in the present world and life experiences. This mainly points us to the new vision of life as demonstrated by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

## **Eschatology as New Creation**

Oliver O'Donovan as one of the leading Christian philosophers and theologians of our time is not without his own surprises. One of the interesting surprises I noticed in his writing and approach of theme of eschatology is its placement in his writing and how he opened his discussion of it. He got to the idea of eschatology already in his third chapter. It is amazing for me not to see eschatology at the latter part or even as the last chapter of his work. I do not know how exactly this placement was informed but I would leave my comment until the end of this reflection. Secondly, I am also surprised that O'Donovan did not start his study on eschatology with the usual definition of what the term means, not even how it functions within his own writing. He links eschatology and history as two points of dialectical interest and reflection. Thirdly, O'Donovan's eschatological and historical reasoning is focused on the reception of Psalm 8 by the writer of the book of Hebrews in 2:5-9. These puzzling ways are not new to those who are used to reading O'Donovan, but they may even be serious distractions to novices in theological systems or even Christian reasoning. It is clear from here, to me at least, that O'Donovan does not write his works as systems; thus, he can be classified as a Christian theologian and dialectical philosopher of the 20th and 21st century who can

respond to issues of the time but not really one who has any serious interest in providing a systematic approach. His arguments follow his dialectical trajectory mainly as invitation to also think along and learn to reason from within the content of the revelation of God as given in the Christian tradition.

From O'Donovan's engagement, we see Psalm 8 being received by the writer of Heb. 2:5-9 who had a new vision of the order of life and the rule of the world in a different dimension of time. "The Order which the Psalmist believed that he beheld in the world around him the writer to the Hebrews declares to belong to 'the world to come' (O'Donovan 1994:52). This "world to come" is generally the eschaton. There is no indication of the actual time or the possible leading signs of this world to come in O'Donovan's discussions as seen in chapter three of his RMO. Nevertheless, his interest has been on the new order that this new world would surely be set upon; this coming world for me has been set in tension with the renewal of the old world in which we live, as can be seen in the arguments of Karl Barth (Barth 1958; Hodgson 1989; Gunton 2004) and even Jürgen Moltmann (1996). The renewal of all things is the actual doctrine of the reconciliation of the world and selves, even the lives that were wronged and hurt in many diverse ways (Volf 1996:2005). This new world order would be the new rule of God in the world that would be the healing of the nations and the lives of all the oppressed as argued by Miroslav Volf (2021:66-151). But O'Donovan does not go as far as to tell us what exactly could be expected in this new coming world other than the rules of the game shall surely change.

The writer to the Hebrews sees the "Man" depicted in Psalm 8 as Jesus "who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death" (Heb. 2:5ff; O'Donovan 1994:52). Yet, O'Donovan seems to read the text somewhat backwards, with Psalm 8 as a cosmological utterance. This for him does not mean a new world that would totally suppress the Psalmist's expectation; but rather, he showed something of its ontological fulfilment. O'Donovan (1994:52) argues from the side of the writer to the Hebrews saying, "He is not attempting to replace the psalmist's doctrine of creation with an eschatology which will better suit his own Christological interests". Thus, side by side, we see an open exegesis without any serious synthesis with a certain point of convergence, here as regards a theological view for the eschaton. O'Donovan does not see the vision of

eschatology as stripping humanity of its vital role in the creation order, not even in the Christ event. This points more to its revitalization and restoration than its replacement. O'Donovan (1994:52) further argues by saying that "... this eschatological triumph of mankind is not an innovative order that has nothing to do with the primal ordering of man as creature to his Creator".

O'Donovan builds his eschatological vision on the salvific work of Christ, of redemption, as the divine act of restoration. In his words (1994:53), "When we describe the saving work of Christ by the term 'redemption', we stress the fact that it presupposes the created order. 'Redemption' suggests the recovery of something given and lost". And the question here is, what is the redemptive nature of eschatology? What was that which was given at creation to humankind and was lost and now would be redeemed and restored at the eschaton? To answer these questions O'Donovan's thoughts lead us back to the moment of God's blessing of creation when God gave charge to humankind to take care or to "rule" (*masal*) the creation. The Old Testament scholar, Walter Kaiser Jr. (1978:76) argues critically on the divine mandate of Gen. 1:26-27 that it was never a given order for human beings to brutally use creation. God did not give license for mankind to destroy creation but rather to learn to tend it as something of their own sense of responsibility. In his 1984/1985 Gifford Lectures, published as *God in Creation*, Jürgen Moltmann (1985) also gives a new doctrine of creation as the habitat of God. The human being created in the image of God is created to be a viceroy to the rule of God in the world. The rule of God is that which tends and gives life in abundance to all that God has created. This is because all God's creation is the object of God's love (cf. O'Donovan). The redemptive act of God to humankind is the recovery of the humankind's rule of creation. This for me is the restoration of the harmony and vitality that has been grossly abused and neglected by the sinfulness of humanity, and the arrogance of modern science and technology which in many ways cares less about created nature.

O'Donovan gives us a new vision of God's redemption not only to humankind but to the entire cosmic order. God comes in God's love to bring back order to the chaos that sin has brought. The enmity of life that turns the human being in the modern world into more of a consumer than a steward shall be adjusted by the transforming act of God. Jürgen Moltmann (2012) presents us with a new modern anthropology and eschatology in his reflection on the dangers of

our time and the crisis of being human. In a similar sense Michael Welker's Gifford Lectures of 2019 also focus on the creation of human beings in the image of God; asking the question: in God's image? This poses the question on the second side of the created order not as first given, but as displayed by human beings in the modern world. Thus, Michael Welker follows the cultural and innovative trends of modern history to see how far he could trace back this pristine human being created in the image of God. I am afraid to say that the life of the modern human being is nothing but a big disappointment to him and surely even to God. But the time of redemption is coming as O'Donovan sums it up; this would not be the end of all things as if the last page of a book is being closed, but it shall be the time of cosmic redemption. "For redemption is what God has done for the whole, and not just for a part of that which he once made" (O'Donovan 1994:53).

Jürgen Moltmann in his *Theology of Hope* (1964) seems to dismiss any sense of ending when he sees even the end as a new beginning. This is a sign of serious hope – who knows even militant hope? But there would be an end of some things. Not everything will continue as they have begun: the problem of evil and its effect shall be done away with. O'Donovan refers to "[t]he end of futility" (Rom. 8:20; O'Donovan 1994:53). This would be possible, and it is surely one of the markers of the eschaton. This end would lead us to the beginning of a life in shalom. The end of evil and misery is the mystery of this coming eschaton. Miroslav Volf (2021:131-151) sees the necessity of the end of all evil and even the end of the memory of all evil as the experience of God's forgiving love and the joy of reconciliation of all things. To Volf (2021:276), every memory of evil if it should endure, it would undo heaven. But heaven he sees is the moment of the end of bad memory or the memories of sin and evil. And thus it is a new time that did not evolve from anywhere but broke open from the depth of the heart of God into our human experiences as the gift of God's newness.

O'Donovan (1994:53) creatively sees history as a great movement of reality to its goal "through eschatology". Eschatology here does not close the door of everything but rather leaves it open for the coming of all reality into the goal for which it was created. This he (1994:54) further explains by the use of the word "transformation." In his own words, "The eschatological transformation of the world is neither the mere repetition of the created world nor its

negation". It is hard at this point to logically explain what O'Donovan thinks or how he wants his argument to proceed.

Firstly, he denies the idea of transformation as repetition; this goes contra to Barth, Rahner, Moltmann and even Pannenberg. Secondly, he also argues against seeing transformation as negation, which is also contra Nietzsche, and Tillich. It is impossible to force O'Donovan to stand with J. Derrida, or J. Caputo, in their stagnation of thoughts and their forceful expansion beyond reason or contortion beyond feeling. O'Donovan seems to say, "Things are not going to go on as they have been. There will be an interruption that would come from somewhere, sometime not to take away or merely to repeat, but to give something new." Now I think if this makes sense then O'Donovan awaits the miracle of renewal as the fulfilment of all things. The reason why it is a miracle is because it transcends that which was, and which is. It comes from somewhere beyond the now. But this somewhere is where the now is moving toward. And when it gets there, it shall all be well and fulfilled (Julian of Norwich).

O'Donovan (1994:54) further argues that, "Eschatological transformation rules out all the other conceivable eventualities which might have befallen creation, all those ends to which God did not destine it". This makes the eschaton also the new moment of purification. All that which intruded into the creation order that was not its actual reality shall be purged away. This in O'Donovan's view does not necessarily take us back to the Garden of Eden. But it releases us to live in the realized Kingdom of God. The kingdom of peace, joy, justice, and righteousness. O'Donovan sees the link between time and space in the question of the end time. This is actually not just to end time as we popularly say it but mostly the end of time. "Eschatological transformation resolves the unanswered question of creation, the question of what its temporal extension means" (O'Donovan 1994:54). What O'Donovan means by "temporal extension" includes the idea of seeing time as ultimately the time of God in which the life of God's gift and creation finds its fulfilment. This is the actual goal of eschatology that humanity and all creation are not bound in the prison of time but are all released to enjoy the fresh air of freedom. John Calvin saw the glory of God in the flourishing of the human being. This idea of flourishing life is the actual experience of true salvation and true blessing in God. According to the South African theologian Denise Ackerman (2014), to be

human is to be blessed and to be blessed is to flourish in the goodness of God. (cf. Marais 2014).

## **Natural Ends and History**

Creation has its nature, and that which is only natural has an end. It is not the end in itself but an open means to an end. Nature here is quite different to the natural. Yes, there may be correlation, but the natural in this context would be seen as that which is transient. The order of the natural is that which characterizes the present world; this order cannot endure forever. It must be open to its own transformation. O'Donovan (1994:57) argues that "natural order and natural meanings are understood only as

moments in the historical process. They are to be dissolved and reconstituted by that process, and their value lies not in any integrity of their own but in being raw material for transformation".

In looking at that which is natural in the nature of God's creation, O'Donovan (1994:57) sees the begging question of history. In his view, "[w]e cannot object to the fact that history should be taken seriously". The idea of taking history seriously does not mean approving every bit of it or negating it all together. Taking history seriously, as I at least see in O'Donovan, is to live in history with open eyes. To live with hope and cheerfulness and not mere human optimism but the vital hope that all shall be well. To take history seriously means to understand the distance between the human self and the history of God. God is the God of all history. No part of history can ever be out of the Lordship of God (Abraham Kuyper). In this regard, the history of evil as seen in the modern world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries can still be held in the hope of God's actual renewal and that evil that reigns in the heart of some human beings to that makes them be the agents of its negation shall be rescued from their tyranny, and the peace of God shall be the new order and the experience of life.

The relation between creation and history is quite open and delicate. This delicate negotiation leaves the doors open for the harmony of both. O'Donovan (1994:57) observed that, "That which most distinguishes the concept of creation is that it is complete" "Creation is the given totality of

order which forms the presupposition of historical existence". History is the ongoing process of creation and not its actual end. There is no end of creation until the end of this time of creation, this time of being human, this time of brokenness. This would be found ultimately in the time of perfection beyond the meaninglessness of this transience created order (cf. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*). There is a tension between the traditional view of creation as being complete and the modern view of the incompleteness of creation. The modern perspective believes in the incompleteness of creation, for example, O'Donovan (1994:59) referred to a hymn in his discussion from his modern Anglican tradition which in part reads, "Creation's Lord, we give you thanks/ That this your world is incomplete". This takes my mind back to Hannah Arendt's analysis of the modern man in her book *The Human Condition* (1998).

The modern human being is *homo faber* and *homo laborans*. This means that humankind are struggling beings, the human being is a creative agent who always wants to manufacture things and also contribute to the order of things in the world. This is why some would even opt to live without any sense of submission to the reality of God. The modern human being wants to always contribute to the making of things. This makes him or her to glory in the incompleteness of creation. But creation as given in terms of the natural order of things has been completed. Now what remains is the continual manifestation of the effect of that order. But creation as "the making of things" for the comfort and enjoyment of the human being in the world cannot be said to be actually completed, for the modern human being is yet to complete his or her creation work.

According to O'Donovan's perspective, he argues for the biblical traditional view when he said that God completes his creation and what remains for us is to enter his rest (cf. Gen. 2:2; Heb. 4:10) "Historical fulfilment means our entry into a completeness which is already present in the universe" (O'Donovan 1994:59). This "rest" is the experience of the eternal fulfilment of our life in the presence and perfection of God. At this stage the completion of creation is not only realized or accepted but it would be fully experienced. Thus, "If we can, and must, speak of the completeness of God's work in creation, we can, and must, speak equally of the incompleteness of his work in the providential government and redemption of history" (O'Donovan 1994:59). "To defend the

finitude of history as the object of God's creative decree, the early Fathers spoke of creation as absolute origin, *ex nihilo*" (O'Donovan 1994:60).

## Creation as Covenant

Another important point that O'Donovan (1994:60) made in his discussion of creation between the natural and historical is the idea of seeing creation as covenant. But sadly, he never elaborated on this idea so we cannot say much about it. But it is still agreeable that creation is God's initiated life which is covenantal; this means it moves according to God's given rules of creation and these rules are the principles upon which the covenantal activity of God and God's creation is found. The actual sense of creation as given and as history is made cogent here when creation is seen in the context of time.

"Creation as a completed design is presupposed by any movement in time" (O'Donovan 1994:60). The eschaton shall be creation without time. This is the end of time. Sometime in April, 2022 in one of his emails to me, O'Donovan challenged me to reflect on the idea in Rev. 10:6 which says, "Time shall be no more." For me I see the idea of time (*chronos*) as the idea of history. Thus history shall be no more. When creation reaches its goal there would not be time to regulate human activities. Creation would be left in its given beauty and no more movement in time. We shall only and always be joyful in the presence of God. Thus the idea of the completion of creation can only be discussed in its theory, in its design, but not yet in its experiential sense. The end of time, what eschatology is, eventually shall be the fulfilment of history and the coming of God (cf. Moltmann 1996). This would be the time of true justice and righteousness and shalom.

Creation is seen as that which awaits the transformative action of God in order to redeem it from the futility there is and to restore it to its actual sense. "The transformation is in keeping with the creation, but in no way dictated by it" (O'Donovan 1994:62). The understanding of creation as God's open reality leaves it open to the coming of the transformation of God. No matter what creation becomes, God's power is always available to make it whole. This comes not from creation itself, not by means of human science and technology, but it comes from the creative love and mercy of God. God in creation as Moltmann argues directs our attention to the God who actively



loves his creation and seeks to always make it his home. The eschaton shall be the moment (without time) in which the creation of God becomes the actual home of God and the God of creation becomes the home of his creation. This would usher us into the Sabbath rest (Moltmann) or “the rest” (O’Donovan) that God has already destined to give his creation. This is the moment of fulfilment and delight in all wholeness. If we keep this argument open it might be readily dismissed by O’Donovan as reading too much into history or away from it. It may appear as a kind of dogmatic view of that which is meant to be the natural order of history. This dogmatization has been confronted by O’Donovan in the name of modern historicism. In O’Donovan’s own words (1994:63) he said, “Our complaint against historicism is that it has made every act of providence by definition an act of salvation.” “All happenings have taken on a Messianic character”. I would now turn briefly to O’Donovan and listen to his perspective on the way forward from what he suspects is nothing but modern historicism.

## **Historicist Ethics?**

O’Donovan speaks of a historicist’s ethics when I expected that he should construct something beyond it. By this I do not mean that he returns to it in order to promote it, but only to criticize it. My expectation here is to see how he pushes the boundaries beyond this dogmatic enticement. O’Donovan (1994:64) began with the assessment of the formation of history from a classical creationist perspective, saying, “Classical Christian thought proceeded from a universal order of meaning and value, an order given in creation and fulfilled in the kingdom of God, and order, therefore, which forms a framework for all action and history, to which action is summoned to conform in its making of history”.

To briefly highlight some of his view here, O’Donovan (1994:64) argues that “Historicism comes in many forms, some inclining to be definite and some to be agnostic about the ends which human cultures serve”. He (1994:65) further points out that, “In man’s dealing with nature historicism invariably promotes a strong tendency to intervene and manipulate”. This is what I see more in Moltmann’s critique of modern science and technology in which the autonomy of human reasoning has made humankind the masters of nature and the destroyers and consumers of its beauty (cf. Moltmann 1985). If this is correct

then historicism must be the extension of modernity's triumph of humanity over nature and not going by the classical view of life and history as ordered by God.

O'Donovan further examined the possible failure of human beings in the capture of nature by means of historicism. "If historicism fails in its treatment of nature for lack of a concept of creation, its social thought fails equally for lack of a strong eschatology" (O'Donovan 1994:66). What remains vague from the above quote from O'Donovan is his idea of "treatment of nature" and the "lack of a concept of creation." Does the treatment of nature mean the right dealing or right care of and for nature? Does "a concept of creation" here refers to the biblical testimony of the revelation of God as the creator of all creation? Where does O'Donovan leave his idea of "creation"? In the field of biblical exegesis or at the door step of secular or social philosophy? These are questions yet to be clearly answered.

O'Donovan sees the idea of human creative action in the quest for something new beyond that which is in the present. The human being who needs to live towards the goal of history must learn to protest against the stagnation and abuse of history now. "Protest, rather than administrative evolution, must be the engine that propels history forwards on its way, the tool with which we fashion the raw material of past and present experience into the artefact of our own future," O'Donovan (1994:69) argues.

## **Restoration, Politics and Christian Liberalism**

Tranter (2018) examines the contribution of O'Donovan with regards to the nature of the world in the future. The argument is mainly to stress the assurance of the coming of the new world and the renewal of the old. Thus, what has been created and given would not be totally lost and what has been distorted would be renewed and restored. O'Donovan has made a strong argument on the nature of Christian ethic in the light of Christian liberalism and the political interest of that possibility (cf. O'Donovan 1996). O'Donovan has creatively worked at restoring the truth of life through the Christian imagination and the processing of the Christian vision of life in the past and also in the future. This has been done as his own way of restoring the almost lost argument from the Christian perspective in the wider Western tradition of

politics, philosophy, and life. He has found the space in which the “truth” of the Christian tradition would always become meaningful and sound into the right direction of life (Tranter 2018:136). This is the work of “restoration” in which not only what has been given or created his restored but even the moral order that has been terribly distorted by human inadequacy would be made anew (Tranter 2018:136). The doctrine of restoration in Christian theology is a very good news not only with regards to politics and ethics in the present world but also as part of the central vision of eschatology.

The restoring action of God is organized and guided by God’s passion (Tranter 2018:141). Moltmann (1993:21-60) argues on God’s nature is an expression of God’s love. God does not deny or abandon God’s self. But God in mercy can adjust God’s action for the sake of the expression of his forgiving love. The passion of God is that which holds all things together as that which God has truly cherished and wishes to keep together in love. O’Donovan (1996:178) is referred to by Tranter as seeing the condition of the Church in the wider context of the world. The Church is truly a suffering community in the midst of the powers of darkness. The good news through all this is the fact that the Lord Christ has already conquered all the power of evil which assail the church (Tranter 2018:141). The Church lives not by itself in the struggle with darkness but rather it lives from the victory that Christ has already won on her behalf in the world. This has remade history in the history of Jesus Christ.

From O’Donovan, Tranter (2018:141) points out how the resurrection of Christ has opened the new pattern for humanity. The history of humanity has never been truly realized until the coming of Jesus Christ. Christ has been the only demonstration of who God truly is and who a human being truly is and should always be. The resurrection of Christ brought in the new moral order of life in which the creative power of God prevails over the chaos of life and history. The power of God as seen is that which gives life in the darkness of death and frees all that God so loves into the newness of the given life. The emptiness of the tomb after the resurrection is both a testimony and the creative demonstration of the presence of life in the midst of death. This gives hope and new vision to the contexts of history in which death seem to prevail. Many African countries like Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, etc. suffer the presence of evil as that which marginalizes, steals, and kills. But in Christ we are all invited to open our eyes into the new future that Christ has opened in his body.

Without reducing our ethical vision to an imagined or ideological Jesuology, we are rather invited in Christ to see the new realistic sense of life in which the life and death are met in the cross of Christ (Tranter 2018:142). This new realization has been found as key to the politics of Christian mission (cf. Kerr 2009). The politics of Christian mission here does not mean a new sense of Christian militancy. But rather a true sense of reality as it has been given and as it has been opened to being in Christ. This is the new proclamation of life beyond death. The cross event of Jesus Christ announces the newness that death is not the last word. Death is the most dreadful experiences of life because many who fear death do not see it as an adventure but rather as an end in itself. But in Christ we see that death is the defeat of that which negates life and makes it miserable. The death of Christ is the victory of life over death thus the new ethics of the Christian is the new proclamation of life in all its fullness. Christian political presence and action is not meant to be a sense of intrusion upon the right of others as in colonial ideology but rather it is the opening of the gates of unfreedom and life negation to true freedom and life affirmation. The political moves of the Christian are the new mobilization that awakens the weary to see the new vision that Christ is and which he presents through his life. This means living a life in all its worth. This is the politics of the Christian. It is politics because of the dynamism of choice and action that makes it constructive and effective. It is politics because it helps to mobilize the other persons to see that which they might not have seen before and also key into the new vision and the new life.

O'Donovan and Yoder have imagined the correlation of theology and politics in a post Christian Protestantism (Doerksen 2009). The understanding of the Christian life in the post Christian context to me does not spell out a new sense of atheism or secularism but rather it points us to an inclusive vision of the Christian life that is marked by what O'Donovan calls Christian liberalism (cf. Chaplin 2002) In his reflection on O'Donovan's idea of Christian liberalism, Chaplin (2002:269) observed that it was not a triumphalist ideology of the influence of Christianity in Western culture and life, but rather it is a new form of reading of history (Western and beyond) from a Christological perspective. This helps us to see the reception of Christ in the modern world. The reality of human dignity, rights and rational judgment have not been neglected but rather they have been given a new force in the reality of Jesus Christ and his actions in the world of time and space. It is not meant to be a totalitarian

ideology but rather it is an open generosity of God in the person of Jesus Christ. The establishment of the Kingdom of God in its eschatological reality remains an open vision for the new world of order and life. There would be new society and government in which the righteousness of God and justice would dwell. The idea of judgment is also found in its perfection in the fullness of God's time in the Christ event. This is not about a fantasy game of dispensationalism (Chaplin 2002:290) but rather it would be the actual fulfillment of all time and life in that which God makes new in Christ. The thrust of Chaplin's reading of O'Donovan in order to present the world which a call for political responsibility remains a good contribution even to my African contexts. The bastardization of life will surely be reversed and all cases of human injustices made right in the fullness time. Eschatology thus is not the call to the end of all things, but rather for the renewal and fulfillment of all life.

The *Desire of the Nations* by O'Donovan has been well- received and critically examined by scholars like Chaplin and many more. The challenge to read it with the new interest of discovery remains interestingly stimulating. For through it, O'Donovan has given voice to the depth of Christian faith (O'Donovan 1994; 1996; 2004; 1989; McIlroy 2010). His thoughts have radically opened new vistas of thinking about politics, Christianity, civilization, and the world of time. O'Donovan's thoughts remain critical of modern secular thinking but still remain useful to the construction of democracy and the hope of the life in the new creation of God. This eschatological vision gives democracy a proper pattern that could fit into any Christian context and with the hope that it further shapes the Christian thinking into that which remains the common good for the enjoyment of all.

## **Jesus Christ as The Eschatos**

I wish to also highlight the person of Jesus Christ as central to the ethical thought of O'Donovan in RMO. Who is Jesus Christ in the modern world? How does the being of Jesus Christ affect our ethical understanding and relation to the created world and the world to come? O'Donovan in his analysis of the thoughts of the writer to the Hebrews sees the relation of Jesus Christ as the Son of man who helps to open the door of freedom for his brethren. O'Donovan (1994:52) said, "The triumph of the Son of man prepares the way for the future triumph of his 'brethren', mankind as a whole". The writer to the

Hebrews presents a new Christology which attends to the sufferings and pains and the goals of the incarnation or rather the appearance of Jesus Christ. This is seen in the temporal sense of the lowering of Jesus. We have earlier seen how the writer to the Hebrews transposed the thought of Psalm 8 with reference to Jesus Christ. In O'Donovan's (1994:53) view, "This enables him to see Christ's incarnation and glorification as the sign that mankind's subordination to angels is provisional and temporary". The idea of mankind's "subordination to angels" in this context is a new intrusion into both texts. There is nowhere either in Psalm 8 or Hebrews 2 where human beings are subordinates to angels. If this is done then it would be a good reason to actually accept and promote the subservience of human beings to angels and also encourage the worship of angels, even the so-called guardian angels. But the two texts referred to humankind and then Jesus, as being made "a little lower than the angels" this means the quality of the life of glory and power had to be set aside for the sake of fulfilling the mission of salvation of mankind (that is on the side of Jesus Christ). This Messianic vision opens us to the solidarity of God with human beings even in the lowly estate of our being. This is what we see being celebrated in Hebrews 2-4, that Jesus Christ has accepted our sense of being and by that has given us his own sense of glory as from the Father.

O'Donovan (1994:53) points us to the "age of sin and suffering" which to the Rabbinic tradition is the period of "[t]he temporary subjection of mankind to angels". Now we can see where O'Donovan met the idea of human beings' "subordination to angels." It must be a Rabbinic tradition which to me creates an ambiguity on the history of human relation to God through the Lordship of Jesus Christ as the only mediator between God and Man (1 Tim. 2:5). Even in the coming of Jesus Christ as the Savior the writer to the Hebrews said, "it was not angels that he came to help" but he came to help or save us, who are his brothers and sisters before God. The role of angels as seen in the letter to the Hebrews is that of being the servants of light to us who are going to inherit the salvation of Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:14). Thus, this moves us beyond the Rabbinic tradition of subordination to angels to a new paradigm of freedom in Jesus Christ.

O'Donovan (1994:53) further emphasized his arguments as we have seen before that, "The 'future age' would see the renewal of the created order as

God intended it to be". The revelation of God in Jesus Christ, which Karl Barth sees as the humanity of God, opens us the way to see the ontological vision of the incarnation (cf. Barth 1956; Barth 2015). This is the revelation of the glory of God in him and this is the glory that we too shall share in him (Rom 8:17-18). O'Donovan (1994:53) explains that "Although we do not see the glory of mankind, we do see the glory of Jesus in his passion and exaltation. That is the guarantee: the pioneer of salvation has been made perfect through suffering, and he calls the rest of humanity his 'brethren 'and his 'children'" (Heb. 2:11-13). The light of Christian eschatology is seen first at the dawn of the resurrection morning. To Moltmann and then to O'Donovan the resurrection of Christ is the key to the eschatological moment. "The resurrection of Christ, upon which Christian ethics is founded, vindicates the created order in this double sense: it redeems it and it transforms it" (O'Donovan 1994:55).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we need to ask this question of O'Donovan, where does Christian ethics look? In his discussion we see that, it "looks both backwards and forwards, to the origin and to the end of the created order. It respects the natural structures of life in the world, while looking forward to their transformation" (O'Donovan 1994:56). The eschaton is the new moment of fulfillment of all things and not the end of all things. O'Donovan creatively links the idea of creation to eschatological creation. This frees the world from the limitation of time, and the corruption of sin and all kinds of evil. This purifies the world from outside itself and makes it a new habitat for humankind and God and all creation. This is the new moment (*Augenblick*) in which everything reaches its goal as deigned by God. The eschaton, as I see it from O'Donovan's RMO is the coming of the day of God's justice that "supersedes all other justice" (O'Donovan 1994:70).

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# **Spiritual Transformation in the Nigerian Baptist Convention: a Historical Reflection on Recent Paradigms**

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## **Abstract**

Recently, there have been paradigm shifts in the spirituality of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. One major factor responsible for the spiritual transformation is the influence of Neo-Pentecostalism or the Charismatic movement. This new wave affects the Baptist heritage of the denomination. This study reflects on the spiritual transformation in the Nigerian Baptist denomination from the 1980s to 2022. The study is significant because it gives insight into the causes of the spiritual transformation in the Convention over the years and encourages the Convention to assess her spiritual activities to retain her identity continuously. It examines notable spiritual transformations in the history of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, highlighting the factors that were responsible for them and isolating some of the noticeable spiritual transformations. The paper utilises the historical-analytical method.

## **Introduction**

The Baptist denomination is one of Nigeria's foremost historic mainline churches. Rev. Thomas Jefferson Bowen, the first American missionary sent by the Southern Baptist Convention to Nigeria, landed in 1850 and planted the first Baptist Church in 1854 at Ijaye-Orile in the present Oyo State. The Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) had passed through many stages in its development. The era of leadership in NBC can be divided into two: the era of American missionaries and the era of nationals (Oguntade, 2012). In addition to her

attendant challenges and achievements, scholars have documented these early stages in different academic works (Bowen, 1857; Collins, 1993; Bamigboye, 2010; Ajayi, 2005). The concern of this paper is not to reflect on this historical background but to examine one of the current trends emerging in the NBC's history.

It is important to note that in the context of this study, spirituality is the total essence of the church in relating to and satisfying God, and enriching the spiritual state of humanity through various spiritual programmes to develop the total person to have a right standing with God and good human relations with fellow human beings in society. Spirituality is a channel through which an individual or collective Christians commune with the Divine and are consecrated for his course. Spirituality is in contrast with an emphasis on the physical or mundane. Spiritual transformation in this study implies a shift from a traditional pattern of spiritual activities to a new or changed pattern. Conservative Baptists consider evolving spirituality in the NBC as alien to the traditional Baptist faith and consequently a challenge to the continuity of the traditional Baptist faith as inherited from the missionaries.<sup>1</sup> If this trend continues, future generations will be disconnected from the Baptist heritage inherited from the 19th-century Nigerian Baptists. It would not be wrong to propose that the Baptist heritage will lack a Western touch in the near future. As such, an African version of the Baptist heritage will be inherited by future generations.

In this study, the author used participant observation to gather information. He, the author, was born into the Baptist denomination, received training as a

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<sup>1</sup> Foremost among the conservatives that are skeptical of the current trend in the NBC is the former Convention President (1977-79) and General Secretary (1979-91) Rev. Dr. S.T.Ola Akande. He wrote a letter dated 3 February 2014 to the Convention leadership through the NBC President, Rev. Dr. Supo Ayokunle titled "A Wake-Up Call to All Nigerian Baptist Leaders, That Our Baptist Heritage Faces The Danger of Corruption, Miss-Use, Give-Away, Liberalism and Annihilation as we come to the End of the 100 Years of Our Existence as NBC." Among other issues raised, he showed his displeasure at the increasing shift to Pentecostal forms of worship in the Baptist churches in Nigeria. He argued that the uniqueness of Baptist worship has been lost. He claimed that, "in our days, the Convention was very strict at ensuring that Baptist churches kept to the simplicity of our Baptist worship. I was a policeman to see that churches were conforming to our Baptist form of worship."

Baptist pastor, and has served in various capacities. The *Nigerian Baptist* magazine, correspondence, the Convention Constitution, Regulations, and Minutes were consulted. Likewise, some individuals with a long-standing in the Baptist denomination were interviewed. These formed the primary sources for this study. Previous works found in books, journals, and the internet were also consulted as secondary sources.

This study has its limitations. There are up to 17, 586 Baptist churches cooperating with NBC.<sup>2</sup> It is impossible to study each of these local Baptist churches in a study like this. However, churches' representatives meet annually in a designated place for Convention-in-session, which a conference or two conferences host. In recent years this annual gathering, which used to be a medium of reporting to the churches about the administrative stewardship of the NBC leadership and a forum for assessing NBC administrators, has witnessed a remarkable spiritual transformation. One can argue that what is obtainable in the Convention-in-session reflects what goes on in most local Baptist churches, because local Baptist churches were responsible for forming the Nigerian Baptist Convention in 1919. The approach for this study is historical-analytical. It is historical because it considers the past events that influenced the present situation. It describes what used to be in the past compared to the present situation. "It is an attempt to understand a phenomenon by determining its processes of growth and dynamics of internal change" (Ogundare 2013:22). It is analytical because it involves critique and evaluation of facts and information relative to this study.

## **Previous Studies on NBC Spirituality**

Scholars have often tried to explore Pentecostalism's influence on the NBC's spirituality. Travis Collins and Ademola Ishola (1995) provided a theological appraisal of charismatic renewal from the Baptist point of view and offered

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<sup>2</sup> In 1990, the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in cooperation with the Convention attempted a base count which stipulated the number of the Nigerian Baptist Convention churches to be 5,000. Another attempt by IMB/Global Missions Board coalition in 2000/2001 stipulated that the number of Nigerian Baptist churches to be about 8,000. See also the 2010 Nigerian Baptist Convention Church Census Report ([www.nigerianbaptist.org](http://www.nigerianbaptist.org), accessed 19 October 2022).

ways the denomination can respond to this phenomenon. Writing in the same period as Collins and Ishola, Emiola Nihinlola (1995) advocated for the accommodation of students and youths who had embraced a Pentecostal mode of worship like vigils, speaking in tongues, laying on of hands, and deliverance. Moses Oladeji (2005) extensively discussed the initial problems of Pentecostals' influence on mainline churches, especially the NBC. Deji Ayegboyin and Emiola Nihinlola (2008) focussed on the Pentecostal impact on Baptist churches' doctrine and practices, including ministration of spirit-baptism, deliverance services, and praying with anointing oil.

Samuel Tsegbeyeri's Ph.D. Dissertation focused on "Economic Paradigms of Nigerian Pentecostalism and their Influences on Mainline Protestant Churches in Warri Metropolis." The scope of the research was limited to Warri Metropolis, and including the Pentecostal influence on other mainline Protestant churches, including Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations, as well as Baptist. The present study is limited to the Nigerian Baptist Convention. Furthermore, the work of Tsegbeyeri was specifically on the influence of Pentecostals on economic paradigms. The present study is interested in the spiritual transformation of the NBC.

Humphrey Okereafor's (2011) dissertation addressed the "Influence of Pentecostalism on the Contemporary Nigerian Baptist Convention." This influence was limited to beliefs and practices, and how the NBC has responded to that influence. Mathews Ojo (2018), a notable scholar on Pentecostalism, identified that the response of Nigerian Baptists to the charismatic renewal passed through phases. Each epoch reflected certain peculiarities of that age. First, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the response was antagonism to Pentecostal spirituality. Second, from the mid-1990s, the posture changed to tolerance. Third, by the new millennium, there was a realisation that certain aspects could be utilised as a tool for church growth. The work of Mathews Ojo (2018) helps us to understand that, to a large extent, the NBC has accepted practices of Pentecostalism. These previous studies are relevant to the present study to some extent. However, to the best knowledge of the author, none of the previous works has analysed recent developments.

## The Antecedent to the Contemporary Spiritual Transformation in NBC

The gradual spread of charismatic renewal from the 1970s to the NBC has brought tremendous changes in Baptist spirituality. Before the embrace of the charismatic renewal, the worship services of Baptist churches used to be solemn. After a call to worship by the pastor or worship leader, the common slogan was "God is in his holy temple; let everyone be silent before him." Praise songs were not part of an order of service. However, hymns were a required part of the order of service. At least four relevant hymns would be sung in a particular service. At that time, shouts of "Hallelujah", speaking in tongues, prophecy, and over-night prayers were considered sacrilegious.<sup>3</sup> Congregational prayers conducted during mid-week services on Wednesdays, traditionally called prayer meetings (*ipade adura*), used to be contemplative compared to the aggressive prayers modelled after those of the African Indigenous Churches (AICs) and the new Pentecostal churches.

It should be recalled that the charismatic movement grew from the university environment in the 1970s. According to Ojo (2018:80), the charismatic renewal movement in Nigeria began among youths who were connected with the Scripture Union in war-torn Biafra (Eastern Nigeria) in 1968, but it became a national phenomenon through the students of the University of Ibadan. Ojo (2018:80) reports that in January 1970, revival broke out when some students in the Christian Union claimed to have been baptised in the Holy Spirit in a private prayer meeting. Though a small group, three leaders of the Christian Union boldly shared their Pentecostal experiences. Within a short time, more students accepted the experience, and it soon spread to other Christian groups such as the Student Christian Movement (established in Nigeria in 1937), Scripture Union (established in 1887), and other universities. This crop of students returned to their churches—mainly mainline churches—to propagate their new experiences. They could be regarded as radical Christians or

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<sup>3</sup> At the time it was believed that these practices were alien to Baptists' traditional way of worship and practices. Baptists believed in a simple mode of worship or solemn worship rather than a spontaneous and noisy atmosphere of worship. In addition, they believed that spiritual gifts must be exercised with caution, especially speaking in tongues, which must not be exercised without interpretation.

enthusiastic revivalists who believed that the members of their churches must replicate their new religious experience. Commenting on this decisive and dramatic moment in the history of missionary churches, Ogunewu (2022:5-6) notes, “invariably, such Pentecostal emphases and practices as personal experience of conversion or the born again experience, aggressive prayer, night vigils, baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, emphasis on faith healing and miracles, the use of charismatic gifts and holiness of life, were soon becoming audible and visible among certain older denominations”. Nkwoka (2010:82), citing Mbiti, affirms that the charismatic renewal or Neo-Pentecostalism of the 1970s was an ecumenical movement that cut across all human boundaries and barriers of denomination, nationality, sex, class, and age , and involved both clergy and laity.

In the 1980s there were mixed reactions to the wave of the charismatic movement on NBC. This generated debate and resulted in recommendations of the stance of the Convention to local Baptist churches. In order to protect her heritage and distinctive doctrine and practices, the Convention attempted to control the new wave. Although the Convention acknowledged the reality of the charismatic movement, it made frantic efforts to suppress what it regarded as the extremism of charismatic tendencies. The minutes of the Baptist denomination attest to this assertion thus:

We recognise that Baptists have a distinctive mode of worship that is in consonance with the free-church traditions, and we recommend that all Baptist churches continue to identify themselves with our traditional Baptist way of worship. We further recognise that whereas charismatic fervour has an important place in worship, however, excessive charismatic practices such as weeping when praying, speaking in tongues which nobody understands nor can interpret; laying hands on people to give them the Holy Spirit; jerking when praying; holding separate prayer meetings are not desirable in Baptist worship (Minutes of the NBC 1982:230-232).

The resultant effect of the implementation of these decisions in some Baptist churches was a conflict between the youth and the elderly. To the charismatic youth, the adults were unnecessarily persecuting them. This scenario was also

observed by Oladeji (2005:75) when he affirms that “such implementation led to the expulsion or suspension of members who embraced Pentecostalism”. While some Baptist members were excommunicated for practising “unbaptistic practices” in an era of heightened conservatism, others left because of what they considered as unbearable “coldness” in the worship services or persecutions by the elderly members of the church who disallowed expression of their charismatic gifts. Some of these excommunicated Baptists either joined established charismatic churches or founded new ones.

Some, however, stayed in the Baptist churches. Those that remained continued to pursue their spiritual transformation agenda in their different local Baptist churches. Primarily, the Baptist Students Fellowship, (BSF; formerly known as Baptist Students' Union [BSU]) founded in 1957 by American missionary Miss Mary Frank Kirkpatrick, promoted this spiritual enthusiasm. It should be noted that there are two types of NBC BSF: church-based and campus-based. The penetration of the charismatic movement into the Baptist denomination was quickly embraced by Baptist youths. It is earlier noted that religious awakening was facilitated by students of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, which started at the University of Ibadan and spread to other universities and colleges. This religious awakening started in the Christian Union Fellowship and spread to other Christian Fellowships in Nigerian universities. The BSU as it was then called was first established at the University of Ibadan as a campus-based Christian fellowship in 1960. It was during this period of the religious awakening in the 1970s that it became a nationwide movement. Ajayi (2010:205) submits that, “by the 1970s and 80s, BSU had become a nationwide movement”, due to the proliferation of tertiary institutions in the country in the mid-1970s and the increased interest of the Baptist Mission of Nigeria and the NBC in student ministry. One can also argue that the religious awakening of the 1970s and 1980s helped facilitate BSU's growth and expansion. However, some Baptist students were members of Scripture Union or Christian Union during this period. Therefore, based on the encounters of the Baptists through either denominational or interdenominational charismatic renewal movements in the tertiary institutions, the students/youths strongly felt that the church should embrace Pentecostal religious sentiments. Ojo (2018:34) corroborates that “it was the Baptist Student Fellowship that provided a major institutional channel for the penetration of Pentecostalism into the Nigerian Baptist Convention.”



Surprisingly, from the early 21st century, Baptist churches began to welcome charismatic spirituality. It was possible because some Baptist members influenced by the neo-Pentecostal movement from the mid-1980s began to enrol in Baptist Colleges of Theology and the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho. These students were university graduates. "While a few university graduates had passed through the seminary in the past, this type of student began to enrol in increasing numbers from the 1980s" (Ishola 2011:208). In 1992, when the Master of Divinity, a programme designed for university graduates, was introduced in the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, it encouraged most young Baptists who had embraced the charismatic movement to enrol as student pastors. This new crop of pastors replaced the conservative pastors who were retiring from the pastorate. These charismatic pastors gradually began to reflect the Pentecostal mode of worship in Baptist churches. Church members also began to have a flair for this new mode of worship, sometimes demanding dynamism in worship from their pastors.

It should be noted that the late Evangelist Job Alabi, who died on 26 May 2017, at the age of seventy-two years, was believed to be a significant factor and foremost in the charismatic revival that engulfed the Baptists from the 1980s. Evangelist Job Alabi was a gifted Bible expositor who pulled in crowds at his preaching campaigns. His ministrations were notable for strange happenings that were hitherto alien to the conservative mode of worship in NBC churches. Generally, after a well-delivered sermon, the evangelist would sing a congregational hymn and ask the congregation to thank Jesus if that was the only thing they could use to express thanks unto God. Suddenly some in the congregation would scream, fall, and roll on the ground; others would speak languages incomprehensible to many listeners and prophesy. Conservative Baptist pastors and congregants were skeptical of this new wave, fearing that it would erode their Baptist heritage and distinctive values. Such people, therefore, condemned this new movement in strong terms. However, other Baptist evangelists continue to promote charismatic enthusiasm through their preaching styles and ministrations. Before long, exhibiting spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues, visions, and prophesying became a norm in the worship experience of some Baptist churches. If the missionaries who came to Nigeria in the 19th and 20th centuries could visit Nigeria in the 21st century, they would notice a significant lacuna between the Baptist faith they passed on to

Nigerians and the one that is now practised. The factors discussed above were the antecedents to the cultivation of the new spiritual transformation. The following section isolates the notable spiritual transformation in the NBC.

## **Notable Spiritual Transformation in the NBC**

### ***The repackaging of Convention-in-session activities***

Convention-in-session is an essential aspect of the life of the NBC. It usually comes up once in a year, from a Saturday morning to a Thursday afternoon in April. It brings to a close the accounting year of the Convention. Reports from different departments, boards, and institutions of the NBC are significant parts of the Convention-in-session. These reports are printed in the Convention's *Book of Reports and Annual Accounts and Financial Reports*. Questions are raised, and delegates make comments on all the reports. Although it is also an occasion for spiritual revitalisation, the hallmark and zenith of the Convention-in-session in the past was business, which was for administrative transparency and stewardship accountability. It is well captured in the denomination's constitution thusly:

The annual session of the Convention is an occasion for the rendering of account of stewardship by the elected officers of the Convention to the local churches through their messengers. It is also an occasion for the critical evaluation of the work done in the light of the mandate given to these officials by the previous Convention-in session. The reports, minutes, etc would be expected to reach the messengers ahead of each annual session not later than two weeks before the commencement of the annual session. The annual session shall also serve the purpose of spiritual nourishment of messengers (2014:11).

It can be inferred from this regulation that the Convention-in-session of the NBC is for accountability, but because it is a religious institution, spiritual activities are also included. In the past, spiritual activities were limited to expository Bible study and brief sermons in the general sessions.

However, in recent times, the format of programmes has been repackaged by different leaders of the Convention. This transformation became noticeable during the period of Solomon Ademola Ishola, the apex leader of the Convention (then called General Secretary). Moreover, it intensified during the period of Samson Olasupo Ayokunle. In biographical research on the leadership of Ademola Ishola, Famutimi (2020:122) observes that prior to the assumption of Ishola as the apex leader of the Convention, some youth have left the NBC because their spiritual yearnings were not met. In order to retain the youth and bring back the youth who have left the denomination, “Ishola endeavoured to make use of the beneficial dimension of Pentecostalism and avoid those that were detrimental to the health of the Convention” (Famutimi, 2020:122). Famutimi’s view is not different from that of Ojo. Ojo (2018:42) argues that “largely, Ishola's innovation brought a renewal to Baptist spirituality in that era”.

As a practical step in this direction, by 2002, the evening rally was introduced, and this has since been sustained. The evening rally is a revival campaign where it is believed that the congregants will have a divine encounter. The remarks of Ishola (2018:12), the then General Secretary of the NBC, is insightful on the reason for the introduction of the evening rallies: “I felt the Convention was riddled with crises, acrimony, and unnecessary arguments; I never liked that. So, I wanted something quite different, and somehow, God orchestrated it so that we started shifting people's focus to God's Word through evening rallies. During Business Hour, we normally scaled through without rancour, accusation, or misgiving from anybody”. Therefore, introducing evening rallies in the Convention-in-session was a strategy to mitigate the tension formerly experienced during the Business Hour. Inevitably, this has also encouraged local Baptist churches to organise various spiritual programmes for the betterment of the congregants. These spiritual programmes have exposed Baptist churches to different spiritual gifts and offices.

Moreover, in the year 2011, as Solomon Ademola Ishola was preparing to retire as the General Secretary of the Convention, he introduced a glorious morning encounter, a service that usually comes up between 8 am and 9 am runs from Monday to Thursday. This programme aims to bless the congregants spiritually to have real testimonies before the session ends. There was also an experiment in 2018-2021 to rebrand the Convention-in-session by separating

departmental meetings from the Convention-in-session during the tenure of Samson Olasupo Ayokunle. The intention was to free the annual event from the cumbersomeness of meetings and to concentrate more on spiritual matters. Of course, this is a departure from what entailed in the past. However, this has been reverted by the current President of the Convention, Israel Adelani Akanji. One can argue that Ishola intended that the spirituality of the Baptist denomination would resemble that of Pentecostalism. It can be corroborated by his move to restructure the NBC. Ishola (2006:263) submits that “the basic reason being the need to move from the politically oriented character of our American (Southern Baptist Convention) system to a more biblical African-Nigerian contextualised system”. Among other things, the restructuring committee that was set up gave recommendations to change the NBC to the Nigerian Baptist Church or the Baptist Church, Nigeria. The Committee also recommended that the General Secretary (the apex leader of NBC) should be changed to National Overseer, Church Overseer, or General Overseer. This is similar to the nomenclature in Pentecostal churches. In support of this move, Professor J. Ande, a lecturer at the University of Jos, gave credence to the need to transform the spirituality of the NBC. Among others, she (2009:86) made the following suggestions:

Let there be more spiritual programmes in the Convention. The various organisational programmes should be taken off since they have their annual sessions separately. Their time can be given to more in-depth spiritual programmes... Rebranding the name from Convention, which has more of a business connotation, to another, more spiritual name.

To a large extent, Ishola's administration between 2001 and 2011 transformed the spirituality of the NBC to resemble Pentecostal spirituality and changed the nomenclature of General Secretary to President. However, he was unable to change the nomenclature of the NBC. Therefore, congregationalism, the hallmark of Baptists, is still being practised.

### ***Night of Wonders (NOW)***

The introduction of Night of Wonders is a current trend in the Baptist denomination. It is aimed towards retaining membership in the denomination and gaining new members. It has been painstakingly observed that Baptist

members attend Pentecostal spiritual programmes like Holy Ghost Service, Holy Ghost Night of Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), and all Night Prayers of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries. This programme comes up every third Friday in March, July and December. It was introduced in 2012 by Olasupo Ayokunle. The venue was the Convention Centre, Idi-Ishin, Ibadan. In 2021, the programme shifted to the Baptist International Convention Centre (BICC) located on the Ibadan-Lagos Expressway. Buses are provided to convey worshippers to the programme. The service features elaborate praise and worship songs, testimonies, power encounters through charismatic messages (which are usually delivered by the Convention President and the guest preacher), and aggressive prayers similar to the spiritual activities peculiar to the Pentecostals and AICs.

The main spiritual activity that marks out the service is prayer for divine interventions in different life challenges. At the end of each sermon, invitations are made for those who want to be born again or receive miracles on life issues. Prophetic utterances are made by the preachers and occasionally by the worshippers in the service. This is unusual in a typical Baptist traditional church. Unlike what obtained in the traditional conservative Baptist denomination of the past, many preachers outside the denomination have ministered during the NOW programme. These included Pastor Ayo Oritsejafar (Word of Life Bible Church), Bishop Wale Oke (The Sword of the Spirit Ministries), Apostle Sunday Popoola (Christ Family Assembly Churches), Bishop T. V. Adedokun (Victory International Church), and Prophet Funso Akande (Gospel Promotion Outfit, Ede). Gospel singers from outside the denomination (like Evangelist Bola Are) have also participated in the programme, especially during the December edition, usually designated for praise to God. In a way, NOW rebrands the Baptist denomination to meet the congregants' popular demand for spiritual yearnings. Of course, it is a spiritual evolution, a paradigm shift from what obtained in the past.

Furthermore, the programme attracts significant personalities, like royal fathers and politicians. The royal fathers have permanent seats at the auditorium's front row, indicating a social status that must be specially recognised and honoured. The Convention President and his wife sit with the other officiating ministers in line with their official positions and functions in the service. This is similar to the Pentecostal churches' sitting arrangements,

as Asonzeh Ukah (2008) has identified in his work. From the preceding, we have seen that the Convention is shifting from typical Baptist worship and encouraging a new form of spirituality in the NBC.

### ***Transformation in the Mode of Worship***

Audi (2012:168) observed that only a few things are left of the West's visible posture in the missions churches on the African continent, especially Nigeria. Audi further notes that these little things can be seen in the buildings and liturgy inherited from the missionaries. This author posits that those relics Audi claimed remain are gradually becoming monuments. Some of the buildings inherited are either being restructured or abandoned for new ultra-modern places of worship.

Moreover, close observation reveals a gradual replacement of Western liturgy with African liturgy in the Baptist denomination in Nigeria. Expressing a similar view, Oladipo (2010:35) argues that "the Christian faith has been de-westernised in our generation." The reality of de-westernising Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa has been strongly facilitated by contextualisation and indigenisation. It is well captured by Oladipo (2010:36) when he notes that "while missionaries have always been interested in Christianizing Africans, converts in Africa have equally wanted to Africanize Christianity." Fatokun (2005:159) is right in his observation that prior to the infiltration of the Pentecostal mode of worship in the mainline churches, the mainline churches were purely intellectual religion and formalistic. Scholars have noted that Pentecostals' mode of worship is characterised by emotions and enthusiasm. For example, Anyanwu (2004:58) advances that "the place to find happy, exuberant worshippers is in Pentecostal churches...Pentecostals want to be translated in the supernatural realm during worship." The view of Ndiokwere (1995:277) is not different from that of Anyanwu. He observes that in Pentecostal churches, the place of worship is accessible to everyone: "It is a place of free movement and total participation by everyone. In the acts of worship, the movement should be rigorous and often spontaneous".

Today, these experiences are not exclusively for the Pentecostals. In some Baptist churches, when congregants are excited or motivated by the pastor's sermon, they express their agreement or seek to tap into the preacher's anointing by dropping an offering at the pulpit area. Some Baptists believe that

when they pray on the ‘altar’ (or pulpit area), their prayers will receive immediate attention from the Divine. Before now Baptists believed that a Christian could offer prayer anywhere and that God would respond as appropriate. Recently, these experiences happened in the 2022 Convention-in-session hosted at BICC along Ibadan-Lagos Express Way, Afuwape, Ogun State. Some congregants went out during sermons to give offerings and others, during recess, went to the pulpit area for personal prayers. Before, this was strange and would not be welcomed in Baptist worship services. In addition, the NBC officially approved the use of anointing oil in 2015. The Baptist Policy states that “As a denomination, we believe in the proper use of anointing oil to minister to the sick and those afflicted by demons” (2015:50). Prior to the influence of Pentecostalism on Baptist churches in the NBC the use of anointing oil was not acceptable. However, today, the anointing oil can be used to pray for the sick and to practice exorcism.

### ***Mass Ordination***

Ordination is a religious rite of setting a person apart for a ministerial office (Erickson, 1986:120). It serves as a means by which a congregation officially affirms, spiritually and ceremonially, the ordained minister's divine calling to the gospel ministry (Brewer, 2011:249). According to Baptist practice, the ordained pastor is responsible for conducting believer baptism, administering the Lord's Supper, and conducting holy matrimony. This does not change the principle of the priesthood of believers, which Baptists hold in high esteem. All Christians are still qualified to participate in the church's mission and ministry. Nevertheless, for good order, the priestly acts of preaching and administering the ordinances are reserved for the ordained (Brewer, 2011:251-252). In the NBC, deacons and pastors are qualified are ordained.

The author's concern in this section is the transformation that has taken place in the ordination exercise of pastoral ministry. Hitherto, the ordination exercise of deacons is still considered the exclusive duty of the local church. However, unlike in the past, when the pastor's ordination into full-time pastoral work was done in the local church, from 2005 during the leadership of Ademola Ishola as the General Secretary of the NBC, the convention has practiced mass ordination. Mass ordination is when qualified pastors are brought together in different Baptist conferences for an ordination service (NBC Policies and Practices 2005:9). This was a departure from what obtained

in the Baptist heritage. For example, Leon McBeth (1987:244), citing Benjamin Griffith's Essay notes thus:

the association, council, or assembly of delegates when assembled is not a superior judicature, having such superior power over the churches concerned; but that each particular church hath a complete power and authority from Jesus Christ to administer all gospel ordinances, provided they have a sufficiency of officers duly qualified,... and also to try and ordain their own officers and to exercise every part of gospel discipline and church government, independent of any church or assembly whatever.

Supporting this position, Brewer (2011:257) asserts that “both John Smyth and Thomas Helwys originally believed that the entire congregation should lay hands on the ordained”. This was predicated on the belief that the clergy emerged from the laity and were probably tapped to serve ministerial functions (Brewer 2011:257). It should be noted that John Smyth and Thomas Helwys were the first generation Baptists leaders who led some Puritans to separate from the Church of England in the seventeenth century. In the earliest history of Baptists, the ordination of both pastors and deacons was limited to the calling church. At that time, a church officer could not transfer his or her ordination to another congregation. It was believed that the ordained were selected to render services to the local church (Brewer, 2011:258).

The reason for this transformation was that ordination in the local church was considered financially burdensome and, as such, was losing its sacredness. It was therefore believed that mass ordination would relieve churches of financial burden, and thereby, the ordination service would retain its spirituality. Also, it would be devoid of pomp and pageantry that may make the ordinand and congregants lose their spirituality and the essence of the ordination, which is consecration for divine service. Therefore, Baptist policy stipulates that “all candidates for ordination shall be ordained in one day at a common place by each Conference within the Convention year and there should be no fanfare and/or elaborate ceremonies” (Beliefs, Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention 2015: 34). However, the reality has shown that mass ordination has not reduced fanfare in any way. First, it



has been observed that each ordinand usually entertains their invitees immediately after the service, and usually, the local church bears the burden of the financial implication. Second, in most cases, the ordained pastors usually organise the ordination thanksgiving service in the various local churches, which may include eating and drinking, which is a common practice in Africa. Thus, the spiritual height that mass ordination intends to attain has not been achieved. However, it should be recognised that mass ordination, comparatively with the past church-based pastoral ordination, is a recent spiritual transformation in the history of NBC.

### ***Clamour for Prophetic Office***

There are two recognised offices in a local Baptist Church: pastor and deacon. A trained pastor can serve as a missionary, evangelist, and teacher, and can preach prophetically. To the Baptist, a prophet does not only foretell, but also forth tells. This confirms the position of Familusi (2018:19) when he writes, “Prophets are first and foremost preachers, who call people to repentance... Their primary appeal, therefore was a return to the Lord and loyal observance of the stipulation imposed by Him as terms of the covenant”.

Kingston (1965:73, 74) described a prophet in two ways, basing his definition on the Hebrew word *naba* which means “to cause to bubble up” and the Greek word *propheteuo* which is derived from two words—*pro*, meaning “before” or “for”, and *phemi*, “to bring to light by speech.” From these expressions, Kingston (1965:73, 74) defined and described a prophet as follows: First, a prophet is one who involuntarily bursts forth with spiritual utterances under the divine influence. Second, a prophet is God's spokesman and speaks from a divine influence, under inspiration, whether as foretelling future events or as exhorting, reproofing, threatening individuals or nations as the ambassador of God and the interpreter of His will to men.”

Subscribing to Kingston's view, Baptists believe that a prophet is not only a seer; he is also God's mouthpiece who speaks fearlessly to rebuke sins without minding whose ox is gored, with the expectation that there will be repentance and re-birth. Baptists also believe that one does not need to hold the title of Prophet before functioning in a prophetic ministry. Today, however, Baptist pastors are clamouring for the special recognition of a prophetic office. This set of pastors believes that some pastors are specially called to be prophets,

preaching prophetically and engaging in foretelling and prophetic prayers. There are Baptist pastors in the NBC who organise spiritual programmes similar to Prophets in AICs, such as taking church members for prayers on mountains, engaging in marathon fasting and emotional prayers, and organising unique healing and deliverance sessions.

On the other hand, because pastors are not allowed to have the title of Prophet, some notable Baptist members and pastors have left the denomination to establish prophetic ministries, including Morakinyo Oyatumo, a son of a retired Baptist who left the Baptist Church to establish a prophetic ministry named Goodnews Prayer and Deliverance ministries, Ogbomoso. Some Baptist churches in the South West of Nigeria have benefited from his prophetic ministrations. Prophet Timothy Oyekunle, a former pastor in the NBC, started as a freelance prophet, and eventually founded a church named Goshenland Battle of Christ church (also known as Battle Axe) in Apete, Ibadan, in order to fulfil his prophetic calling. Prophet S. O. Olakanmi, formerly the pastor of Temple Baptist Church, Ede, resigned from the Baptist pastoral service to start Power of His Resurrection Ministry in Wasinmi, Osun State. Prophet Mathew Olaniyi Oladosu is a former pastor in the NBC who left the denomination to establish a prophetic ministry in Oyo.

Baptists interviewed by the author believe that the lack of recognition of the prophetic office by some leaders of the NBC is a challenge. They opine that some Baptist leaders are averse to prophetic ministry; therefore, prophetic ministry lacks solid ground to fully operate because it is not officially recognised in the denomination. Therefore, it is their opinion that there is a lack of opportunity to operate the prophetic ministry in the Baptist denomination fully. Generally speaking, there is fear on the part of the carrier of prophetic ministry to fully make proof of their ministry and the fear of the abuse of the office by the stakeholders. Notwithstanding, from the preceding, it is evident that some Baptist pastors are clamouring for recognition of prophetic ministry. This is a new dimension in the spirituality of NBC.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has established ongoing spiritual transformation in the NBC. Majorly, the spiritual transformation has been influenced by the charismatic

movement that engulfed the Baptist denomination in the early 1980s and the admission into the seminary of dynamic young pastors who had had contact with charismatic Christian fellowships in the universities. This influence has resulted in spiritual transformation in the Baptist liturgy and practices and in an aspiration for recognition of prophetic office by some Baptist pastors. Ademola Ishola was the first NBC leader to accommodate Pentecostal spirituality, and the subsequent leaders are improving on his legacy of spiritual transformation of the NBC. Whereas dynamism is a welcome development, there is also the need to review these spiritual activities in the light of biblical teachings and Baptist heritage. This is necessary so that Baptists will continue to retain their legacies and identity and will continue to be true to the Bible.

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## **From South to North: Contributions of African Immigrants in Western Christianity**

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### **Abstract**

Many modern Christian scholars are united behind the opinion that the centre of Christianity has immensely shifted from the global north (Europe and North America) to the global south (Africa, Asia and Latin America). Such dynamics have led to the decline of Christianity in the global north and the western world whilst a proportionate increase in Christianity has been a trend of the global south in the last decade. This article asks the question: is it time for the global south to re-evangelize the global north? As the western world becomes increasingly secular, it has become consequently evident that Christianity is currently post-Christian. Moreover, due to the global north's economic superiority, it has become a major immigrant destination for the global south citizens. This has led to an influx of high number of immigrants into the global north. This article points out the contributions of the global south in western Christianity by using African immigrants as a case point.

### **Introduction**

There is no doubt that migration of people from one region to another has played a huge role in evangelism and in the expansion of Christianity throughout history. This can be closely linked to the arrival of missionaries from the global north to other parts of the world largely in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (Levi, 2009). At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the centre of Christianity was Europe at large (Henry, 2005). This trend did not last long, however, as the

global north began to express low levels of religiosity whilst the global south continued to advance in the reception and spread of Christianity (Wijsen, 2009). In the recent past, changes in migratory flow have led to an increase in the number of immigrants from the global south settling in Europe and North America (Goss et al., 2011). This has led to the emergence of diaspora Christianity and immigrant congregations in the global north. Due to migration, the global north society has been demographically transformed from a traditional ethnically homogenous society to a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious one (Rex, 1996).

Religion is one of the most tightly held social identities by immigrants while in their host countries (Adedibu, 2013a). As a result, the religious practices and traditions of immigrants from the global south have found their way to the global north. According to recent data, almost half of all international immigrants to the global north identify themselves as Christians (Molteni & van Tubergen, 2022). This explains the remarkable explosion of immigrant religious communities in many western societies. However, while many African immigrants establish strong religious communities in their host societies, they also face many barriers in cross-cultural outreach as well as in social integration into their host society (Alanezi & Sherkat, 2008). This is largely attributed to factors such as racial discrimination, language barrier, and increasing levels of secularism in western societies (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012).

While there is a continuing debate on the direction of Christianity globally, there is an immense representation of African Christianity in western societies (Adogame, 2013). Despite the waning level of Christianity in the global north, immigrant communities are slowly becoming most of the Christian representation in the global north (Martin, 2010). A brief examination of western Christianity reveals various contributions from immigrants at various levels. This paper addresses specifically the contributions of African immigrants to western Christianity. To tackle the issue exhaustively, this paper is divided into three sections. The first section deals with an overview of postmodernism and the demographics of Christianity. The second section examines the barriers and challenges faced by African immigrants in the European religious landscape. The third section evaluates the implications of an African worldview to theology in the global north.



## Postmodernism and demographics of Christianity

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was the beginning of the shift of the centre of Christianity from the global north to the global south. The arrival of European Christian missionaries in areas of Africa, Latin America, and Asia initiated a transition in the spread of Christianity to the global south (van Engen, 2016). It is worth noting that in the 1900 the largest Catholic country in the world was France while at the beginning of the present decade the largest Catholic countries are in Latin America and Africa (Jensz, 2012). If the current trend of secularism in the global north continues at the current rate, it is estimated that by the start of the year 2050 more than 50% of the world's Christian population will come from Africa (Becking et al., 2017).

Christianity in totality is increasing in numbers despite its decline in Europe and North America. This is due to an increase of an equal or a greater number of Christians in the global south, which offsets the decline of Christians in the global north (Eku, 2009). Due to migration, citizens of the global south are finding their way to the western society, enriching it again with new dimensions of Christianity. In comparison, it is estimated that 7600 people drop their Christian faith per day in Europe and North America while there are 23000 people joining the church in Africa either by birth or conversion (van Engen, 2016). Most European countries are no longer publicly expressing their religious inclinations as religion is deemed obsolete and backward. In Britain, religious matters have become peripheral and are often lacking among the ingredients that constitute the reality of the British population (Burgess, 2011). Even among the publicly declared Christians of the global north, a sparse number attend religious services or are actively involved in religious activities (Rex, 1996).

Traditional Christianity in the global north has been abated by postmodernism, a reaction to the assumed traditions of Christianity to explain reality (Goss et al., 2011). This has led to the introduction of different ideologies into the Christian doctrine. It is still widely debatable amongst Christian scholars as to what the true teaching of Christ according to the Bible is (Fatokun, 2005). This is primarily experienced in western society where there is an encroachment of cultural perspectives into its understanding of Christian teachings (Sanneh, 2009). The west, with its sophistication, has so far found some of the

traditional religious teachings inapplicable to its society. This explains the upward curve in secularism. The remaining members of Christianity have continuously found a way to harmonize theology and science, leading to different dogmas within Christianity (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012). The main question that remains unanswered in all this is who gets to decide what the truth is? In North America, an increasing number of people identify themselves as nonreligious, with a corresponding increase in the number of people who do not believe in a deity (Rex, 1996). Does this mean Christianity is becoming an affair of the global south?

Africans take seriously all matters regarding religion (Fatokun, 2005). However, it is a historical fact that the current form of Christian doctrine in Africa was introduced by missionaries from Europe and North America (Levi, 2009). As the global north declines in what was considered their endeavour, the global south is picking the baton and passing it on to posterity. One can be allowed to say that African Christianity is flourishing because of cultural aspects of African societies. Additionally, it should be noted that Christianity in Africa, at least to a greater extent, is not practiced independently, but rather as a complement to traditional morals and values (Frescura, 2015). This explains why the wave of postmodernism has not been able to sweep through the African moral and religious landscape. There still exists certain distinct ways of doing things in African society that has not changed with the change of time and the introduction of modern technology (Frost & Öhlmann, 2021).

The concept of Christianity in the global north is progressively becoming divergent from its counterpart in the global south (Bevans, 2015). While western society is finding no meaning in Christianity, African society is staunchly inclined toward Christianity. This explains the increasing numbers of churches and missionary activities in the global south (Burgess, 2011). Many of the religious organizations in the global north that align with the traditional concept of Christianity have found harbour in the African church, hence increasing the activities of Christianity in the global south (Fatokun, 2005). At least 95% of people that identify with Christian religion have remained so for their entire lifetime, with a meager 9% changing denominations and sects within the Christian faith. 9 in every 10 Africans are religious or believe in the existence of a God and the supernatural (Adedibu, 2013a).

The above statistics and illustrations depict a scenario of declining Christianity in the global north. But there is still hope for the emergence of a new form of robust Christianity in western society thanks to immigrants. In many western societies, strong religious practices have been associated with immigrants, making religion to be both despised and appreciated by different sections of the host societies (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012). In some instances, western societies have blended well with immigrant religious communities and incorporated ideologies regarding their practice of religion. Other host societies have become difficult to integrate with immigrants due to elevated levels of secularism and anti-immigrant attitudes (Smits et al., 2010). However, this does not kill the hopes of rejuvenating Christianity in the global north. African immigrants are more involved in religious participation in their host societies on arrival than they were in their home countries (Kalu, 2010). This has been due to cultural differences and religion being the only social identity that unites different ethnic communities.

We must not only point out changes in the demographics of Christianity in the global north but also changes in migration trends. If we are to get to the root of this matter, then it ought to be observed that the global north is currently accepting considerable number of immigrants from the global south in search of employment, education, and refuge from political instability. The United States of America is the global leader of immigrant destinations with 13% of its national population comprising of immigrants (Zong & Batalova, 2014). Guillermina (2003) observes that majority of immigrants in the USA are Christians or are likely to convert to Christianity with 65% of immigrants identifying with Christianity. Most of these immigrants are religiously active and belong to different religious groups. This shows that immigrant religiosity is on its way to re-evangelize the west. Wittmeier (2012) observes that in Canada immigrants from the global south are already altering the Canadian religious landscape. Immigrant religious communities are overtaking the mainline Pentecostal churches that are on a decline. Other immigrants bring new devout members into the already existing Catholic churches (Kalu, 2010). In Europe, the same effect has been felt in many countries that had turned secular at the beginning of the millennium. Britain, in which many churches had closed due to secularization, is now experiencing a new wave of religiosity as it opens its doors to immigration (Adedibu, 2013a). Most of the active

religious centers with large memberships in Britain are comprised of immigrants.

Immigrant Christianity has revolutionized the dynamics of Christian faith. The west ought to brace itself for something different as far as Christianity is concerned. There are many ways through which North America and Europe can benefit from immigrant Christianity if an effort is made to embrace it. Owing to existing cultural differences, there is no doubt that the global north and the global south have distinct understandings of various teachings in the Christian faith. This has been the obstacle in the way of immigrant Christianity. The next section examines three main challenges that immigrant Christianity face in Western societies. By making an effort to address these challenges, there is a possibility of an immense shift in terms of re-evangelizing the global north by the global south.

## **Barriers and challenges faced by African immigrants in the European religious landscape**

Settling in a new society often comes with a heap of challenges, especially in a foreign land. There is always the anticipation of a good start or a better life for most immigrants that are arriving in the global north from the global south. In most cases, these categories of immigrants are migrating in search of employment, better educational opportunities, or refuge from political instability. This speaks to the fact that the primary focus of immigration is economic as opposed to the social aspect of life. As the immigrants settle in their host societies, they must try to fit into those host societies as much as possible for their survival. This remains true even for religious participation. In as much as religion has been identified as the most unifying social aspect between immigrants and natives of the host societies, it still presents many obstacles to immigrants, which this section endeavours to address. Among the most familiar challenges faced are language barrier, secularism, and anti-immigrant attitude.

### ***Language barrier***

The consequences of migration cannot be generalized. They are not usually predetermined due to different uncertainties arising from individual immigrant's reason for migration. Additionally, immigrants are often viewed

negatively in both their host countries and their home countries (Smits et al., 2010). Immigrants are constantly battling these challenges in their daily lives. Amongst these challenges, the problem of language barrier is one of the most challenging parts of immigrant life. When a host community receives immigrants, the immigrants often try to learn the language of the host community for a better understanding or even integration into that host community (Alanezi & Sherkat, 2008). In some situations, it becomes tough since language proficiency is a pre-requisite for employment and education. To participate in community activities, immigrants must therefore overcome the language barrier.

In religious contexts, immigrants in host societies that speak a different language from the immigrants' mother tongue often face difficulties in religious integration (Connor, 2009). In some cases, immigrants succeed in the setting up of immigrant religious communities but that does not go far since the serves only immigrants. Social integration is induced by certain factors such as common language, trust, equity, and respect (van Tubergen, 2013). As much as people can develop these factors with time, they are not readily available in every situation. Even after overcoming these barriers, some societies might develop cohesive tendencies for a limited period, while there is a common agenda connecting the involved groups that later disperse after achieving their goals (Cadge & Ecklund, 2007). Therefore, for immigrant's religiosity to penetrate the host society, there must be a connection and understanding of the host society's religious landscape, beginning with the language of the host society (Cartledge & Davies, 2013).

In most, if not all, cases religious services and teachings are conducted in the native language of the host society. This means that for immigrants a larger outreach can only be effective when they learn the native language (Adedibu, 2013b). Participation in local religious activities equally requires understanding of the host society's native language. Whitaker (2015) notes that the difficulties in adapting to the language and lifestyle of the host community contributes to the culture shock that immigrants experience once they settle in their host societies. Christian immigrants face the risk of being misunderstood if they are unable to express themselves in the local language, leading to resistance in accommodating their religious views by the natives of the host society (Gibney, 2015).

In the light of these factors associated with language barrier, it is still largely unknown whether immigrants are willing to learn the local language or are more comfortable conducting religious activities in their own language or another foreign language (Sanneh, 2009). In many non-English speaking countries, international congregations and immigrant religious communities have resorted to the use of English, an international language, to connect both immigrants and natives of the host society (Owino, 2021). This has borne little fruit since a large population of natives in non-English speaking societies are uninterested in using a language that is not their native tongue (van Tubergen, 2013). In Europe, where there are different nationalities with different local languages, there is a generalized sense of patriotism by natives when they use their local language. This means that for immigrants to fully explore such a religious landscape they must learn the local language (Rex, 1996).

### ***Anti-immigrant attitude***

Immigrant religiosity has been a success as far as immigrants are concerned. However, when the necessity to cross cultural borders arises, challenges come that need to be overcome (Kalu, 2010). To begin with, most host communities are not welcoming to immigrants and tend to view everything about immigrants from a negative point of view (Adogame, 2013). Most of the time, the culture of immigrants differs from that of the host community. This creates difficulties for social integration into the host community (Melinda, 2015). Most African immigrants experience significant culture shock when settling in Europe and North America, where things are done differently (Oro, 2014). Insisting on keeping their traditional morals and values, these immigrants are often treated with resentment by their host communities. Most immigrants from African communities experience difficulties in cultural accommodation by the global north because most cultural practices and values of Africans are considered backward and retrogressive by the western societies (Frescura, 2015). In some cases, the level of acceptance depends on an immigrant's reason for immigration. Refugees often face more hostile treatment in host communities than do other immigrants who have come through established legal channels (Harold, 2019). Even in their involvement in religion, refugees face difficulties in assimilating into the religious sphere of their host communities.

The expectations of most immigrants are not usually met immediately upon they arrive in their host societies. In such cases, immigrants are mentally disturbed, and the outcome of their residence becomes a new experience (Connor, 2009). Many immigrants, in search for an institutional belonging, join religious communities. However, the religious landscape of most host communities is not an easy go for immigrants, and they end up discriminated against and segregated, thus frustration ensued (Creighton, 2013). Among the many expectations of immigrants, usually they first aim for an economic liberation through a paying job. Later, immigrants expect a jovial relation and connection with the host society in similar ways to who they connected in their home countries (Alanezi & Sherkat, 2008). Once they meet the opposite of these expectations, they face the only option of surviving on their own in a foreign land. This can result in engagement in unlawful activities or undocumented work to cater for themselves and their families in their home countries (Molteni & van Tubergen, 2022). When natives in the host society identify such cases, it often depicts a negative picture of immigrants and over time cultivates a culture of anti-immigrant sentiments from host communities (Melinda, 2015).

Due to strict immigration laws in many countries, immigrants are often restricted from working or have a minimum time of working (Tataru, 2020). Also, most of them are employed in the informal sector and must work extra hard to afford a living in their host societies. There is often a generalized low regard for immigrants when it comes to job qualifications. This extends across the board, even into the social sphere (Smits et al., 2010). Natives are more likely to trust a local religious leader than an immigrant of the same qualification (Adedibu, 2013a). Besides immigrant culture and religion are often considered backward by the host societies, making it an arduous task for immigrants to integrate into the religious sphere of their host communities (Cadge & Howard Ecklund, 2007). For African immigrants settling in western societies, some of their cultural practices are rejected because they are found to be extreme by the belief system of the host society (Kalu, 2010). For example, most African societies have not yet established gender equality and it is an open fact that even in religious settings the patriarchal system is dominant (Fatokun, 2005). As a result, people raised in that culture grow up believing and being obedient to their structures of leadership. On arrival in

western societies, any attempt to practice such cultural behaviours is met with contempt.

### ***Secularism***

The process of social integration can be daunting for immigrants; there are some recognizable barriers that are difficult to traverse. One such barrier, especially for religious immigrants, is the increasing rate of secularism in European and North American societies (Rex, 1996). Immigrant minority communities are faced with the challenges of tackling institutionalized secularism in the global north, especially in their attempts to integrate into the social and religious sphere of their host communities (Adogame, 2013). Western societies accommodate ethno-religious minority communities, but they are perceived as different by the natives of those host societies. The secularism problem that immigrant communities face remains one of the most complex sociological issues that migrants from the global south face when they immigrate to the global north (Harold, 2019). Such a challenge does not only pose a socio-economic disadvantage, it also affects the immigration status of immigrants (Burgess, 2011). This is because some of the cultural and religious values of immigrants raise doubts within the host communities about whether the immigrants can be integrated into the social sphere of the host communities (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012). For example, some immigrants' political and religious values of freedom, tolerance, and gender equality differ to a greater extent from those of their host societies in the global north (Smits et al., 2010).

In the global north, multiculturalism is a product of immigration, creating diverse cultural perspectives (Cadge & Howard Ecklund, 2007). A considerable hurdle to approaching the challenge of secularism lies in the nature of the religious landscape of hosting societies. There is a generalized tendency for natives to naturally despise the cultural values and practices of immigrants (van Tubergen, 2013). Coming to religion, the global north acts in a way as the custodian of Christianity; any attempt to redefine or to administer to them a novel approach to what is already thought of as normal is met with resistance (Smits et al., 2010). As most European and North American societies progressively embrace secularism, they assume a superior moral ground in which they consider the opinions and cultural views of minority groups to be inconsequential and insignificant (Goss et al., 2011). Over the last few decades,



the rapid secularization of European societies has diminished the place of religion in societies (Wijsen, 2009). It has become difficult for religion to be associated with considerable progress in those communities.

The European religious landscape has become uneven, with no distinct position to classify its elements. While most European societies are distancing themselves from Christianity, there is still lack of clarity as to the exact position of those that have left (Molteni & van Tubergen, 2022). Many in the European population that identify as Christians but do not participate in any religious activities or going to church (Martin, 2010). This introduces one of the major differences between the global south and the global north. In the global south, an identity as a Christian involves participation in religious activities and faithful attendance of church services (Adogame, 2013). Post-Christian Europe still struggles with the question of whether it should be defined by a common heritage of the Christian religion and by the metrics of western civilization or whether it should be defined by the modern structures of political tolerance, liberalism, and inclusive multiculturalism (Molteni & van Tubergen, 2022). As much as immigrant religiosity persists, European societies hold different views regarding religion due to their widespread secularism. However, due to political tolerance and liberalism, they respect individual religious stands (Wijsen, 2009). It becomes a huge challenge for immigrants, especially from the global south, to express religious views in the global north when the society in the global north does not recognize the role of religion in public life.

## **Implications of an African worldview to theology in the global north**

There is no doubt the current global religious landscape is uneven with Christianity shrinking in the global north and the global south experiencing an increasingly robust wave of Christianity (Eku, 2009). These apparent differences have shaped the two societies differently. While African society and the global south subscribe to public and state recognized religiosity, most western societies find difficulties with public exercises of religion (Becking et al., 2017). However, these western societies respect the private expression of religion due to their liberal democratic systems. For African immigrants in western societies, belonging to a community of fellow believers is the basic

identity of religious practice (Kalu, 2010). For them, to be a Christian means you attend religious services and publicly exercise your religion.

While there is still contention amongst scholars of Christian religion about how culture influences religious practices, it is apparent that western Christianity and African Christianity differ in practice based on culture (Fatokun, 2005). African societies condemn the west for compromising moral and ethical values. They consider religion in the west intruded by secular behavior (Adogame, 2013). Most of the notable differences between African and western societies revolve around the issues of gender and sexuality. While African society is strict on gender roles between male and female, the west operates based on gender equality (Becking et al., 2017). Additionally, the west has culturally recognized homosexuality—something that remains a taboo in African society (Adogame, 2013). While European liberal theology recognizes same sex marriage, it is strongly discouraged in the African religious setting. In Europe there are various theological perspectives on what constitutes a “proper marriage” besides the traditional union between male and female (Bongmba, 2015). One should not fail to note that the development of these theological views has been informed by culture. As European society has become progressively liberal, it has incorporated divergent views. On the other hand, African society has remained rigid and conservative, sticking to traditional theological view (Adedibu, 2013b).

Most different theological views in Christianity exist in the European societies and the global north at large (Rex, 1996). In most African societies, Christians consider reading the Bible part of religion (Bevans, 2015). For African Christians, the Bible is strictly the word of God that is to be used like a user manual for life. In addition to reading the Bible, African Christians use the guidance of the clergy and religious leaders to pray for and visualize changes in their lives (Bongmba, 2015). They believe to the word what the Bible promises and stick to it faithfully. In western theology, the contrast lies in the fact that the Bible can be understood in many ways. The understanding of many biblical concepts is abstract and therefore lacks an equivalent in the physical world (Oro, 2014). It is easy to take a position and argue theological positions that support any perspective, but we must not overlook the intention of the true word of God. Most theological schools in African societies are bible-based and are based on the belief that only through the Bible that we can

understand the initial intention of God for humanity and the world (Kalu, 2010).

In African societies, Christianity and religious practice is marked by social activities (Frescura, 2015). This might have been contributed to by low economic status necessitating societal help. Most of the African immigrants moving to Europe are seeking economic empowerment and are in most cases coming out of a context of poverty. Despite economic difficulties, poor leadership, and the low quality of social amenities, African Christianity embraces charity and hospitality (Adedibu, 2013a). Religion and social responsibilities are intertwined in African Christianity. This is because the ordinary daily activities of people are informed by religion (Frescura, 2015). Religious morals and cultural views are woven into the fabric of everyday life. This is best demonstrated by the fact that in African communities churches have given rise to schools and hospitals and many other programs aimed at the collective good of their societies. Even in catastrophic events or social ills, the religious community takes a front seat in leading and providing solutions (Levi, 2009).

African Christianity cannot stand on its own without supporting pillars from various communities involved. Christian theology in most African societies is based on its cultural context (Gathogo, 2022). African traditions are strong social identities; ways must be found for Christianity to be compatible with the traditions. African Christians are reluctant to abandon their traditional ways. Therefore, a middle ground must be found for them to practice Christianity without having to abandon their culture (van der Meulen, 2009). However, this does not go without challenges since over-contextualizing Christianity in many diverse cultures can lead to different forms of Christianity and can encourage forms of stray theology (Kalu, 2010). Additionally, African societies take seriously any concept of supernatural phenomenon. In fact, most of the African mythology that form African culture comprises of supernatural narration (Bongmba, 2015). While the west and global north at large are gravitating towards science and a system of empiricism, African societies are still strongly held with the occurrence of supernatural phenomenon (Fatokun, 2005).

## Conclusion

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century one could hardly tell the direction of Christian demographics. Europe, the pioneer continent of Christianity was a migrant-sending region, through colonialism and other forms of exploration. This was the beginning of the introduction of Christianity to the global south. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen a reverse of these demographics. Europe is now a migrant-receiving country. Additionally, it is now the least Christian continent amongst the traditionally Christian regions of the global north. The influence of Christianity in the global north has been on a decline due to societal changes and advances in technology and science. Today Europe and North America are described as secular. On the other hand, the global south is currently experiencing growth in Christianity and more communities are being converted into Christianity.

Part of the problems facing the global south has been economically instigated and this has led to a migration of citizens of the global south to the global north. In this migration process, the global north, the migrant-receiving society, has become multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious. Amongst these elements, religious belongingness has been the most dominant social identity expressed by many immigrants upon arrival in the host community. This means that immigrants will continue with the religion of their home country in their host country. Since most immigrants settling in the global north are from the global south, religion is therefore finding its way into the global north through immigrants. This raises the question of this article: Is it time for the global north to re-evaluate its stance on modern Christianity? The rest of the world and the global south has come to the west. The west should therefore look for ways to blend in and accept its re-evangelization by the global south. It is high time that western theology change and adapt to the views of the current time and of the dominant Christian culture from the global south. This is not only necessary; it is inevitable as well.

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# **Enhancing Sustainable Transformation of Contemporary Teenagers Through Discovery Bible Study Model**

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## **Abstract**

Existing experiments and participant observations have shown that teenagers generally exhibit oppositional defiant disorder. This disorder has a significant relationship to their increased involvement in alcoholism, substance addiction, cultism, crimes, and money rituals, to which teenagers from Christian homes are not exempt. This phenomenon portends danger for the future of Christianity. Thus, the spiritual development of teenagers and the continuity of the authentic Christian faith in the next generation is a cause for concern. These challenges become critical because parents, teachers, pastors, and other ministers, who wish to see transformed teenagers, end up employing the wrong training tools that compound this disorder. Therefore, this writer presented Discovery Bible Study (DBS) as a model for enhancing the sustainable transformation of contemporary teenagers. He posited that the model creates a platform for Christian caregivers to lean on a blend of the principles of cognitive learning theories, such as Lewin's field theory, and experimental learning theories, such as Kolb's theory, to engage their teenagers in sustainable transformation. The paper asserts that a re-educative process, in cooperation with these teenagers, will change their cognitive structure, modify their values, and eventually affect their behaviour for the desired holistic transformation. To this end, it considers the two learning theories, contemporary teenagers and spiritual development challenges, and how DBS may be used to enhance sustainable transformation in contemporary teenagers.

## Introduction

Reliable experimental studies have shown poor teenager responses to Christian discipleship. Ayandokun (2015:130) affirms that the teenage years are the most challenging stage to show response to the gospel. While children between the ages of 5 and 12 record 32% conversion possibilities and youth beyond the age of 19 record 6%, the conversion possibility for those between the ages 13 of 18 is only 4%. Furthermore, participant observation of Christian teenagers in Ogbomoso, a prominent city in Nigeria's southwest, confirms this challenge. Between January 2017 and February 2020 the researcher confirmed that despite different teenager-targeted spiritual development programmes existing in the many churches of different denominations the level of teenagers' involvement in alcoholism, drug and substance addictions, idolatry, cultism and money rituals (often tagged “yahoo plus”), examination malpractices, immorality, and other ungodly practices, was alarming. The experience cuts across students from secondary and tertiary institutions and many of those learning one trade or the other. This is against the reality that Ogbomoso is reputable for having several evangelical churches including Baptists, Anglicans, Methodists, and Independent Pentecostals. Local churches scatter the city and its suburbs. Ogbomoso can be called a land of many churches.

Contemporary Christianity in Africa faces the challenge of passing on the authentic faith to the next generation because its efforts toward discipling contemporary teenagers have not seemed to yield the desired result of transformation. This challenge has become a significant concern for teenagers' parents, teachers, and other ministers. It is also a source of worry for the church and the larger society where these teenagers are to make an impact. How then shall the contemporary church effectively commit the gospel to their teenagers despite the various contextual challenges of the contemporary teens, and record the desired transformation in their lives and society? It is a problem relating to the transformation of contemporary society and the sustenance of the historic Christian faith.

The purpose of this paper is to present Discovery Bible Study (DBS) as an effective tool for enhancing the transformation of contemporary teenagers and the sustenance of the Christian faith. Focusing on Nigeria, this paper posits

that some discipleship efforts have not resulted in the desired transformation made visible in the conversations, attitudes, relationships, and lifestyles of contemporary teenagers because, due to teenagers' peculiar nature, they see most of such Christian education programmes as attempts by the old folks to force their old ways on them. The writer elucidates that DBS is an effective tool for the spiritual development of teenagers as it affords an individual the opportunity to discover and apply the truth on their own. To that end, using both primary sources, including journal articles, participant observation and interactions with some caregivers of teenagers, and secondary sources, the paper combines Lewin's field theory and Kolb's experimental learning theory to elucidate enhancing transformation of contemporary teenagers by presenting DBS as an effective model of operation.

## **Concept of Sustainable Transformation**

Transformation is about a change in form or structure, outward form or appearance, character or condition (Merriam-Webster 2022). In this paper, transformation is defined by four scriptural passages, namely, Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Joel 1:3; and 2 Timothy 2:2. In Romans 12:2, the emphasis is on the changes that occur within an individual's life. Such changes are reflected in visible adjustments in every area of their lives, including attitudes, thinking, lifestyles, and conversation. Such transformations are noticeable in contrast to their lives before becoming Christians. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, the key idea is the present passive indicative Greek word μεταμορφούμεθα (*metamorphoumetha*), rendered "being transformed" (ESV, NIV), "being transfigured" (AMP), or "changed" (KJV) (Thayer 2007:405). The meaning of the expression is the change in character and expression of Christians as their minds and will undergo renewal (Bromiley 1985:609). Thus, the true sense of transformation is holistic.

Joel 1:3 and 2 Timothy 2:2 emphasise reproducibility, which brings the changes from one generation to another, with an emphasis on the original view of the founder (Keener 1993:606). An old Yoruba adage says that a faith whose rituals are kept secret from the young folks, or that children are not part of, will soon go into extinction. This truism is consistent with the Word of God. Continuity of the gospel is a function of deliberate transference of its seed from one

generation to the other. This ability to cause change and transfer the same essence to another is what makes it sustainable.

In the Old Testament, the problem of idolatry in the lives of God's people was traceable to the lack of proper transfer of the essence of their faith in Yahweh to the succeeding generation. "Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel" (Joshua 24:31). Unfortunately, they did not transfer their loyalty to their children:

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths (Judges 2:10-13).

Adeyemo (2006:298) deduces that the writer of the book of Judges clearly associates the spiritual and social problems of Israel, which fill the pages of the book, with their failure to pass the faith on to the next generation. For whatever reason, Joshua's generation failed in their responsibility to disciple and mentor their children in accordance with the Lord's commandment in Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

Sustainable transformation serves to exhibit the life of the Christian faith with increasing impact and to preserve and transmit the true essence of the faith without dilution or unprofitable syncretism to others. This transference idea agrees with Paul's admonition for Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim 2:1-2). Paul's emphasis was on the continuity of apostolic ministry. Apostolic ministry, which every generation must pass on to the succeeding generation, is that which is biblical (Stott 1999:51-52). The apostle was charging his disciple to ensure a guarding of the gospel entrusted unto him and its continuity through succeeding generations of faithful men who would also

teach others. Undoubtedly, the efforts of some faithful men of the past have allowed us to have the gospel today.

Keener (1993:626) gives a contextual understanding of Paul's idea in 2 Timothy 2:2 as relating to Greek philosophical schools where a tradition was passed from one generation to another. There the emphasis was on the founder's views; it was not the views of the immediate leaders. The implication is that authentic biblical faith must be kept unchanged as it is passed from one generation to another. It must be that which the Triune God established by the power of the Holy Spirit and through the early apostles. Thus, the Bible remains the authentic means of reaching contemporary teenagers with the authentic Christian faith that brings transformation and continues to the next generation.

The purpose of Christian education is to bring transformation in the lives of believers irrespective of age, gender or status (Ayandokun 2015:1,8,10-13). It is the primary tool for sustainable transformation. However, for any education to result in the desired transformation, it must satisfy the complex demands of the learning process. This condition is more so in Christian education, where permanent changes in persons vary from simple acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills to attitudinal changes in relationships or lifestyles (Miller 1966:219). Thus, it is often difficult to settle for a single theory in education. Therefore, this paper considers a blend of cognitive and experimentation theories, which the DBS model supports.

The cognitive theories deal with concepts and ideas within Christian teachings, which lead to "learner's discovering and perceiving new relationships [with God and other believers] and achieving insights and understanding" (Horowitz 1986:144). The changes begin from their cognitive setup. The experimental learning theories, like Kolb's theory, consider learning as a multidimensional approach that links theory and practice through a continuous four-stage cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and experimentation. It posits that an individual's experience plays a critical role in their holistic learning. Therefore, the facilitator of learning needs to help the learner make sense of their experience through critical reflection, which serves as the feedback that reinforces their learning (Shaw 2021:132-133). Since not all inner changes easily result in outward expression and vice-versa, the DBS model combines

these two theories complementarily. While one aspect engages the cognitive theory to work from within, the other works from the outside experiential issues to establish internal cognition.

The spiritual development of Christian teenagers is not only a function of their psychological development but also an element of their experience (Amao-Kehinde 2010:3). To experience the desired changes, they must first discover and perceive themselves in the light of their identity in Christ and their relationship with other believers. However, this "inside-out" kind of change does not negate behavioural modification theories that involve experiences in which their caregivers aided them to respond based on an experiment or experience. Some areas of practical Christian life involve forms of experimentation for the acquisition of specific skills. However, subjecting the entire life of teenagers to such a theory is to expose them to the confusion of life. Also, humanistic theories may not be appropriate because some humanistic perceptions are not consistent with the Word of God. Thus, the contemporary unregenerate peer perception and conception of the world of reality would become the teenagers' inner drive for learning. The unchanging and ever-saving truth of the Word of God should drive their learning within the context of their experience.

From the foregoing, the gestalt cognitive theories are applicable because they emphasise deliberate learning by processing information and by the spontaneous application of the same to daily life issues (Mangal 2013:201). To these theories, the expected change in Christian teenagers is not primarily a response to the external forces because such will amount to rote learning, which may not be able to offer solutions to fresh real-life challenges they may face. In specific terms, Lewin's field theory of learning is of great value because it takes learning beyond the physiological aspects of human behaviour (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). It proposes that learning is a function of the person and their identity (Snyder 1996:281).

Lewin proposes that there are three dimensions in any learning process. It begins with a "reworking of valuing and feelings, [followed by] acquiring new cognitive structures of life space, [and then] mobilising new behaviours in [a practical] situation" (Snyder 1996:282). The foundational principle of this theory is to identify forces to weaken and forces to strengthen to bring about

the desired changes by understanding how social groups are formed, motivated, and maintained, and to change the behaviour of the group (Burnes & Cooke 2012:2). The change occurs through the three-step process of re-education<sup>1</sup> that changes the cultural identity of the teenagers by first changing their cognitive structure, followed by a modification of their values. The final result is new behaviour (Lewin 1948:58-59). Teenagers reflect this series of changes as a free expression of their control over their actions.

The implication of Lewin's theory for teenagers' spiritual development is that, instead of making them follow certain "dos" and "do nots" in their spiritual journey, the facilitator of learning exposes them to the Word of God, which engages their worldview and reworks their value systems, feelings, and attractions to their natural tendencies. Consequently, the engagement makes them adopt the biblical cognitive structure and valuing, which results in a new behaviour. Most teenagers' primary challenge is deciding between aligning with their popular teenage identity and their identity as Christians, especially when they are outside the purview of their ministers.

Complementarily, Kolb classifies learners into four categories. The first category consists of convergent learners; the second has assimilative learners. Both categories learn through an abstract presentation. The third and fourth categories are accommodative and divergent learners who learn on concrete terms. Teenagers may combine concrete and abstract learning capacities on a continuum between extremes. They are capable of learning through direct experience by doing, acting, sensing and feeling, analysing, observing, and thinking either as active processors who make sense of an experience by

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<sup>1</sup> The concept 're-education' in this context is strictly according to *Merriam Webster Dictionary* definition as "training to develop new behaviours (as attitudes or habits) to replace others that are considered undesirable." The training is best done through appropriate cultural means of informing the member of that society. It is different from what is associated with either the Chinese re-education camps or the Nazi's concentration camps. Chinese re-education programme, often used for prisoners, is based on humiliation, dehumanization, and brainwashing (Human Rights Watch; Haitiwaji & Morgat 2021). For the Nazis, the concentration camps were terror apparatuses that they used between 1933 and 1945 in countries they occupied during the Second World War. They were a combination of political re-education and industrial slave labour with radical extermination of their human enemies such as the Jews (Straede n.d.).

immediately using the new information or as reflective processors who do so by reflecting on and thinking about it (Shaw 2014).

Consequently, with a biblical cognitive structure, they can seek appropriate Christian responses to situations around them even when surrounded by other choices that come from contemporary peer pressures. The minister can aid them in experimenting with specific instructions appropriate to their cognitive discoveries. How these pressures affect their peculiarity is the crux of the next section.

## **Contemporary Teens and Challenges of Spiritual Development**

Most scholars of developmental psychology classify the stages of human development into five, namely, infancy from birth to age of two; childhood between two and twelve; adolescence between twelve and twenty-one; adulthood from twenty-one to sixty-five; and old age or senescence after sixty-five (Amao-Kehinde 2010:44). Thus, the adolescent stage is between childhood and adulthood. As an essential part of the growing process where they seek to learn to be adults, adolescents also try to establish their identities outside their parents (Nelsen & Lott 2022:Introduction). This establishment of identity means a shift of identity from dependent childhood to independent adulthood. This in-betweenness is key to their peculiarity and consequential challenges in their spiritual development. This section highlights some of the challenges associated with the spiritual growth of the contemporary teenagers.

### ***Insecurity-related Challenge***

Ogundipe (2017:36) submits that because they are neither here nor there, adolescents sometimes "feel insecure with some changes; the desire to be independent occupies their thinking, leading to incessant conflict with people, while their mental development spurs multifarious questioning of values, governance, religion, civic duties, leadership and or relationship".

It is unfortunate that parents often worsen the situation of teenagers' transition from the safety of the home to the complicated world outside by using tools that hinder the brain from doing its job. According to Nelson & Lott



(2022), "although control sometimes provides the illusion of success on a short-term basis, children who are raised with choices, responsibility, and accountability are more likely to develop the social and life skills that will serve well throughout their lives". They add that such mishandling of teenagers often results from the parents' or other ministers' fantasy of a dream teenager rather than a typical practical teenager. The outcome is stress due to their struggles with gaps between these two identities. Nelson & Lott (2022) also conclude that this is one scenario that often leads to an oppositional defiant disorder where the teenagers become more defiant with the more controlling force of their minister.

### ***Technology-related challenge***

Apart from the challenges above that are directly related to teenagers' nature, other external factors are peculiar to contemporary society. The adverse effects of technological development, including many vices and practices they are exposed to through their use of social media, are foremost in this regard.

### ***Challenge of strange teachings***

Another factor that compounds this includes strange Christian teachings, which are attractive and have a form of godliness but deny the power of godliness. An example is the popular teaching of hyper-grace, a new wave of teaching that sounds attractive because of the opportunity it gives for loose living regardless of the concepts of repentance, confession, judgement and holy living from the grace of God (Oloyede 2017:98-101). Thus, as they get to any area of life choice, such teachings seem appealing and easy to embrace since they do not put any moral responsibility on them.

### ***Challenge of ineffective teaching programs***

More so, the failure of some of the existing organised discipleship efforts, which most parents rely upon, has compounded the problem because some of these efforts have remained as programmes to generate reports for the denominational body to which they belong. For instance, in the Nigeria Baptist Convention, the training manuals and promotion systems of groups like the Girls' Auxiliary (GA), Lydia Auxiliary and the Royal Ambassador are designed as good discipleship tools from conversion through consecration to Christian

service.<sup>2</sup> However, the author has observed that promotion to higher ranks has become the focus in some of these churches of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, while discipleship has become redundant. In some cases, GA leaders are eager to send "nice" reports to the Women Missionary Union headquarters to earn themselves some applause, even when the material does not impact the lives of the teenagers they report.

### ***Challenges of poor parental handling skills***

Ayandokun (2015:172-179) affirms the need for parents to learn the skills to handle their teenagers in love specifically. According to her, good strategies that will bring lasting transformation in teenagers will show the love of God, correct in love and reduce criticism, patiently build a relationship with them while listening to them attentively, and make them active rather than dormant. Further, parents must create an appropriate cognitive structure with adequate experiential steps for spiritual development. The position of this paper is that DBS serves as a helpful approach for achieving such a feat.

## **Discovery Bible Study and Teens' Spiritual Development**

This section elucidates the concept of Discovery Bible Study. After that, it considers how it can be an effective tool for the spiritual development of contemporary teenagers.

### ***Discovery Bible Study (DBS) as a Model***

Discovery Bible Study (DBS) and Training for trainers (T4T) are common missiological tools in church planting movements (Smith & Parks 2015:36). DBS is also often referred to as the disciple-making movement (DMM) tool developed by David L. Watson as "a simple method to see for oneself what the Bible says about life's big questions" (Discovery Bible Study, 2020). It is an inductive process of participatory group Bible study focusing on discovering Biblical truth, obedience, accountability, and sharing the same truth within one's circle of relationship (Smith & Parks 2015:36-38). Watson (2008)

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<sup>2</sup> GA of the Nigerian Baptist Convention is a group created for girls between the ages 10 and 17 before moving to the Lydia Auxilliary where they are until marriage. The Royal Ambassador is for their male counterparts. Each of these groups have curricula integrating spiritual formation with domestic education and skill acquisition.

demonstrates this in his *Obedience Based Discipleship: Field Testing Guide Version 1.5*.

While many discipleship programmes in the modern church focus on imparting doctrinal truths and sound theological understanding, DBS emphasises the central task of the Great Commission mandate, namely, "teaching them to observe" (Carlton 2003:115). Steve Addison asserts that, instead of fixing problems, the DBS group leader only creates an environment for participants to learn and discover how God can meet needs and to be disciples. The opening often involves the pastoral care concerns of the members, considering what to be thankful for and what needs the group can pray about. Next is a review of the lessons from the previous week and how each participant fared in practising the truth they discovered and identifying challenges they encountered in obeying the truth. They help each other to remember correctly and overcome challenges of application. The next activity is reading the day's scripture passage before proceeding to the four-phase discussion process (Addison 2011:177, 178).

The participatory discussion of DBS involves four crucial steps. In the first step, the participants consider what the Bible text says. One after the other, they express its literal content in their own words. In the second step, they internalise the text by prayerfully relying on the Holy Spirit to get its meaning. Here, the leader ensures he does not dominate the discussion but guides and corrects members of the group whenever they stray from the right meaning of the text of consideration. They may also, at this stage, add other similar passages of the Scripture that support the lesson put forward by the text as they imagine themselves as characters in the story in the text (Carlton 2003:117).

At the third stage, the participants, having empathised with the character in the passage, prayerfully think about how to apply the text in specific areas of their lives, such as offering praises to God, making a request, or claiming a promise from Him, obeying a specific command, avoiding a particular sin or learning to be or to not be like a character in the passage considered. The participants often state such action in clear, practical terms for the week ahead and in covenant with the group. Subsequently, each participant is accountable to the group and shares their experience of how they obeyed or had challenges

in obeying the discovered truth so that other members can prayerfully help them overcome these challenges in their spiritual development. The last phase of the study is sharing the spiritual truth they have learnt with others before the next study session. Each member is specific about a person from their relationship circle with whom they will share the spiritual truth (Carlton 2003:117-118).

### ***DBS and the Challenges of Spiritual Development among the Teenagers***

While Christian education has transformative power, Ayandokun notes that Christian teenagers often conform to worldly lifestyles contrary to the teaching of Christian parents and other ministers. According to her, teenagers lack the discipline to reject ungodly offers because they want to belong (Ayandokun 2015:6-7). Agiobu-Kemmer asserts that Erikson's psychological theory applies to developmental stages throughout the life span of an individual. According to her, the fifth stage of the theory coincides with the years of adolescence when an individual develops a sense of identity or "ego sense" that results in identity confusion. This crisis is because they have several possible identities from which to choose one. They often see several adult statuses and role models within their social context. Since they want to pursue their identity independent of their parents, they want the opportunity to arrive at their own identity without adult interference. They also tend to resist attempts by parents, pastors, teachers, and other ministers to push and impose specific choices upon them, leading to further internal conflicts and conflicts with others (Agiobu-Kemmer 2009:15-18).

The main essence of DBS is self-discovery of biblical truth and application of the same as derived by the teenager. The discovery stage corresponds to the cognitive conceptualisation part of their learning process, while application corresponds to the experimental aspect of their learning process. The feedback session in the DBS model strengthens the experimental aspect of the learning process. Interactions with over forty student pastors show that Bible study sessions in their churches are less participatory. Only two asserted that their churches operate participatory Bible study. In most of the cases considered, the Bible study leaders teach from their well-prepared outline and allow the audience to contribute or ask questions. Some parents also use such styles in their family devotions. This model makes teenagers feel that the

adults are forcing them into the adults' moulds rather than allowing them to make their own choices. Such a teaching style is counter-productive and can lead to conflicts and oppositional disorder.

In DBS, rather than being confused by the seeming dictates of the parents, teachers, or others, teenagers have the opportunity to examine their existing or prevailing peer worldviews, subject them to a reworking of their valuing and feeling – by themselves and under the guidance of the leader. As a result of such reworking, they can adopt a biblical cognitive structure and arrive at a particular identity that they do not consider imposed by the significant adult others. The specific action step emanating from the discovery is the experimental aspect that becomes valuable for the practical application of biblical truth to their thinking, attitudes, choices, lifestyles, and relationships. Consequently, the process complementarily engages both the "inside-out" and the "outside-in" tools to bring about spiritual development as they strengthen each other in the teenager.

The participatory nature of DBS promotes behavioural change as a function of perception. It creates a platform for teenagers to be motivated for a collaborative problem-solving process with their ministers. Such process includes mutual sharing of issues and goals by teenagers and their ministers, negotiation to be on the same page and settling for the appropriate option that is both satisfactorily understood by the teenagers and impacts their behaviour (Nelsen & Lott 2022:Chapter 5). Through this process, the principle underlying Lewin's theory becomes operative. First, the ministers understand the forces that sustain the undesired behaviours in the teenagers so that they can weaken them through re-education, change their cognitive structures, and modify the valences and values that affect their motoric action in the desired direction. This process receives a boost from the specific actions discovered in the study of the Bible, experimented between sessions, and fed back into the learning process, as Kolb's theory indicates.

The inductive story form of the DBS allows for self-discovery and helps the teenager empathise with the story's character. Each of the steps has a way of enhancing the spiritual development of the teenager. In the first stage, they know what the Bible says beyond merely committing the passage to memory. The second stage gives them a sense of joy associated with discovering the

practical Scriptural lessons they can experiment with by themselves. This is against the background of doctrinal and theological truth that often looks like legal codes that quickly trigger their oppositional defiant disorder. In addition, it also encourages them that they too can listen to God through the Holy Spirit.

In the third stage, group accountability makes them see themselves as members of a group, helping them settle the identity crisis that often leads to confusion as they make choices. Sometimes thinking of accountability alone can help an individual to refrain from doing the wrong thing. This stage of accountability corresponds to the feedback stage of Kolb's experimental learning. It helps them to undergo further behavioural modification as they learn from the experiences of other group members. The last stage conditions the Christian teenagers to be agents of change in their peer circle of relationships instead of being constantly affected by wrong lessons from ungodly sources. Since they are eager to do this, they eventually sow seeds of a biblical worldview in the hearts of their friends, who may either be transformed or stay away from them.

Finally, because DBS combines evangelism and discipleship over a period, it serves the purpose of consistent change of peoples' worldview in a way that is easily reproducible because it calls the whole group to commit to what they discovered by themselves rather than imposed instructions (Smith & Parks "Part 2" 2015:33). This change will be lasting because the teenagers do not see themselves coerced into it. It is also consistent with Lewin's theory as change in the cognitive structures of these teenagers will modify their valences and values, eventually leading to biblical motoric actions.

## **Conclusion**

To respond positively to the holistic development of Africa, the Church must consider the future population and leaders, the teenagers. Teenagers must be well disciplined to be able to reflect biblical values and virtues in every walk of life. As different statistics have shown, many Christian teenagers have not reflected the elements of discipleship in their lives because some approaches that focus on sound doctrinal and theological truth often come as imposed identity. This raises teenagers' oppositional defiant disorder as they feel forced to follow certain directions outside or against their will. This paper has

presented the Discovery Bible Study as a veritable tool for holistic transformation in contemporary teenagers: its approach gradually causes changes in teenagers' worldviews without making them feel like the adults are imposing their ways on them. The change in cognitive structures automatically modifies their identity perceptions, valences, and values, leading to the desired change in every aspect of their lifestyles.

In this light, three recommendations are worthy of note. First, contemporary families, groups, and churches should give DBS a proper placement. The church should not limit its use to the traditional church planting movement among the unreached people groups. Second, churches should mobilise more people to lead DBS groups in their weekly Bible studies. More leaders mean smaller study groups for effective participation. Finally, Christian parents should try to learn about DBS and use them at home with their children. They should not limit the training of their children to what they have in the church or to the doctrinal-based training of most family devotional guides.

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# **The Role of Counselling Skills and Approaches in Pastoral Counselling**

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## **Abstract**

The article stresses the importance of “proper training” for pastoral counselling providers to ensure that they can provide effective and ethical counselling services. Many pastoral counselling providers lack the necessary training and expertise in counselling skills and approaches, which creates a potential risk of ineffective counselling, misdiagnosis, and harm to clients. The article discusses key counselling skills and approaches, emphasizes the need for on-going professional development, and provides recommendations for training programmes and resources to improve the quality of pastoral counselling services.

## **Introduction**

Counselling is a therapeutic process that involves the assistance of a trained professional to help individuals, couples, or groups address personal, social, or psychological issues. According to Taylor (1983:89), cultural counselling is effective because it is closely related to the specific culture and customs of the people. It addresses social and religious issues and can focus on individual or community concerns. Traditional cultural counselling follows social patterns and involves a chain of authority, with trusted leaders and experienced individuals offering advice based on wisdom and experience. Younger individuals are expected to obey the advice of elders, and counselling is often conducted within the context of the family or community. Community or group counselling is particularly effective in the African perspective, as it ensures that

solutions are acceptable to the entire community and becomes part of the community's education system.

In the African context, the importance of professional training and education in counselling is widely recognized. African scholars emphasize the need for counsellors to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively address the different needs of their clients. Inadequate training can lead to ineffective counselling practices, potentially causing harm to clients and impeding their well-being.

By “proper training” the author means being equipped in counselling skills that involves a comprehensive and structured education that prepares counsellors with the necessary knowledge, competencies, and practical skills to effectively engage in the counselling process. The specific components of proper training may vary depending on the educational institution and the counselling programmes.

According to Dzokoto & Adams (2016:53-56), a study conducted in Ghana highlighted the significance of training in counselling for African counsellors. The research emphasized the need for counsellors to possess the appropriate education and training to provide effective counselling services in diverse cultural contexts. This aligns with the notion that professional training is essential to equip counsellors with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of counselling in Africa.

Additionally, the *African Journal of Psychiatry* (2014:10-16) emphasizes the importance of on-going professional development for counsellors in Africa. Continuous education and participation in relevant workshops, conferences, and seminars are essential for counsellors to stay updated with the latest research, practices, and approaches in the field of counselling. This ensures that counsellors are equipped with the most current and effective counselling skills to meet the evolving social, spiritual, and psychological mental health needs of their clients.

By prioritizing professional training and on-going education, counsellors in Africa can enhance their competence and proficiency in providing counselling

services. This will contribute to improved client outcomes and the overall quality of counselling practice on the continent, as stated by Okpaku (2013:21).

The lack of training or expertise poses significant challenges to effective counselling skills and approaches in the African context. African scholars emphasize the importance of professional training, education, and on-going professional development for counsellors to provide safe and effective counselling services. By prioritizing professional training and continuous education, counsellors can enhance their competency, proficiency, and cultural sensitivity, leading to improved client outcomes and the overall advancement of counselling practice in Africa.

## **The role of counselling skills and approaches in pastoral counselling**

Pastoral counselling reflects the Christian tradition of soul healing and the values of clinical practices that facilitate the expression and exploration of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Lartey (2003:81) asserts that the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of the individual are central to counselling theory and practice. Thus, wholeness, well-being, and growth are the key areas of pastoral counselling in this study. It is often conducted by trained church leaders who have an understanding of the religious and spiritual aspects of human life. Pastoral counsellors are trained to provide counselling services to individuals and families who are struggling with spiritual, emotional, and psychological problems. Counselling skills and approaches play a crucial role in pastoral counselling, as they are used to help clients overcome their difficulties and improve their mental and spiritual well-being.

Counselling skills and approaches are crucial in pastoral counselling because they provide pastoral counsellors with a framework to guide their interventions with clients. Pastoral counsellors work with individuals who are experiencing a range of emotional, spiritual, and psychological issues. The use of appropriate counselling skills and approaches can help clients to achieve their goals more effectively.

One example of a counselling skill that is commonly used in pastoral counselling is cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT is a goal-oriented

approach that helps clients to identify negative thoughts and beliefs and to replace them with more positive and adaptive ones. Butler et al., (2006:17-31) explain, CBT has been found to be effective in treating a range of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD. In addition to CBT and the person-centred approach, there are many other counselling skills and approaches that are used in pastoral counselling, such as solution-focused brief therapy, narrative therapy, and mindfulness-based interventions. These approaches can help pastoral counsellors to tailor their interventions to the unique needs of each client.

Another example of a counselling approach that is frequently used in pastoral counselling is the person-centred approach (Rogers, 1957). This approach emphasizes the importance of the therapeutic relationship and the role of the counsellor in creating a safe and non-judgmental space for clients to explore their thoughts and feelings. This approach is based on the belief that every individual has the potential to grow and develop, and that they possess the inner resources necessary to do so. The person-centred approach emphasizes empathy, understanding, and unconditional positive regard. The pastoral counsellor creates a safe and non-judgmental environment where clients can explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This approach helps clients to feel heard and understood, which can be therapeutic in itself. The person-centred approach has been found to be effective in helping clients to develop greater self-awareness and to make positive changes in their lives (Rogers, 1957:95-103). Roger's work is a foundational theory in the field of counselling and psychotherapy. Despite its age, the person-centred approach continues to be influential and relevant in contemporary counselling practice.

Rogers' work on the person-centred approach laid the groundwork for a therapeutic approach that emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and non-judgmental environment for clients. The approach centres around the belief that individuals have an innate capacity for personal growth and self-directed change. The counsellor's role is to provide a safe and empathetic space where clients can explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and work towards self-awareness and personal growth.

Family systems therapy is a widely utilized approach in pastoral counselling, emphasizing the significant influence of family dynamics and relationships on

an individual's mental and emotional well-being. This therapeutic approach concentrates on enhancing communication, resolving conflicts, and cultivating healthier relationships within the family. Family systems therapy has shown efficacy in addressing various issues, including marital problems, parent-child conflicts, and sibling rivalry (Bowen 1978:321).

While the citation provided is from 1978, it is worth noting that Bowen's work on family systems theory has had a lasting impact on the field of counselling and continues to be influential today. Although more recent sources can be found, the foundational principles and concepts of family systems therapy remain relevant and widely applied in contemporary pastoral counselling practice.

Finally, many pastoral counsellors use spiritual or faith-based approaches in their counselling work (Brawer 2001:163-173). These approaches can include prayer, meditation, and scripture reading. For clients who are struggling with issues related to faith or spirituality, these approaches can be particularly helpful in addressing their concerns and finding meaning and purpose in their lives.

Overall, the use of appropriate counselling skills and approaches is essential in pastoral counselling because it allows pastoral counsellors to provide effective and evidence-based interventions that can help clients to achieve their goals and to improve their overall well-being. Counselling skills and approaches play a crucial role in pastoral counselling. The person-centred approach, cognitive-behavioural therapy, family systems therapy, and spiritual or faith-based approaches are just a few of the many skills that pastoral counsellors use to help clients overcome their difficulties and improve their mental and spiritual well-being. By using these skills, pastoral counsellors can help individuals and families to find hope, healing, and a renewed sense of purpose in life.

## **The need for proper training in counselling skills and approaches to pastoral counselling providers**

Pastoral counselling providers play a crucial role in supporting individuals who are experiencing emotional and spiritual distress. However, without proper

training in counselling skills and approaches, they may lack the necessary abilities and knowledge to provide effective care.

Pastoral counselling is an essential aspect of pastoral service, and it can be said that pastoral service is incomplete without counselling. Specialized education is required to become a professional pastoral counsellor. In Dittes' (1999:57) reflections, he highlights that when someone asks to talk to a pastor, it is often a cry for help from someone who feels unable to cope. Pastors are often the first point of contact for those seeking crisis counselling within a church ministry. As the Church is made up of both healthy and sick individuals, pastoral counselling providers can offer much-needed support to those who are spiritually or emotionally unwell. Pastoral counselling providers frequently encounter broken families and individuals in need of coping strategies. Through counselling, parishioners can find spiritual and emotional healing and upliftment. Almost two-thirds of the work done by pastoral counselling providers in the vineyard of the Lord involves counselling in various ways.

Counselling is needed to regulate sexual attitudes and behaviour among youth and adults, to prepare couples for marriage, and when an unmarried woman becomes pregnant. When the church fails to avail counselling services to its members, they are left vulnerable and helpless (Malewo, 2002:71). The call for counselling in the church is a clear indicator of the trust Christians bestow on the church as a reliable source of spiritual, social and moral principles.

Research done by Patterson (2020:100-114) has shown that pastoral counsellors who receive training in evidence-based counselling skills are better equipped to help their clients navigate complex emotional and spiritual issues. Additionally, staying up-to-date with the latest developments in the field can enhance pastoral counsellors' ability to provide effective care (Westgate 2018:20-29).

## **The perils of doing pastoral counselling without the knowledge of counselling skills and approaches**

The lack of proper training in counselling skills and approaches can have negative impacts on the effectiveness of pastoral counselling interventions. For example, Girton (2016:387-395) reveals pastoral counsellors who are not



trained in evidence-based skills may rely on their own intuition or personal beliefs, which can lead to ineffective or even harmful interventions. In several instances, some church leaders have a hard time understanding the difference between counselling and telling people what to do.

The consequences or perils of doing pastoral counselling without the knowledge of counselling skills and approaches can be severe, and may include harm to the client, ethical violations, and ineffective interventions. Here are some examples of these perils:

1. *Ineffective Interventions:* Without knowledge of counselling skills and approaches, pastoral counsellors may rely on untested or ineffective methods to help their clients. For example, they may offer generic advice, repeat clichés, or rely solely on prayer or religious texts, without addressing the underlying emotional or psychological issues. Such interventions may be inadequate or even harmful to the client's well-being (Collins 1988:423).
2. *Ethical Violations:* Pastoral counsellors who are not trained in counselling skills and approaches may inadvertently violate ethical standards in their work. For instance, they may disclose confidential information about their clients, engage in dual relationships, or fail to obtain informed consent from their clients before providing interventions. Such violations can undermine the trust and safety of the counselling relationship and may have serious consequences for the client (ACA 2014).
3. *Harm to the Client:* Pastoral counsellors who lack knowledge of counselling skills and approaches may unintentionally cause harm to their clients. For instance, they may re-traumatize clients by triggering traumatic memories, or they may exacerbate the client's distress by invalidating their feelings or experiences. Such harm can have long-term consequences for the client's mental health and well-being (Pargament & Jones 2011:24 -27).

In summary, the consequences of doing pastoral counselling without knowledge of counselling skills and approaches can be serious, leading to

ineffective interventions, ethical violations, and harm to the client. It is essential for pastoral counsellors to receive appropriate training and supervision to ensure that they are providing safe, ethical, and effective interventions to their clients.

## **The merits of doing pastoral counselling with the knowledge of counselling skills and approaches**

Proper training in counselling skills and approaches is essential for pastoral counsellors to effectively provide counselling services. Without adequate training, pastoral counsellors may lack the knowledge and skills necessary to properly diagnose and treat clients, potentially leading to harm or ineffective treatment.

Proper training in counselling skills and approaches can provide pastoral counsellors with a range of tools and strategies to help individuals navigate emotional and spiritual challenges. It can also help them to develop tailored interventions that are consistent with their clients' beliefs and values.

Research by Ellis et al., (2013:152-160) has shown that training in counselling skills and approaches can significantly improve the effectiveness of pastoral counselling. One study found that pastoral counsellors who received training in cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) were able to effectively treat clients with depression and anxiety, while those without CBT training were not as successful. Similarly, another study by Barnes & Mohr (2010:1-10) found that pastoral counsellors who received training in family systems therapy were able to improve their ability to help families with relationship problems.

It is important for pastoral counselling providers to be proficient in counselling skills and approaches for effective services. Proficiency in counselling skills will help not only to evade causing more problems to the suffering people but also to enrich the management of the problem at hand and empower the symptom bearer toward the restoration or transformation (Clinebell 1984:165).

A significant number of people are hurt by their very trusted church leaders who do not bother to improve their abilities in counselling skills and

approaches and only performs their responsibilities in “traditional fashion” (Kimilike 2008:87).

In conclusion, the need for proper training in counselling skills and approaches is essential for pastoral counsellors to effectively provide counselling services and promote the well-being of their clients. The article emphasizes the importance of on-going education and training for pastoral counsellors to ensure that they are providing the highest quality services as discussed above.

Investing in training and continuing education can lead to improved outcomes for individuals receiving pastoral counselling, increased confidence and competence among pastoral counsellors, and enhanced credibility and trust in the field of pastoral counselling as a whole. By prioritizing proper training in counselling skills and approaches, pastoral counsellors can ensure that they are providing the best possible care to their clients and making a meaningful difference in their lives.

## **Challenges in implementing effective counselling skills and approaches for pastoral counselling providers**

Pastoral counselling providers face unique challenges in implementing effective counselling skills and approaches. Some of the key challenges include:

*Maintaining confidentiality:* Pastoral counsellors are often seen as a trusted confidant within their community. However, this can make it difficult to maintain the confidentiality of their clients, especially when there are other community members involved in the situation. Maintaining confidentiality in pastoral counselling can be a significant challenge due to several reasons.

Firstly, pastoral counsellors often have dual roles as both a religious leader and a therapist, which can create a conflict of interest in maintaining client confidentiality (Sells 2011:1-14). Maintaining client confidentiality in pastoral counselling is a significant concern, especially when pastoral counsellors serve dual roles as religious leaders and therapists. Balancing their responsibilities to clients and their role within the religious community can create a conflict of interest. While confidentiality is crucial for building trust and providing a safe

space for clients, religious expectations may require disclosure or involvement of others in the counselling process, leading to ethical dilemmas. In the African context, where religion plays a central role, this issue is particularly important. Pastoral counsellors in Africa can address this challenge by establishing clear guidelines and boundaries regarding confidentiality, engaging in open discussions with clients, and exploring alternative methods of support while respecting privacy. On-going professional development and training programs that focus on ethical considerations, including confidentiality, can help pastoral counsellors effectively manage the conflict of interest and uphold professional and ethical standards.

Secondly, as members of a religious community, pastoral counsellors may be required to report certain information to community leadership or authorities, even if the client has not given their consent, creating challenges around confidentiality (Smith 2012:17-24). Confidentiality in pastoral counselling becomes more complex when counsellors are obligated to report information without the client's consent, creating a conflict between maintaining confidentiality and fulfilling responsibilities to the religious community. This issue is particularly relevant in Africa where religious communities have a strong influence. Pastoral counsellors in Africa can address this challenge by familiarizing themselves with legal and ethical requirements, openly discussing confidentiality limitations with clients, seeking supervision and support from colleagues, and advocating for clear guidelines and ethical frameworks within their religious communities. Balancing client confidentiality with reporting obligations is crucial for pastoral counsellors in Africa, requiring understanding, communication, and support.

Thirdly, unlike licensed mental health professionals, pastoral counsellors may not have the same legal protections around confidentiality (Kreitzer & Wicks 2010:83-94). There is a disparity in legal protections for client confidentiality between licensed mental health professionals and pastoral counsellors. To address this issue, pastoral counsellors in Africa should familiarize themselves with the legal framework, inform clients about limitations, and prioritize trust-building. Seeking legal advice, consulting professional associations, and continuing professional development are essential. In summary, pastoral counsellors in Africa must navigate confidentiality challenges by

understanding the legal landscape, educating clients, and adhering to ethical guidelines.

Fourthly, pastoral counsellors may have different ethical considerations around confidentiality than licensed mental health professionals, such as a duty to report information to protect the spiritual well-being of their client, even if it conflicts with the client's desire for confidentiality (Canda 2008:97). The distinction between pastoral counsellors and licensed mental health professionals regarding confidentiality is emphasized in the quote. Pastoral counsellors may have a duty to report information to protect spiritual well-being, even if it contradicts the client's desire for confidentiality. In the African context, open discussions, trust-building, and guidance from professional associations are vital for pastoral counsellors to navigate these ethical considerations while prioritizing client well-being.

Lastly, limited training in confidentiality and privacy can make it challenging for pastoral counsellors to navigate the complex ethical and legal considerations around confidentiality (Eby, & Dorman 2016:523-532). Limited training in confidentiality and privacy poses challenges for pastoral counsellors in understanding and addressing complex ethical and legal considerations. Proper training is essential to navigate confidentiality nuances and uphold legal and ethical standards. In the African context, pastoral counsellors should prioritize training on confidentiality, including legal requirements, ethical guidelines, and cultural sensitivity. Pursuing professional development opportunities will enhance their understanding and enable effective counselling while protecting client rights and well-being.

Pastoral counsellors need to navigate these challenges carefully to ensure that they uphold their ethical obligations to clients while meeting the needs of their religious community. Generally, maintaining confidentiality is a challenge in doing pastoral counselling due to the unique roles and responsibilities of pastoral counsellors. They may have different ethical considerations and legal obligations around confidentiality, and may not have the same level of training as licensed mental health professionals. Counsellors need to navigate these challenges carefully to ensure that they are upholding their ethical obligations to their clients while also meeting the needs of their religious community.

*Balancing religious beliefs with counselling ethics:* Sessums (2019:332:341) indicates, balancing religious beliefs with counselling ethics can be a significant challenge for pastoral counsellors, who are often guided by their religious beliefs, which can sometimes conflict with the ethical principles of counselling. There are several reasons why this can be a challenge:

*Dual Roles:* Pastoral counsellors often have dual roles as both a religious leader and a therapist, which can create a conflict of interest (Rohrer-Murphy & Schillinger 2017:95-104).

They may feel pressure to prioritize their religious beliefs over their ethical obligations as a therapist. A conflict of interest arises when pastoral counsellors hold dual roles as religious leaders and therapists. This dual role can create a challenge as they may feel compelled to prioritize their religious beliefs over their ethical obligations as therapists.

Balancing the responsibilities of a religious leader and a therapist can be complex, as it requires navigating between the spiritual needs of the religious community and the ethical considerations of providing effective therapy.

*Client Autonomy:* Baldacchino (2008:134) designates, counselling ethics prioritize client autonomy and self-determination, but some religious beliefs may prioritize obedience to religious authority or discourage seeking outside help. This can conflict with the client's desire to make their own decisions about their mental health.

*Limited Training:* LaSala (2014:1-9) highlights, pastoral counsellors may not have the same level of training in counselling ethics as licensed mental health professionals. This can make it more challenging for them to navigate the complex ethical considerations that arise when balancing their religious beliefs with their ethical obligations as a therapist.

To provide effective pastoral counselling, counsellors must navigate the complex ethical considerations that arise when balancing their religious beliefs with their ethical obligations as a therapist. They must prioritize client autonomy, avoid promoting harmful practices or beliefs, and ensure that they are providing effective care that meets the needs of their clients.

*Addressing diverse needs:* Addressing diverse needs is a significant challenge to effective pastoral counselling (Tix & Frazier 2019:91-102). Pastoral counsellors work with people from diverse backgrounds, with different beliefs, values, and expectations. They may work with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds, each with their own unique values, beliefs, and practices. Understanding and respecting these differences can be challenging and require additional education and training.

Moreover, pastoral counsellors may work with clients from different religious traditions or with no religious affiliation at all, requiring a deep understanding of different religious beliefs and practices (Tix & Frazier 2019:97). Clients may have intersecting identities that impact their mental health and well-being, such as race, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status, which pastoral counsellors need to be mindful of when addressing their clients' experiences and needs.

*Limited resources:* Limited resources in pastoral counselling within the African context have been discussed in various studies and reports. These resources can include financial constraints, limited access to interpreters or translators, a shortage of appropriate literature, and a lack of community resources. These challenges can make it difficult for pastoral counsellors to provide comprehensive care to their clients (Tix & Frazier 2019:97).

In addition to limited resources, pastoral counsellors may also face the issue of their own biases and prejudices, which can affect the quality of care provided to clients from diverse backgrounds. It is crucial for pastoral counsellors to engage in self-reflection, cultural sensitivity training, and ongoing professional development to examine and address their biases and prejudices. This self-awareness is essential for providing culturally responsive and inclusive care to clients (ACA 2014).

Overall, pastoral counsellors need to be knowledgeable about different cultural and religious beliefs, be mindful of intersecting identities, and work to address their own biases and prejudices. They need to have access to resources to address the diverse needs of their clients effectively. Pastoral counsellors must prioritize cultural humility, respect, and understanding to

provide effective and culturally responsive care that meets the unique needs of each client.

*Resistance to change:* In addition to the above challenges, resistance to change can be a significant challenge to implementing effective counselling techniques and approaches, especially for pastoral counselling providers who may have established ways of working based on their beliefs and values. According to Horowitz and Fournier (2014:22), resistance to change can manifest in several ways, including denial, anger, or avoidance. Counsellors who resist change may be reluctant to try new approaches, may dismiss evidence-based practices as incompatible with their beliefs, or may be defensive when confronted with challenges to their existing practices.

To address resistance to change, it is important for pastoral counselling providers to receive on-going training and support, to remain open to new approaches and techniques, and to be aware of the unique needs and cultural backgrounds of each individual. They may also benefit from reflective practice and supervision, which can help them to identify and address any biases or assumptions that may be limiting their effectiveness.

*Stigma and cultural barriers:* Wang, & Wang (2019:242-255) divulge, present significant challenges to the effectiveness of counselling techniques and approaches. According to research, stigma refers to a set of negative attitudes and beliefs about a particular group of people or behaviour, which may lead to discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes. Cultural barriers, on the other hand, are the differences in values, beliefs, and customs that can affect communication and understanding between individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

The impact of stigma and cultural barriers on counselling cannot be overstated. For instance, stigma may cause individuals to feel ashamed or embarrassed about seeking counselling, especially for mental health issues, which can prevent them from accessing the support they need to address their concerns. Similarly, cultural barriers can make individuals wary of seeking help from a counsellor who does not share their cultural background or may not understand their experiences. Consequently, they may worry that the



counsellor will judge them or dismiss their concerns, leading to a fear of judgment.

Moreover, cultural differences can lead to language barriers, making it difficult for individuals to communicate effectively with their counsellor. This can lead to misunderstandings and a lack of trust, which can compromise the effectiveness of the counselling process. Also, stigma and cultural beliefs can influence an individual's understanding of mental health and illness. For example, some cultures may view mental illness as a weakness or a punishment for bad behaviour, leading to reluctance to seek help.

To mitigate these challenges, counsellors must be aware of their clients' cultural backgrounds and any potential stigmas that may affect their willingness to seek help. Counsellors should also have excellent cross-cultural communication skills and the ability to adapt their counselling techniques to meet the needs of clients from different backgrounds. Finally, counsellors can reduce the stigma surrounding mental health by educating their clients about the benefits of seeking help.

In conclusion, stigma and cultural barriers can significantly impact counselling skills and approaches, making it challenging to provide effective support to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is crucial to understand and address these challenges to ensure that counsellors provide high-quality care to all clients.

*Client resistance:* The act can pose significant challenges to effective counselling skills and approaches. According to Norcross and Goldfried (2019:102), client resistance refers to any form of opposition or reluctance that a client exhibits towards the counselling process or the counsellor. It can manifest in several ways, such as denying or minimizing the problem, being defensive or argumentative, avoiding or changing the subject, or simply not engaging in the therapeutic process.

The impact of client resistance on counselling can be significant. It can impede progress towards achieving the desired outcomes of counselling and reduce the effectiveness of the skills and approaches used by the counsellor. For instance, if the client is defensive or argumentative, it can make it difficult for

the counsellor to establish rapport and build a therapeutic alliance. Similarly, if the client avoids or changes the subject, it can hinder the counsellor's ability to explore the client's concerns fully and identify the underlying issues.

Moreover, client resistance can also arise due to cultural factors such as differences in values and beliefs. For example, in some cultures, expressing emotions or seeking help for mental health concerns may be stigmatized, which can lead to client resistance to counselling. Similarly, clients from certain cultural backgrounds may have different expectations of the counselling process, such as seeking advice rather than exploring their thoughts and feelings.

To address client resistance, counsellors must first identify the underlying reasons for the resistance and respond appropriately. It is crucial to understand the client's perspective and work collaboratively with them to overcome their reluctance or opposition. Counsellors can also adapt their counselling skills to meet the unique needs and expectations of the client, such as incorporating cultural considerations into the counselling process.

In conclusion, client resistance poses significant challenges to effective counselling skills and approaches. Counsellors must be aware of the potential reasons for resistance and respond appropriately to facilitate progress towards achieving the desired outcomes of counselling. Lack of training or expertise can pose significant challenges to effective counselling skills and approaches. Counsellors must meet the appropriate education, training, and credentialing requirements and seek on-going professional development opportunities to provide effective counselling services to their clients.

## **Recommendations to improve the quality of pastoral counselling services**

Pastoral counselling plays a significant role in providing emotional and spiritual support to individuals in Africa who are facing personal or spiritual difficulties. However, Kimilike (2008:38) commends, there is a need to enhance the competence and effectiveness of church leaders in pastoral ministry services to meet the contemporary challenges and the growing inclination of congregational members towards external ministries.

To improve the quality of pastoral counselling services in Africa, the following recommendations are suggested:

*Professional Training:* Professional training is a crucial aspect of improving the quality of pastoral counselling services in Africa. It is important for pastoral counsellors to receive comprehensive training in counselling skills and theories in addition to their religious education. This dual training equips them with a broader knowledge base and skill set to effectively address the emotional and spiritual needs of individuals seeking counselling.

Professional training in counselling provides pastoral counsellors with a deeper understanding of human behaviour, psychological theories, and evidence-based counselling approaches. They learn about various therapeutic modalities and interventions that have been proven effective in helping individuals cope with mental health challenges (Beck, 1979:54). This knowledge enables counsellors to apply evidence-based techniques and tailor their approach to meet the specific needs of their clients.

Professional training enhances the effectiveness of pastoral counsellors by equipping them with a range of counselling skills. These skills include active listening, empathy, effective communication, and problem-solving skills (Ezigbo 2017:24-32). By developing these skills, counsellors can establish a strong therapeutic alliance with their clients, create a safe and supportive environment, and facilitate the process of healing and growth.

Implementing these recommendations by providing professional training, promoting cultural competency, encouraging collaboration, utilizing evidence-based approaches, and emphasizing self-care, pastoral counselling services in Africa can be improved to better meet the emotional and spiritual needs of individuals.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, proper training in counselling skills and approaches is essential for pastoral counselling providers to provide effective support to individuals dealing with emotional, spiritual, and mental health challenges. It is important for pastoral counselling providers to continually improve their skills and

knowledge through on-going training and education to meet the unique needs and cultural backgrounds of each individual. This will help to address the challenges that may arise in implementing effective counselling skills and approaches and enable pastoral counselling providers to provide comprehensive and effective support to those in need. Overall, investing in the education and training of pastoral counselling providers will help to promote the mental and emotional wellbeing of individuals and communities.

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## **Twenty-First Century Challenges for Sustainable Christian Marital Relationships in the Nigerian Context: Post-Marital Counselling as a Pastoral Care Recipe**

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### **Abstract**

This article asks why a hitherto perceived sweet, glowing, and romantic marital relationship between a Christian husband and a Christian wife can suddenly turn sour or bitter. Sometimes such an expected sweet and romantic relationship goes into limbo and ends up in dissatisfaction, disappointment, disenfranchisement, physical and emotional abuse, and, in a worse scenario, separation and, sometimes, divorce because of the activities of certain intruders. This article contends that certain intruders are encroaching on the sustainability of the Christian marital relationship. It argues that many of these intruders will be greatly minimised where pastoral caregivers provide space by placing a great premium on effective premarital counselling, and more importantly, post-marital counselling within at least the first two years of marriage. It concludes that when this missing gap is appropriately filled in, it will facilitate the commitment of the couple to each other and motivate a progressive dedication to faith by both partners. In this way, a sustainable and harmonious Christian marital relationship can be achieved, which will enhance the quality of the spiritual health of the Christian community with a spill-over to the general society.



## Introduction

Readers of the Bible encounter the historical narrative of marriage as the first established human institution (Gen 2:18–24). The further expansion that would later follow in the biblical narratives regarding familial relationships, whether of the nuclear or extended family, presupposes a primordial functional, sustainable type of a knitted relationship such as existing between husband-wife, parents-children, and couple-in-laws relationships (Chuwang 2019:5). Marriage and familial relationships are fundamental to a functional and cohesive society. Thus, they deserve meticulous academic research into their ancient context (Balch and Osiek 2003; Dumitraşcu 2015).

According to its original purpose and goal, the marital relationship is meant to be a consistently suitable, supporting type of relationship that supplies specific needs to remove loneliness and boredom (Gen. 2:18, 20b). In the divine economy, husband and wife became interchangeably fused; they become one whole as partnering helpers. A helper within a marital context designates someone who comes alongside another to render support in a manner that both strengthens and adds value to the person being supported. Such a relationship is one of giving of oneself for the sake of the other by contributing to making the other more productive and beneficial to the church and society.

The family, as the minutest unit of the larger human society, is “the cornerstone of any society” (Ajayi, Olakunle, Ahmed, and Abegunrin 2021:1) and intrinsically “the backbone of every society” (Chuwang 2019:4), serving as the foundation upon which a cohesive society rests. Butler and Lee (2015:2) assert: “The family, although very complex, is the most fundamental unit of society. The family functions as the carrier of tradition and the stability of community”. The family lays the foundation for a cohesive, functional human sociology; good morality; religious traditions; proper management of one’s personal and corporate economy; care for ecology; the value of the dignity of labour; adherence to the principles of truth, honesty, equity, fairness, and justice; care for human life; and upholding the dignity of human beings. Other societal institutions can only be expected to reinforce what the family has instilled and codified in their progenies.

Functional, sustainable familial relationships have a bearing on the expression of religion. The spiritual strength and the missiological success of Christianity fall back on the merits of strong and sustainable Christian families. In this regard, Kasper (1983:1) is right: “There is no area of human life on which most people today are so dependent for personal happiness and fulfilment as that of love between man and woman, a love that is made lasting in marriage and family life. There is also no other sphere in which faith and life are so intimately in contact with each other as in marriage”. This is rooted in godly parental care and modelling that instils the character of godliness and good morals in their progenies who perpetuate the faith even after the demise of their parents. Since all progenies learn lessons regarding morality and social etiquette at home from an early age, their progenitors stand as their paradigm in this respect, particularly because the latter mimic the values modelled by their progenitors.

Unfortunately, marriages—Christian and non-Christian alike—are constantly coming under various assaults such as dishonesty, infidelity, separation, and divorce. The prevalence of moral vices in society is a picture of what obtains in most twenty-first-century families. The children of separated or divorced marriages are exposed to unnecessary hardship and trauma. Couples who resist marital separation and divorce for fear of societal shame, disrepute, and stigmatisation live in perpetual dissatisfaction, agony, and unfulfillment. Yet the divine purpose of the marriage relationship was enjoyable, lifelong companionship. This notwithstanding, marriages today—even Christian marriages—are crumbling because “people no longer take marriage as a serious commitment for life” (Paul 2019:247). This is the likely reason why both Jesus and Paul re-echoed the original purpose for marriage (Matt. 19:3-12; Eph. 5:31). One fears that the disturbing ideology of “open marriage” may sooner or later become normative in Nigerian society.

This research sought to resolve a pastoral care and counselling issue. Pastors who exercise oversight over congregations as pastoral caregivers and as under-shepherds, representing Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd, must live up to the Christological demand placed upon them: “Feed my lambs”, “Take care of my sheep”, and “Feed my sheep” (Jn. 21:15–17). Paul echoed this demand in his instruction to the elders of the congregation at Ephesus: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Be shepherds of the church of God. . . . So be on your guard!” (Acts 16:28, 31). Paul further affirmed this imperative to Timothy:“ Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2).“ Endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5). One of the pastoral care and counselling challenges that pastors face almost daily is in the area of marriage and familial relationships.

Why is there increasing abuse, separation, and divorce in marriages today—even Christian marriages—when the divine norm is the union of one man and one women for better or for worse; till death do us part? (Gen. 2:18, 24; Mat. 19:3-6, 8). Why is it that couples who had benefited from premarital counselling prior to their marriage also experience marital challenges to the extent that some either end in separation or divorce? What is missing that Christian marriages and homes that are expected to be a model to society also suffer from crippling disasters in their familial relationships? Failure in marital relationships leaves its detriments on the partners as well as children and members of society. How, then, can such familial abnormality be resolved for a reversal of the unfortunate trend? To respond to these queries vis-à-vis the research problem, the research applied a discursive-investigative approach in search of a remedy by using both primary and secondary sources of data. After discussing the triggers and effects of this relational abnormality, it proposes post-marital counselling and continuous periodic marital management counselling as an antidote.

A sample of 35 respondents, including 18 pastoral caregivers and 17 male and female spouses, were randomly selected in Jos, Nigeria for the research after obtaining their consent. The pastoral caregivers were selected from four denominations. The ministry experience of these pastoral caregivers ranged from 6 to over 21 years. The majority had pastored at least four, some even more than five, different congregations. The 17 spouses including 10 husbands and 7 wives from ten different Nigerian tribes. They also maintain membership in five different denominations. They had been married from two to over twenty-one years. In addition to this survey, at a couples ’seminar, facilitated by the researcher in one local congregation in Jos, Nigeria, on 18 June 2022, the participants were grouped into two groups for discussion on the research concern to generate additional data. One group consisted of 53 wives; the other, of 47 husbands. Because this research was conducted in the field of

practical theology, the researcher applied practical-empirical and theological-contextual methods to analyse the data obtained. These methods of analysis encapsulate current observable phenomena being manifested in practice rather than theory and the interrelated religious conditions in which such existential reality occurs.

## **The factors triggering distorted Christian marital relationships as a burden for pastoral caregivers**

The world is quickly becoming a devourer of its inhabitants. Almost every society is experiencing a downward spiral as the universal law of fairness, equity, justice, and love for humanity are being adhered to less and less by nations and citizens. Flagrant human abuses and disrespect for the dignity of the same appear to be on the increase with rising global crises.

Families are also disintegrating at an alarming rate today. It is normal that people who are preparing to marry look forward to it with great anxiety and excitement. But ironically, soon after the occasion, sometimes even during the honeymoon period, some of them become already disenfranchised, loathing the marriage. When this happens, the vows, the marriage, the crown, the merry-making, the dignity and the honour of the “D Day” are easily forgotten (Paul 2019:247).

The research findings indicated that all people who are married or who have previously been married admit the presence of challenges in the relationship. There is nothing like a “problem-free” life. So it is with the marriage relationship. As an experienced pastor contends: “No marriage is free from real life challenges” (Chuwang 2019:113). Admittedly, “there is no husband and wife relationship which is devoid of disputes and conflicts” (Onyekachi et al 2020:1). What, then, could be the cause of these disputes in what was expected to become a loving, caring, romantic, and a lifelong relationship? A few factors are considered below.

### ***Conjugal issues involving coital deprivation***

From the beginning, coital consummation was put in place primarily for the expression of the true love each spouse has for the other, and thereby, to nurture a blissful and romantic marriage experience. But coitus becomes

problematic when deprivation intrudes. A total of 46% of both the pastoral and spousal respondents admitted that the absence of a satisfying sexual experience in marriage causes multiple problems. They recommended that imbibing biblical principles would establish the right foundation for healthy attitudes toward sex in marriage, which scholarship suggests can lead to wholeness in that area (Wheat and Wheat 2012; Köstenberger and Jones 2004).

Several factors account for this coital abnormality (Kore 1995:26–27, 31–32). A wife might deprive her husband of sex because of its lack of satisfaction. In this regard, a wife respondent said, “Most women suffer in silence so as not to hurt their husband’s egos while the men would rather not talk about it and feel they’re good at it when in truth, the woman probably just endures.” Husbands must admit that sometimes they are unable to give their wives coital satisfaction because of inexperience, fatigue, premature seminal ejaculation, or certain health conditions. Such failure can become quite frustrating for the wife.

In the Nigerian context, women generally love to wear new fabrics to exhibit their public status. When a husband is unable to procure some for his wife, she might deprive him of sex in reaction. Such deprivation could equally occur when the husband fails to keep up with the responsibilities of catering to the economic, social and security needs of the family.

Conversely, a husband might deprive his wife of sex as a means of punishing her for some misdeeds or because he keeps a mistress. Couples also sometimes resort to sexual deprivation as vengeance to settle scores when the relationship becomes sour. Promiscuity by either partner can also lead to a lack of interest in coitus by their spouse.

### ***Infidelity in a marital relationship***

John Arierhi Ottuh’s (2019) research indicated that the idea of infidelity is generally highly abhorred by Nigerian tribes because it stands as an object of disgrace to the family and clan of the offender. The act of infidelity fundamentally erodes integrity, dignity, and respect, and demeans the personhood of the person involved. Christian spouses are bound by vows that were pledged publicly. A vow is a solemn promise by which one is bound

by its provisions. It is the act of committing to do something according to its specifications and to unreservedly adhere to the terms of the vow. Ogidi Joshua Dickson (2019:99-102) correctly describes it as a contract of the life of sacrifice.

One of the purposes of the marital union is to compensate for the weakness a man or a woman has in being alone and to establish a faithful, monogamous relationship, which is essential for the successful survival of society (Paul 2019:248). Thus, Christian marriage vows are a solemn commitment to marital fidelity in mind, soul, spirit, and body. This explains why God undertakes to judge any party that defaults in such a relationship (Heb. 13:4). Infidelity causes marriage disharmony and sometimes leads dissolution—against the primordial purpose for marriage.

Thirty-one percent of respondents admitted to the existence of infidelity in Christian marriages. One of the reasons given for infidelity is spouses living apart, mostly because of vocation. When Jesus told his tired and sleeping disciples to “watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” (Matt 26:41), when Paul asked Timothy to flee evil desires (2 Tim. 2:22), and when Peter called on their audiences to resist the devil— an enemy described by Peter as “a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:9)—they recognized not only the presence of temptations but also the possibility falling into them. Danfulani Kore asserts that infidelity is a grave sin in the sight of the One who created sex fundamentally because it is sacrilegious of the “dignity and sacredness” of marriage (Kore 1995:28).

### ***Related financial issues***

The quest or insatiable drive for financial and material acquisition by Christian marriage partners can also become a problem. The writer of Ecclesiastes cautioned against a senseless materialistic behavioural psychology: “Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income” (Eccl. 5:10). Similarly Paul knew the destructive effects of the insatiable quest for money and material possessions when he warned Timothy against it (1 Tim. 6:9-11; 2 Tim. 4:10).

Sixty-five percent of the respondents indicated that a dysfunctional attitude towards the acquisition of tangible things can stand in the way of a blissful

marital relationship. When a Christian spouse becomes greedy, self-centred, and dishonest in financial matters, this serves as fertile soil for conflict, strife, distrust, and dishonesty. Rather, being vulnerable to one's spouse in all financial matters is the height of openness and honesty regarding finances (Dickson 2021:115). Accordingly, Christian couples should make money a servant to meet their family needs rather than a master that controls their home (Chuwang 2019:116).

Poverty and greed can become real challenges for a family. In the Nigerian context it has become normal that rich people are celebrated while the poor are disdained and marginalised, even in larger family decisions, no matter how beneficial the poor person's opinion may be. This distorted psychological ideology has been carried into familial relationships where Christian spouses compete over mundane matters.

### ***Communication gap***

Verbal and non-verbal communication are means of self-expression and of the expressing of one's love for another. In the research sample, 40% of respondents indicated that unstable communication destroys the joy of marriage. According to scholars, although "men tend not to have as great a need for conversation as women", one thing a wife cannot do without is intimate conversation with her husband (Harley 2011:n.p.). Effective communication and the management of information in marriage place each spouse on the same page. A communication gap suffocates either or both partners because it stands in the way of a romantic, marital relationship (Chuwang 2019:115).

This challenge exposes the familial relationship to vulnerability by creating grounds for distrust, doubts, misconceptions, and drawing conclusions based on wrong assumptions. Silence from one spouse is an expression of the lack of proper communication; making independent decisions affecting the family is another. A female respondent said that when deep honest conversations about issues such as the number of children to bear, how a spouse feels about issues, what to buy or not to buy, how to save money, how to discipline children, and more are lacking in a spousal relationship problems easily crop into the marriage relationship. Here, husbands in the Nigerian context appear

to be more at fault, because the culture considers it normal not to tell women all secrets.

Another way of blocking the flow of effective communication is a lack of openness. Forty-three percent of the research respondents indicated that a spouse can become secretive with information when there is a lack of trust in the relationship. This scenario becomes more pronounced when a feeling of insecurity exists in the spouse who distrusts the other, thereby resulting in their not being open to sharing their true feelings with the other, and in their living in pretence regarding the true state of their emotions and challenges. Acting against the prevailing cultural paradigm, transformed Nigerian Christian husbands should create an environment in which their wives are encouraged to share ideas that could be helpful to the family (Kore 1995:39).

### ***Temperamental personality and behavioural intolerance***

Psychologists have identified four personality temperaments (LaHaye 2002:1–63). A person's dominant temperament characterises their behavioural response to internal and external stimuli. While some temperaments are expressive, others are reserved; while some others are egocentric and self-sufficient, others are calm and considerate. Crisis ensues when the weaknesses of the one temperament steps on those of the other (LaHaye 2002:75–88) or when a spouse is insensitive or adamant to the feelings of the other.

Findings from the research revealed that personality differences influence spousal behavioural disposition in marriage. When a spouse is not psychologically, sociologically, emotionally, and spiritually mature, personality differences will stand in the way of their communication and relationship. This will become the case when the spouses are ignorant of the influence of their temperamental differences. Familial crisis can occur when differences in personality traits such as expressed anger, impatience, and intolerance through irrational behaviour are poorly managed. An untransformed strong-willed personality possesses a high tendency of self-ego, which causes a lack of teachability, refusal to adjust to the other personality in marriage, refusal to apologise for a wrong, and an expressed attitude of malice and unforgiveness.

But, when properly harnessed, personality differences can be an asset, not a deficit. Spouses should complement each other by ensuring that the strengths



of the one make up for the weaknesses of the other. It is the failure to understand the composition of individual personalities and the ability and maturity to properly manage them that create many enemies, divisions, contentions, and strife in the family, in society and in the church (Chuwang 2019:83).

### ***An abusive, disrespectful, and unromantic marriage***

Every human person possesses inherent human dignity. Within a marital relationship, each spouse wants to be noticed, respected, valued, and appreciated so they can enjoy the good life in marriage. But marital and familial relationships often become abusive, disrespectful, and impoverished of bliss where inadequate knowledge about the essence of marriage exists or where a spouse intentionally resorts to inhumanity. Only a few spouses can endure an abusive, disrespectful, and romantically impoverished marriage. Wrong assumptions about the nature of marriage and how couples are to relate can generate some misgivings. For instance, many people go into marriage with the assumption that they will enjoy a life devoid of pain. As nice as this assumption is, it is quite erroneous. Marriage is like a business: one first invests in it before reaping the benefits or profits. People who have this misconception about marriage go into it only to benefit from the profit without any investment.

The main purpose of the marital relationship is that of complementarity, that is, filling in the gaps to make the other person complete (Gen. 2:18b). It is rendering support to each other so that together the couple becomes strong (Eccl. 4:9–12). Marriage is to build a “home.” In a home, family members stand together and find peace and calm, support, comfort, and encouragement, thereby drawing strength from one another. In a home, there is comfort and security. In a home one finds a shoulder on which to lean. In a home, there is understanding, acceptance, patience, and tolerance.

Misconceptions regarding the nature and expected relational expressions in marriage can become detrimental and abusive. Thirty-nine percent of respondents agreed that the presence of certain marital abnormalities can tear a marriage apart. The absence of romance is indicative for a couple’s lack of spending quality time together either because of distant vocation, giving more attention to social media, or spending time with friends to the detriment of

one's spouse. Furthermore, the research revealed that some husbands mistreat their wives through verbal abuse by using derogatory and humiliating comments on them or making certain threats. Others disrespect their wives by shouting at them or talking them down in public. Some also display their lack of appreciation and disregard for their wife's contributions or opinions on family matters.

Conversely, some wives abuse and disrespect their husbands, particularly those husbands who have a calm, quiet, and tolerant personality. Respondents indicated that wives exhibit such attitudes when they abuse their husbands verbally and refuse to submit to them through flagrant rebellion and disobedience. Highly opinionated wives have a tendency to become irrational and impulsive with their words and actions. Equally, some wives are overbearing and domineering because of their quest for control. Ironically, some of these women use the Bible and what is preached in the church to force their views on their spouses. These exhibited tendencies from a Christian marriage are disastrously unfortunate, and they signal the presence of carnality and disregard for the divine essence of the marriage life.

### ***Prioritising cultural values over biblical ones***

There are many tribes in Nigeria with traditional practices and customary beliefs and values. Within this context, intercultural marriage can become a source of conflict when the one insists that the other obliges to their traditional norms and practices in the relationship. Our findings revealed that many spouses—both husbands and wives—in the Nigerian context are so intrinsically so to these practices that they fail to detach themselves from them. Some Christian spouses, whether by their embedded individual cultural volition or those forced upon them by their parents and clans, readily subordinate biblical worldviews and principles to allow their traditional, cultural beliefs and practices to become operative in their marital relationship.

The majority of those who subject their spouse to adhering unreservedly to their traditional, cultural, tribal values contrary to those of their spouse are husbands. When Christian couples hold on to detrimental cultural beliefs and practices that are inimical to their marriage, their relationship will always be problematic and constantly in jeopardy. African beliefs that a woman's place is in the kitchen, that she should only be seen and not heard, or that her

presence in the marriage is merely to bear children and to sexually satisfy the man and keep him happy, are culturally conditioned; they lack clear biblical support or value (Kore 1995:7–8, 26–27).

Another traditional African belief that the man is the sole provider and financier of the family, regardless of whether or not the woman has employment or a business that earns more than the husband, is purely a culturally created phenomenon. Some have appealed to the claim of the Bible which instructs the man to provide for his family lest he become worse than an infidel (2 Tim 6). The textual context suggests that this was effective only to the extent that women in biblical times neither went to farms nor were office workers. Such cultural intrusion can weigh heavily on the marriage by creating distance between spouses. However, obliging oneself to the divine prescriptions for marriage actualises and maximises the benefits of abundant married life (Kore 1995:9).

### ***Childlessness in marriage or a particular sex of children***

Traditional African society looks with disdain on a childless couple but ironically fails to raise an eyebrow at irresponsible parenting. Infertility can become a major cause of marital conflict and conflict with in-laws. According to Ademiluka (2021;2, 8), it is “an uphill task to make Africans accept any proposition of a child-free life, given their passion for children”. Childless women often feel forced to seek help from any available means including traditional healing homes and the so-called spiritual churches (Arugu 2014:376). The agony of infertility in Africa is common knowledge to empirical observation and common sense.

To save Christian couples from this traumatic sociological embarrassment, pastoral caregivers should educate prospective Christian couples during premarital counselling about two basic truths concerning children. First, marriage is complete without children. Children are only a gift from God. Nowhere has he promised to give them to all married couples (Gen. 2:18, 22–24; Ps. 127:2). Second, it is better not to bear children than to bring innocent children into the world as truants and threats to society because of parental negligence and irresponsibility. This amounts not only to a catastrophic act but also to an apparent sinful act against the Giver of life. Is it not better to remain childless and be justified before the divine than to have children but stand

condemned in God's judgement for lack of their proper training, upbringing, care, and social and theological protection? Marriage is complete without children in it. Ademiluka (2021:1) is correct in proposing a pastoral care remedy:“

The church [in Nigeria] has to develop a theological reconstruction with regard to procreation in marriage, in a manner that will assure Christians that a childless marriage is not lacking in any way ... [because] the belief that the Old Testament views barrenness as caused by sin and a punishment from God [is not only] erroneous. ... [but because] infertility is a natural phenomenon, and God gives children as a blessing but not necessarily to every individual”.

Another angle to this problem is the sex of children. African sociology presupposes that a married woman who bears only female children does not know how to give birth properly. This is because the culture values male children over female children because of the belief that when a daughter is married, she disappears from the family record. This explains why some cultures and families place high bride prices on their daughters. This is fallacious, not factual. Although God designed the male and female physiological outlook and psychological expression as well as their intellectual perception differently, both sexes have the same human blood, human emotions and feelings, human life and dignity, and both sexes experience death as their destiny.

### ***Miscellaneous causations***

Other causes of marital conflict and crisis are extant. First, thirty-seven percent of the research respondents indicated that third-party interference in a marital relationship can be disastrous, especially when confidentiality is not kept. This includes interference by in-laws, friends, and neighbours (Chuwang 2019:115). An aggrieved and angry spouse may report their marital issues to a third party, even discussing their spouse's weaknesses, with the hope of seeking justice or finding succour. Our research indicated that some spouses do this in an attempt to impress or please a coercive, nagging mother- or father-in-law. This can cause further challenges that negatively impact the marital relationship.

Second, the absence of trust, which is a critical pillar for a sustainable marital relationship, can become an issue in marriage. Christian couples can become intimate in the relationship only when there is trust and mutual respect.

Third, a spouse's previous promiscuous life, whether with or without a child out of wedlock, or previous experience of abortion, can cause suspicion and distrust in marriage. Survey respondents admitted that these situations can become serious, particularly when the couple did not have premarital counselling prior to marriage.

Fourth, findings revealed that where a Christian couple maintain membership in different denominations, the contrary preaching and teaching that each receives can become a means of trouble in their relationship. Respondents also said that comparison causes problems in a marriage where spouses use the marital experience of their parents, friends, or other persons as a paradigm for theirs, especially when such comparison are used to provoke their spouse. Previous research also discovered that social incompatibility, sexual incompatibility in terms of extreme sexual orientation, extended family intrusion, lack of mutual respect between partners, dishonesty and moral decadence, negligent behaviour of spouses, and unwholesome social behaviour are some other causes of marital conflict (Ajayi, Olakunle, Ahmed, and Abegunrin 2021:3–4).

Although crises in Christian marital relationships can sometimes become almost insurmountable because of the behavioural disposition of either or both spouses, mature Christians are expected to always make their marriage work and grow with love. As Dickson (2012:13) correctly states, a Christlike character that displays the character traits of patience, tolerance, and the ability to forbear one's partner is a secret that has kept successful marriages going strong for several years. Quite obviously, without the maturity of possessing a good understanding of the psychology of one's spouse, without the capacity of patience in the face of troubling matters caused by one's spouse, and without the ability to tolerate the mistakes, expressed attitudes, failures, and recurring hurtful behaviours marriage can hardly survive and thrive, especially in this present permissive and individualistic society.

## **The effects of crises in Christian marital relationships as a burden for pastoral caregivers**

The pastor who exercises oversight over a local congregation is described as a shepherd because the pastor is a caregiver, caring for the spiritual, physical, material, emotional, and sociological needs of the congregation. When a problem exists in a marital relationship, there are attendant effects as well. Marital conflicts have detrimental effects on the spouses and on innocent bystanders, including pastoral caregivers, children, extended family members, the church and the wider society.

### ***Effects on pastors***

Thirty-two percent of the pastoral caregivers sampled for this research agreed that marital conflicts can become quite frustrating, adding burdens to their ministry. They admitted that these conflicts can consume a lot of the time they would have otherwise deployed in other areas of church ministry. In my pastoral experience, some marital crises can defy therapy and pastoral counselling; they are endlessly unresolvable.

Couples who go through a relationship crisis easily resort to blaming the other spouse. The sampled pastors admitted that they usually suffer in the line of duty by becoming the target of false accusations of taking sides. Most often these accusations come from the husbands, some of whom will walk out on pastor. It is hazardous for innocent pastors who are endeavouring to save marriages to suffer such emotional trauma.

Perennial marital conflicts can also have negative effects on congregational membership. Some of the surveyed pastors indicated that spouses in marital conflict can change their church membership to where they are not known, resulting in a reduction to the church's membership. Our findings also indicated that lingering unresolved marital issues can become infectious in the spiritual life of the congregation.

### ***Effects on the spouses***

When marital and familial conflict becomes perennial, it soon becomes disastrous for the marriage and the family. As a part of Africa, Nigeria exists within a shame culture. Married people who have a hard time in their

relationships tend to avoid admitting it publicly to avoid social ridicule, stigmatisation, and marginalisation. Some parents encourage their children to remain in a marriage that is not working to save them from public shame and disgrace.

In this research, forty-nine percent of respondents admitted that a lingering unresolved marital conflict normally begins from mere disagreement, but that it escalates to disharmony, separation, and finally divorce. Another 47% of respondents affirmed that divorce can result where a prolonged marital conflict remains unresolved. Even prior to the dissolution of the marriage, respondents admitted that this unfortunate scenario can lead to infidelity. Scholars opines that “divorce will continue to be on the increase in Nigeria if its causes and effects are not properly identified and controlled” (Ajayi, Olakunle, Ahmed, and Abegunrin 2021:2).

Forty-nine percent of survey respondents agreed that a degenerated marital relationship caused by conflict can lead to distrust, suspicion, and a loss of confidence in one’s spouse. These respondents accepted that such issues deeply affect family unity, hereby thwarting any progress or growth in the family.

Perennial marital conflict can also impair one’s health. Among the surveyed spouses, 64% agreed that prolonged marital conflict can cause emotional stress and depression. It can sometimes result in the death through cardiac arrest. Forty-seven percent also revealed that such crises can also cause traumatic experiences that could likely result in hypertension.

Without a doubt, a lingering unresolved issue can affect one’s spiritual health. The research findings indicated that some in conflicted marriages experience difficulty in praying and reading the Bible. Some lose the desire to fellowship with other members of their Christian congregation. Some blame God for their plight because of his seeming inability to take them out of their traumatic condition.

Frustrated spouses in a Christian marriage where efforts at resolving nagging issues have failed can become aggressive and violent. Survey respondents also revealed that a sour marital relationship can lead to loneliness, thereby

resulting in emotional and physical abuse, bitterness, malice and unforgiveness.

More effects came to light during the couples' seminar group discussion. The group consisting of 53 wives admitted that marital challenges can cause poor communication, and intimidation and fear in the wife—especially when the husband frequently shouts at her. It can thwart holistic family growth mechanisms, and can affect the spouses' coital relationship. The result is disharmony and an absence of peace. The second group, consisting of 47 husbands, also agreed that challenges can cause disharmony and the absence of peace. Due to poor communication, disrespect, and a lack of trust in the relationship, resulting in the exhibition of pretence and falsehood. These challenges can also affect efficiency in one's productivity in life, and impair prudent and beneficial financial management for the family.

### ***Effects on children and extended family members***

One would only beg the question not to admit that conflicts in marriage weigh heavily on children in that marriage. Forty-nine percent of respondents admitted that an environment of marital conflict deeply affects the emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual well-being of children in the family. Findings also indicated that such a conflicted environment results in bad parenting and transferred aggression in the children. Additionally, it also causes psychological imbalance in children. As affirmed by Arugu (2014:382), divorce causes children lack parental love and affection, which can cause discontinuity in their emotional and intellectual development, causing a high rate of juvenile crime in society.

Most African societies today, including the clans and tribes of Nigerian society, still boast about the benefit of extended family relationships. The extended families of both spouses—parents, siblings, uncles, aunts and nephews and nieces—are usually affected when a marriage is not working as initially thought. Thirty-one percent of respondents affirmed that marital conflict can cause constant strife and quarrels among the members of the extended family on both sides of the aisle. In such cases, extended family members take sides and become defensive and protective. In the Nigerian situation, every parent, even those whose children are already married, always want to defend their children, even when their child is in the wrong. One's siblings too normally rise



to one's defence. The tendency for either or both sets of the parents of the couple in a conflicted marriage to accuse the other of poor parenting, thereby causing problems for their own son or daughter, most certainly exists. Without a doubt, as Paul (2019:253) notes, the dissolution of marriage leaves infectious effects on emotions such as anxiety, guilt, fear, sadness, depression, anger, bitterness, and frustration on the children, family members, church, friends, and the couple themselves.

## **The antidotal action by pastoral caregivers at resolution**

A healthy congregation is the joy of a truly called pastor. This health includes the well-being of all of the families in the congregation. Certain proposals for pastors are postulated from the findings of the research as the antidotes to the identified challenges to sustainable Christian familial relationships.

### ***Thematic preaching and teaching on family life and seminars on the Christian home***

Preaching and teaching are two aspects of the role of pastors exercising oversight over a congregation. Among the pastoral respondents, 23% proposed this antidote as a cure for the challenges to Christian familial relationships. This preaching can be sequenced under themes regarding the various aspects of marriage and family life, such as the husband-wife love relationship, becoming supporting ligaments for each other's weaknesses, and more.

Just as professionals attend conferences, seminars, and workshops to broaden their horizons in their professions, there is a similar need for Christian families to attend such events. Thirty-three percent of all respondents proposed this antidote. They also suggested the inclusion of periodic family and/or couples retreats and dinners as reinforcers of the familial relationship. Well-articulated sermons and teachings alongside seminars on issues that are relevant could facilitate the rekindling of a glowing happy marriage.

### ***Effective premarital counselling***

Premarital counselling has great benefits because of its significance in building a sustainable family. This preparatory foundational level in the marital journey provides additional church education specific to the motif of Christian marriage

and the methodology of building family life. All the pastoral respondents admitted to placing a high premium on premarital counselling programmes. Twenty-three percent proposed that pastors should intensify these programmes in a more creative and innovative way. In recently conducted research on the influence of biblical premarital counselling on Christian marriages, Akuson (2017:100–107) discovered that couples who receive substantial biblically-based premarital counselling stand a better chance of succeeding in their marriage. According to Akuson’s findings, this foundation promotes a better understanding of God and of each other by the couples; it fosters a good relationship with in-laws; it promotes a good understanding of familial roles; it enhances good couple and familial communication skills and the ability at conflict resolution; and it fosters a good coital relationship.

Premarital counselling is to a marriage relationship as a good foundation is to a building. This interaction between a couple and a pastor is a theoretical, preparatory introduction to the married life. Although examples may be drawn from real-life experiences, they merely remain at the theoretical level for the inexperienced (not-yet-married) couple. Even so, this foundational level of education for marital life is crucial.

Premarital counselling educates the intending couple on the meaning and foundation of marriage from a Christian perspective, the role of communication in marriage, the use and management of finances, the influence of tradition and culture, the implication of one’s vocation on the relationship, and the weighty implications of the marriage vows. It also handles the issue of conflict resolution in marriage or the family, and the duties and responsibilities of both parties to themselves, to their children, and to their extended family members. Furthermore, premarital counselling discusses the value of spirituality in a marital relationship.

Fundamentally, prospective Christian couples are taught during the premarital counselling sessions that marriage, from a biblical perspective, is a knitting type of relationship (Gen. 2:24). When two people become symbolically united into one flesh as originally prescribed by the designer of the marriage union, this is a type of assimilating or fusing relationship that should exist only in a one husband-one wife relationship.

### ***Ensuring the centrality of Christ in the home***

Among survey respondents, 33% of the spouses agitated for the centrality of Christ in the life of the Christian family. Christian couples should constantly seek, individually and corporately, to honour God over their personal honour, to seek to do his will rather than their own will, and to seek to offer to him alone acceptable worship. This is of paramount benefit to Christian couples. Christians are Christ's followers. This is their identity. They have an obligation to submit unreservedly to him and his dictates. They also have the responsibility to uphold and preserve the dignity and integrity due to his name and the glory of his kingdom. A divided Christian family fails in this regard, thereby becoming a dishonour to Christ.

In the Nigerian situation, people—both Christians and non-Christians—are prone to seeking blessings. Infertile families, students, employers and employees in every vocation, leaders and the led, members of congregations and even their pastors—everyone—seeks divine blessings. But the secret to such blessings lies in unreserved obedience to the divine command. The divine statement to Samuel regarding Eli and his children was: “Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained” (2 Sam. 2:30). Malachi took up issues with the post-exilic priests whose professional negligence caused the Yehud community to accuse Yahweh their deity of being an ingrate, blaming him for failing to accept their sacrifices. The prophet indicted them for their flagrant acts of dishonouring Israel's holy and righteous deity through profaned sacrifices (Mal. 1:2, 6–8).

The motif of obedience in the quest for divine blessings is crucial for the spiritual survival of Christian families in Nigeria and elsewhere. Paul presents the Christological model in his Philippian epistle when he says Christ was honoured by the Father because he had honoured him with his obedience (Phil. 2:5–11). One is crowned only after subjecting oneself to the rigours of competing favourably in a race or an Olympic event. A purposeful resolve by Christian couples to put God first in all things holds numerous benefits for their marriage.

### ***Prioritise scriptural values over culture and tradition***

African Christianity generally has its roots in the religious ideology of African Traditional Religion (ATR). Nigeria for example, is described as “The giant of

Africa” for several reasons, among which is its multiplicity of religions (ATR, Christianity, and Islam). More particularly, the country boasts of a multiplicity of tribes, each with its own traditions, cultures, and customs.

These contextual issues in Nigeria affect the people’s sociology, ethics, and religious expressions. Consequentially, the participating spouses in the research admitted that some Christian homes seem to subscribe more to their traditional cultural values to the detriment of biblical values. These respondents therefore agitated for a reversal of such ideological practices. They contended that any Christian and any Christian family that is guided by biblical principles would hardly submit to the demands and dictates of any other cultural practices. Couples invite trouble when, as Christian families, they allow the traditional cultural demands to coerce them against biblical ones.

Christianity follows the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the Sinai discourse at the receipt of the Decalogue, God expressly told the Israelite community about his jealousy for them. Thus he instructed them not to have or worship any other god besides him (Exod. 20:1–7). In a similar way, Christian couples, as God’s redeemed possession, should rather submit to biblical prescriptions for life than to their cultures and traditions except those aspects that are not in conflict with the Scripture.

### ***Cultivate transparency, sincerity, honesty, and effective family communication***

The moral quality of transparency, sincerity, and honesty are obvious ethical principles that regulate a good society. The members of any family that imbibe these principles will always stand strong together. Thirty-two percent of respondents indicated that Christian spouses and families should uphold these moral values for a sustainable and functional familial relationship.

When we read the Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments, we repeatedly encounter an emphasis on truth and truthfulness. The application of the principle of transparency, regulated by the grid of truth, is broad-based. It reflects in one’s thoughts, speech, relationships, approach to one’s vocation, and financial affairs. Research respondents agreed that financial transparency should be strengthened to help avoid doubts, distrust, and suspicion in the

marital relationship. An honest sharing of information by spouses in this regard is beneficial.

### ***Facilitate mentoring and discipleship***

Modern culture promotes mentoring, which reflects the concept of discipleship in both Judaism and Christianity. Both mentoring and discipleship concern the training of someone younger by a senior, either in a profession or a religious faith, to assume a position of responsibility. The trainer, discipler or mentor is usually a model to the disciple or mentee.

As stated earlier, maturation is crucial for both life and functional marital relationships. The core focus of discipleship or mentoring is to attain maturity. Some of the sampled pastors proposed that local Christian congregations should ensure proper discipleship of intending couples for their maturation in the faith before their marriage is contracted. They also suggested that younger couples be mentored by responsible older couples. No doubt, this will certainly reduce the pastoral burden of constantly resolving family problems.

### ***Emphasise the maturation of spouses***

According to 85% survey respondents, maturity is crucial to a sustainable marriage. This involves physiological, psychological, sociological, intellectual, emotional, economic, and spiritual maturation on the part of a couple. Where these are lacking in one or both of the spouses, problems are inevitable in their relationship. This is noticeable in certain areas of the marital relationship.

First, the participating spouses said that a mature couple will value the importance of appreciating and complementing each other.

Second, they said that mature individuals are cautious about becoming overfamiliar with each other to the extent that they fail to express true love to each other.

Third, they said that the family hierarchy should be respected, drawing the attention of the wives to their role of submission. A truly mature Christian husband should treat his submissive wife with value, and dignity, as a rare ruby and an indispensable treasure.

Fourth, mature persons behave responsibly, reasonably, and sensibly towards their spouse and towards other people. The spouses' responses indicated that such civility is demonstrated in one's openness and intimacy with one's spouse. The research also revealed that this civility will also be exhibited in the person's tolerance and forgiveness of the flaws of their partner. While one admits that it is difficult to forgive a partner who never admits their wrongs, spiritual maturation facilitates the exhibition of this virtue. One suspects that this is the reason Paul persuaded couples in Colossae to "bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Col. 3:13). The research indicated that sexual deprivation by an aggrieved spouse is one of the rising marital abnormalities acting as a cause of familial crises. An attitude of forgiveness can neutralise this poisonous agent in marriage.

Fifth, marriage is for adults, not children. Only a psychologically and spiritually mature person understands the value of respect for the marriage institution. The surveyed spouses also indicated that a mature person knows the importance of respect for one's spouse. The original conceptual designer of marriage and family is God, not humanity. Marital and familial relationships are gifts from him. As such, God did not intend for marriage to end in dissolution. Rather, marriage should be lifelong. Only a mature spouse seeks to resolve issues rather than let them stand in the way of refreshing, gluing, and rewarding coitus. Paul knew the implication when he exhorted the couples in the Corinthian church to avoid coital deprivation (1 Cor. 7:1-5).

It is obvious from the preceding that maturity positively affects the familial relationship just as immaturity negatively does. When, therefore, immature men and women come together as husbands and wives it is tantamount to expressing a relationship between boys and girls rather than a marriage relationship. Marriage is neither for boys and girls, nor is it even for teenagers; it is only for mature adults. It is the responsibility of the pastor to ensure that only mature people who are duly instructed in faith be joined together in marriage.

## **Post-marital counselling by pastoral caregivers as a major preventive antidote**

The majority of pastors focus more on premarital counselling than on post-marital counselling and guidance. Post-marital counselling is the periodic professional guidance offered to a couple by a pastor or a trained marriage counsellor within the first two years of a couple's marriage. A new couple is usually under the aura of marital excitement and still enjoying the euphoria of the honeymoon phase for the first two years of marriage. But soon after this excitement, things begin to take turn when the partners enter the stage of practical married life and discover what married life really is. This period is therefore a critical one, as the couple at this stage goes through a period of adjustment and childbearing, which can often become frustrating and frictionally painful.

Reality is just what it is: Reality! It is only when a married couple live together under the same roof and in the same room that they can each discover the real person they are married to. Certain hitherto-hidden character traits, attitudinal exhibitions, mannerisms, behaviours, and lifestyles begin to manifest themselves in the marriage relationship. They can be quite shocking to the other partner, catch them off-guard, and throw them off-balance if not well-managed.

At this stage, each spouse tries to explore the other to discover what they had not known about the other during the period of their courtship. They begin to learn during this period how to live together, how to become responsible parents, how to relate well to each other through speech and conduct, how to discover and learn how to tolerate the weaknesses and excesses of each other, how to plan and think together as a couple, and more. Marriage takes a lot of understanding, patience, and tolerance to build. It is at this very stage in the marital journey that each partner decides what to sacrifice for the comfort of the other, how much a spouse is willing to give away for the sake of the other partner. Sometimes, some partners are not ready to let go of what they cherished in their premarital life. One of the immediate questions a serious and careful spouse may ask at this stage is: How do I live and relate to my marriage partner, given the way he or she is, in such a way that adds value to the marriage and familial relationship?

The survival of the marriage is put to a severe test at this stage. Although this is a very critical stage in the marital relationship, most pastors pay less attention to this stage than they do premarital counselling. Some of them assume that the foundational induction into the marriage life through premarital counselling is sufficient to sustain the relationship. However, they are often astonished at the negative turn of events in the marriage that can lead to separation or the dissolution of the relationship. This ugly situation occurs because of the gap created by the absence of the post-marital counselling services that should have been rendered to a new couple. Premarital counselling is merely foundational, laying down the building blocks to a marriage, acting only as planting a seed. But post-marital counselling is developmental to the growth of the marriage, functioning as caring and nurturing what is planted.

Premarital counselling is merely theoretical while post-marital counselling is practical. The crucial role of post-marital counselling is to hinder the development of anything that would destroy a blissful marital relationship. After the post-marital counselling phase, pastors should continue to provide marital maintenance counselling. In pursuit of post-marital counselling, the following are proposed.

### ***Attend to their questions and concerns***

This period of adjustment in one's marital life comes with enormous challenges. The first two years of a marriage relationship can either root the couple into their dreamed pleasurable relationship or it can mar them with seeds of sharp disagreements, discord, distrust, disenfranchisement, or the feeling of dissatisfaction in the relationship, which sometimes leads to sharp conflict situations that may lead to separation or divorce. Such an ugly scenario can raise questions in the couples' minds regarding what marriage really is and how harmonious the relationship should be. This is where the need for pastoral post-marital counselling is at its sharpest. Dickie (2021) proposes a reestablishment of corporate lament by the church to stand with and support suffering Christians and crushing marriages.

The pastor should plan to provide post-marital counselling services to a newly wedded couple for at least the first two critical foundation-laying and adjustment years of marriage with at least two counselling sessions per year.



The first biannual session should take place after the first six months, the second after another six months, the third after yet another six months, and the fourth also after another six months.

### ***Encourage dedication to faith and motivate commitment to each other***

Loyalty to Jesus Christ is just what it is: Loyalty to Jesus Christ! This is the point of unreserved dedication to one's expressed faith. People who profess faith in Jesus Christ and claim to be the children of God are required to observe the biblical prescriptions for life and service. Above all else is their obligation of obedience to God. This is unlikely to be attained without maturity and pastoral guidance, as the reality of life sometimes stands in the way. Constant pastoral presence is the antidote.

Commitment is essential to a sustainable Christian marital relationship. When prospective marriage partners say to each other, "I love you", they need to understand that the demands of love are all-encompassing. It includes the good, the bad, and even the ugly sides. It includes the sweet, the sour, and even the bitter aspects. When marriage is described as Christian, it means a lifelong commitment to the relationship. The marriage pledge states, "For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part." Accordingly, the pastoral counsellor should always emphasise and re-emphasise the fidelity of both partners to the essence of what Christian marriage is and to the necessity for them to individually obligate themselves to its commitment.

## **Conclusion**

Christian couples need to constantly remember that God, who designed marriage and familial relationships, demands that they be the salt of a rotting earth and the light of a world now groping in the darkness of sin and wrong actions (Matt 5:13, 16). As a model of moral ethics and sociological relatedness, Christian spouses should behave towards their spouses the same way they would like their mother or father, sister or brother, and niece or nephew to be treated. Maturity demands that Christian couples become rational in terms of being reasonable, considerate, responsible, and compassionate in their relationships, because a successful Christian marriage takes much work and lots of patience to build. In his endorsement of Dickson's

book, Bala admits that a marriage that is solemnised by the most spiritual and experienced pastor does not guarantee its sustainability, enduringness, and exciting blissfulness. According to Bala (2021), “for any marriage to work, the couple need to WORK on it” because marriage, even between serious Christians, “needs earthly maintenance to make it succeed.”

The world is becoming more and more unfriendly, throwing just about every disturbing situation at its inhabitants. The world’s system is rapidly crumbling down on Christian families, some of whom are urgently crying for help. For instance, Arugu (2014:371) explains that “childlessness, adultery, quarrelling, alcoholism, socialization and technological advancement, financial difficulties, immaturity, mixed marriage, the adverse influence of in-laws, religious affiliation, and educational attainment” not only serve as some causes for the “loss of an intimate relationship that also brought security and support”, but worse, “divorce is a growing social ill in our societies”. Here, the modelling lifestyle expected of the pastor and the pastor’s family can serve as an encouragement to such troubled families. On the other hand, it should also serve as an indictment to members of the congregation who are perennially disobedient to the provisions of the Scripture to which they claim to subscribe. Apart from the emphasis placed on premarital counselling programmes and general preaching and teaching on the family and home life, pastoral caregivers should be precise on rendering a purposeful periodic post-marital counselling and marital management counselling services to serve as a check on couples.

Being aware of the difficulty present in the pastoral work, once having been a congregational pastor, one understands how frustrating it is to mend broken relationships and broken homes. The scenario is worst when one is dealing with a stubborn, rebellious, disobedient, and disrespectfully spouse. Congregational pastors are encouraged to intensify their oversight function by constantly praying for families and by periodic follow-up visits. They are also to engage in seeking out patiently the already dehumanised and bruised couples and families and provide pastoral counselling for their restoration.

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