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Appropriating John Stott's Concept of Holy-Worldliness towards Reformulating the Political Curriculum of Christianity in Africa: Components from Nigeria

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Abstract

This study applies John Stott's concept of 'holy-worldliness' to God calling Christians from the world and sending them out to be immersed in the affairs of the world as Christ's ambassadors, by localising Christ's political curriculum to Africa. Examples of this localising process were generated from Nigeria. This question guides the study: how can John Stott's concept of holy-worldliness be appropriated towards reformulating the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa, using examples from Nigeria? The study concludes by calling African Christians to consider establishing one 'African Christian school of politics and governance', under the auspices of theological schools in Africa. This school would be mandated to train African Christian politicians at the highest levels in the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa.

Introduction

This study continues a related article titled 'Appropriating John Stott's Holy-Worldliness Concept to Deficiencies in the Political Curriculum of Christianity in Africa: Viewpoints from Nigeria', published in the *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*. Two research questions guided that study:

1. “What are the basic elements of John Stott’s concept of holy-worldliness, in the context of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa?” (Dogara 2024:160)

2. “How can deliberating on the deficiencies in the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa […] be facilitated by an understanding of John’s [sic] Stott’s concept of holy-worldliness […] using examples from Nigeria?” (Dogara 2024:160)

A detailed presentation of John Stott’s concept of holy-worldliness is contained in the earlier paper.

Sequel to the prior paper, this study also appropriates Stott’s concept of holy-worldliness to facilitate reformulating the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa. The prior study identified several deficiencies in the current political curriculum of Christianity in Africa: it lacks proper definition; it is not people-oriented; and it is not different from non-Christian political agendas. It is also purposeless, reactive, disunited, unplanned, inferior, non-influential, and lacks truth and critical thinking, lacks holy-worldly interconnections, lacks Christian political ideology, and lacks structural understanding. To address these deficiencies, this paper considers this research question: how can John Stott’s concept of holy-worldliness be appropriated towards *reformulating* the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa, using examples from Nigeria?

The study concentrates substantial attention on the politicians, theological schools, and curriculum specialists in Africa, to develop the political curriculum of Christianity on the continent. The findings of this study apply to them. These constitute a major component of the church, which this document presents as the most important structure in the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa.

While the study randomly engages cases from across Africa, it primarily generates examples from Nigeria as the largest democracy in Africa. Furthermore, the study interconnects ‘political curriculum’ with curriculum in general, null curriculum, societal curriculum, and rhetorical curriculum, as key terms designed to offer multi-dimensional perspectives on reformulating the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa.

Methodology of Study

The study engages the qualitative research methodology via mixing documentary analysis with systematic theology when addressing research questions. The researcher studied Stott's *The Contemporary Christian* (1992) as a primary document, in synergy with relevant scriptural passages to facilitate a theological grasp of the concept of holy-worldliness. The legal material engaged to support this foundation is the 1999 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*.

Appropriating John Stott's Concept of Holy-Worldliness towards Reformulating the Political Curriculum of Christianity in Africa

How can John Stott's concept of holy-worldliness be appropriated towards *reformulating* the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa, using examples from Nigeria? There are several components that should not be missing from the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa. The term 'manifesto' is attached to each of the components. The list of the components is not exhaustive. While a Christian vying for an elective public office may have a personal and/or a political party manifesto, either or both manifestos need a basis in the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa.

Component 1: Manifesto on Constitutional, Fundamental, and Legal Rights

The political curriculum of Christianity in Africa needs to recognise the constitutional, fundamental, and legal rights of all citizens without any form of discrimination or partiality. This recognition must be taken beyond theory (which is the case in many African countries) to actual practice. In being practical the distinctiveness of the Christian, as a politician, is revealed. In Nigeria, being practical means addressing impediments to the rights of citizens, including religion and citizenship.

Religion

The voices asserting that religion is an impediment to Nigeria's progress are growing louder, although there is no consensus on this assertion. In fact, 'at the mention of religion, most Nigerians will freely turn off their brains' (Ismaila 2024). A way of addressing this impediment is via the political curriculum of Christianity, which, if implemented, will provide a thriving ground for all religions.

First, all specificities on religion need to be expunged from the constitution for this component of the curriculum to be realised. On the one hand, this should mean ensuring freedom of religious choice, practice, and propagation and non-compulsion even in one's religion. No one should be harassed for any religious reason, just as it was rumoured (although the reports were denied) that non-Muslims in Kano State, Nigeria, faced threats of arrest if they ate in public during the 2024 Islamic Ramadan fast. Open Doors International statistics have shown that Nigeria is the deadliest country for Christians. 'More believers are killed for their faith in Nigeria each year, than everywhere else in the world combined' (Open Doors International 2023:1–2). It is easy to become a Muslim in Christian-dominated states like Plateau, Benue, and Anambra, but to become a Christian in the northwestern and northeastern states is a matter of life and death. On the other hand, addressing this impediment means expunging terms like 'Shariah' or 'Islamic' and any pointers to a specific religion or religious affiliation from the constitution, thereby ensuring impartiality towards all religions.

Second, this component of the political curriculum should make it possible to remove religious lines from government-owned public places such as schools, military establishments, and prisons. Religious bodies interested in creating a separate arrangement for their adherents should do so privately in their own religious centres or schools. Churches and mosques need to be de-established in government-owned schools, and even government houses and secretariats, in Nigeria.

Third, the constitutional statement that 'the government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion' (*Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* 1999:Section 10) needs appropriate qualifiers. These qualifiers need to unquestionably establish Nigeria as a secular state

where government resources are not allocated to further religious purposes. The term 'secular' should also be defined clearly in appropriate places in the constitution. Moreover, unless the financing of Muslim and Christian pilgrimages to foreign places considered holy by these religions by governments at all levels in Nigeria is scrapped completely, the statement of government not adopting any religion will remain vague.

Fourth, though religion needs to be expunged from the constitutions of nation-states in Africa, Christian politicians in Africa need to be guided by the right model of Christian religion in their activities. Being properly guided by the right model of religion means pre-deciding to which side of eternity one will belong, knowing that a politician's actions in earthly governance count in eternity. This pre-decision was implied by Jesus when he said:

> Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (Matthew 25:34–40, NIV)

Accordingly, the right model of religion is having the capacity to discern real human needs, to recognise hunger, thirst, strangeness, the need for clothes, sickness, and being in prison. Christian politicians who align themselves with the right model of religion will provide customised solutions to existential problems. They will provide food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, shelter and protection for the stranger and the exposed, clothes for those who lack, care for the sick, and visitation to the prisoner.

Politicians on the right side of religion are driven by the desire to meet human needs. In Jesus' parable, the righteous did not even serve as if 'unto the Lord', because they were not even aware that the Lord was monitoring them or had any expectations from them. Those called by Christ to politics are called to respond to whatever human need Jesus is willing to satisfy. The *Africa Bible Commentary* notes, 'We are called to respond to all human need, for that is what love does' (Kapolyo 2006:1164).

Citizenship

Although the constitution has guaranteed citizens the right to movement and possession of properties in any part of Nigeria, the question of being an indigene or a settler in a particular area remains unaddressed. For example, people fear that allowing equal status to indigenes may distort the commanding demographic majority of a Muslim state (like Kano) or a Christian state (like Plateau), or the ownership of the majority Hausa population of a state like Katsina or the majority Yoruba population of a state like Lagos. Therefore, this question of citizenship as it relates to what it means to be an indigene is an agendum for the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa. Settling it could mean creating a clause in the constitution that allows the status of indigenes to all Nigerians wherever they decide to settle. When matched with the religious component of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa, it would favour all religions since, for example, Muslims could more easily penetrate Christian-dominated states and vice versa.

Elected officials in Nigeria do not necessarily consider themselves as having equal citizenship status with other Nigerians. They send their children to the best schools overseas, receive medical care in Europe or America, assign to themselves and their families the best security services, allocate better government jobs to those closely connected to them, just as if Orwell's satirical fable "Animal Farm" is being dramatised in the political realities of Nigeria where some citizens appear to be considered as more equal than the others (Orwell 1945).

Component 2: Manifesto on the Security and Welfare of the People

The Nigerian constitution clearly mandates that 'the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government' (*Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* 1999:Section 14.b). For those who have been called to implement the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa, this component can be understood in at least three ways.

First, it focuses sufficient priority on ensuring affordable, available, accessible, and quality healthcare, food, shelter, clothing, education, and water equally to all Nigerians in an environment that enjoys protection from destruction. These should be constitutionalised as rights enjoyable even by Nigerians at the lowest end of the economy. No citizen's existential needs should be beyond the capacity of the government to address. The political curriculum of Christianity in Africa effectively engages this constitutional provision to solidify this capacity:

> The State shall direct its policy towards ensuring that all citizens, without discrimination on any group whatsoever, have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment. *(Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* 1999:Section 17.3.a)

Second, the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa needs to focus on subsidising expenses for the general citizenry. As it is now, the government makes policies, rules, and laws and implements actions that favour the rich and the powerful while the poor suffer from inhumane policies. For example, on 29 May 2023 the government withdrew the fuel subsidy from Nigeria, while politicians and the elites in all branches of government at all levels were living large, displaying ill-gotten wealth with unmindful extravagance, and taking all manner of actions to direct state resources to support their expensive lifestyles. The American president eats at his own expense except for work-related meals (Newsom 2018) and receives a monthly bill for all meals (Bell 2016). It is doubtful if this is the case in Nigeria.

Third, the focus of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa is on security and public safety. The current attempt in Nigeria to answer the call for state policing deserves commendation. However, it is time to consider placing policing systems under the ownership and operational control of local governments. Agencies responsible for public safety such as fire brigades should be developed, modernised, widely deployed, and constantly expanded to satisfy the growing population of Nigeria. One deficiency in the public security and safety system of Nigeria is that it lacks the principle of security for all; it is rather security for the elite, the rich, and the powerful. Even pastors who preach that their membership should depend on God for security are seen moving under police protection, although some may have exceptional reasons for that. Security and public safety for Nigerians should translate into the freedom to go to the farm, to go hunting, to travel at any time of the day or night, and to be rescued when in danger.

Component 3: Manifesto on Social Justice

The political curriculum of Christianity in Africa must seek to address social injustice in the country. Four examples arise from Nigeria.

Federal Character

The legal instrument termed 'Federal Character' is enshrined in the constitution of Nigeria in order to ensure unity. It states:

The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few State [sic] or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies. (*Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* 1999:Section 14.3)

One way of interpreting the federal character is to consider its balance in religious, sectional, ethnic, majority/minority, and merit terms. That is to say, when a Muslim or northerner is president, a non-Muslim or southerner should be vice president. When a Christian is governor in a Christian-dominated state, a non-Christian should be deputy governor. In practical terms, there would be

a Christian deputy governor in Kano State (a Muslim-majority state) or a Muslim deputy governor in Plateau State (a Christian-majority state). However, Governor Nasir Elrufai of Kaduna State (a Muslim state) abandoned the federal character by having a Muslim deputy governor in 2019–2023, and the current governor, Uba Sani (a Muslim), has continued to retain a Muslim as deputy governor. Likewise, President Bola Tinubu (a Muslim) is currently violating the federal character with Kashim Shettima (also a Muslim) as his vice president. There has been widespread non-implementation of the federal character mandate of the constitution.

Right to Self-Determination

The level of social injustice in governance in Nigeria has brought about various agitations for self-determination, with some even advocating for splitting the country into Oduduwa nation, Biafra nation, Hausa nation, middle-belt nation, and other sovereignties. In view of the forceful amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates to form Nigeria in 1914 by the British colonial governor, Sir Frederick Lugard (Falola and Heaton 2008:116–118), it can be said that there is a basis for these agitations. Based on the clear practical and constitutional challenges between regions in Nigeria, it is difficult to simply dismiss these agitations.

A preferable course of action for implementing the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa could be considering the provision, 'Nigeria is one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign state to be known by the name of the Federal Republic of Nigeria' (*Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* 1999:Section 2.1), as a social-justice matter. The politically correct thing to do is to support this provision even when there are clear deficiencies in it.

But the political curriculum of Christianity must be politically incorrect, whenever necessary. In this instance, the politically incorrect thing to do is to agree that with God all things (including restructuring Nigeria or creating a completely new constitution) are possible. At the minimum, this agreement means reformulating the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa to support people who consider themselves marginalised. For example, at the state level, some people in southern Kaduna State desire to have their own state called Gurara. This would address some of the agitations for splitting Nigeria. However, the alternative course of action is either to support or to not

interfere with the call for restructuring Nigeria to allow the emergence of as many different countries as are necessary and practical to represent the rights of the people to self-determination. If the alternative course of action becomes necessary, it should not be surprising because in historical actuality it is questionable if Nigerians ever collectively declared that

> We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Having firmly and solemnly resolve [sic], to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God (*Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* 1999:preamble)

British Colonial Legacies

It is difficult not to blame the current social injustices in Nigeria on the refusal of the political and military leadership who have ruled Nigeria at various times to address British colonial legacies. Yusufu Turaki's well-researched *British Colonial Legacy in Northern Nigeria: A Social Ethical Analysis of the Colonial and Post-Colonial Society and Politics in Nigeria* addressed social injustices in Nigeria consequent to the British colonial legacy (1993:325).

One of the British colonial legacies is the policy or practice of selective development or differentiation in the provision of services such as education. For the British, the elites and the masses were educated differently, with concentration on the elites. Development concentrated on Muslim areas while non-Muslim areas were abandoned, only to be rescued by the missionaries. Kaduna State is an example where this British colonial legacy is still in effect. Southern Kaduna State mainly has campuses of schools or lower-level schools: Kaduna State Polytechnic campus at Samaru Kataf (with the main campus in Zaria), Kaduna State University campus at Kafanchan (with the main campus in Kaduna), and Kaduna State College of Education Gidan-Waya (whereas the Federal College of Education is in Zaria). Even politically, it seems southern Kaduna State has been condemned to be a zone of deputies, capable only of producing deputy governors of the state. The political curriculum of Christianity in Africa must concern itself with the task of addressing negative colonial legacies wherever such are found, thereby ensuring balanced human development.

Righteousness and Justice

The social justice component of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa needs to be hinged on righteousness and justice, which constitute the foundation of God's throne (Psalms 89:14, 97:2). God works righteousness and justice for the oppressed (Psalm 103:6). Righteousness and justice are missing in the Nigerian justice system. It is a common thing in Nigeria to come across people complaining that someone who stole a goat may spend years in prison in Nigeria while someone who diverted billions in various currencies may not spend even a single day in prison. The stories of how senior judges in Nigeria tilt judgment to favour the highest 'customer' – the politicians, senior government officials, the rich, and the elites – have already saturated the public sphere. Most Nigerians can describe how government officials regularly refuse to observe traffic lights, which sometimes causes accidents. The cost of accessing legal services or the best lawyers is beyond the reach of the common person. Government-aided legal agencies are so under-funded and lacking in personnel that they are of little or no effect, thereby further putting the poor at a legal disadvantage. The endless delay in the court processes, with corrupt judges, lawyers, and police, makes seeking justice in Nigeria nothing more than a waste of time and resources. Christian politicians, as principal implementers of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa, need to comprehend politics as a way of delivering righteousness and justice in favour of the oppressed and for the development of the society.

Caveat to Components 1-3: Christians and Party Politics

In the political curriculum of Christianity, active involvement of Christians individually and/or of the church corporately should not translate into a union between the church and politicians. This union usually occurs for political gain or selfish reasons. It becomes more pronounced with pastors and other church leaders who also use politics and/or religion to for their own gain. As Mbewe writes:

> This is usually around political election times. Usually, the politicians entice those pastors who have huge congregations to support to exchange them in exchange for financial favors or government favors if they win the elections. Sometimes the politicians woo entire pastors' fellowships to their side in this

> way, and these pastors then try to convince their church members to support the candidates who have done them such favors. This is very common, but the fact that it is happening everywhere does not make it right. (2020:248)

Clearly, the need for Christians to be active in politics, even party politics, should not interfere with the distinct identity of the church, as God's kingdom on earth. The church must not miss the point of the irreconcilable difference between God's kingdom and earthly kingdoms, irreversible decay in politics, and its existence as a parallel government. These elements of the church are explained further below.

Component 4: Manifesto on Democratic Dividends

This component of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa seeks to make citizens at the grassroots active partakers of the democratic dividends. Delivering the dividends of democracy interconnects with at least three items: democratic ideals, freedom of expression, and examination by the radar.

Democratic Ideals

In line with John Stott's holy-worldly component of double listening, listening to people is important for the purposes of giving them feedback, getting feedback directly from them, and ensuring transparent communication, accountability, and relationships. Transparency, accountability, and feedback are important democratic ideals necessary for the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa. Unfortunately, politicians in Nigeria generally behave as if they are accountable to no one, just as former Nigerian president Muhammadu Buhari said during his inauguration on 29 May 2015, 'I belong to everybody, and I belong to nobody' (Osewezina 2015). However, there is no time when elected politicians do not belong to everybody. They should not dare say 'I belong to nobody'. Christian politicians are to set an example by subjecting themselves to the citizens in terms of transparency and reporting. If, for example, Muniyaya Pezuwa, a woman from Kabene-Surubu, was elected as chairperson of Kauru Local Government Area of Kaduna state, Nigeria, in 2024–2025, residents of the area deserve to have regular comprehensive details of her salary, other earnings as a politician, and expenses from those earnings. Pezuwa should supply these details voluntarily, without compelling

her constituents to use legal means to make her account for her office. Accountability is necessary because she is working for the citizens, in whose hands is vested the constitutional authority to hire and fire their representatives.

Freedom of Expression

Nigeria's constitution mandates:

> Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference. (*Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* 1999:Section 39.1)

By this mandate, it is necessary for operators of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa to accept and study all kinds of criticisms as they seek to deliver the dividends of democracy.

On the one hand, it is not in their purview to define what constructive, obstructive, or destructive criticism is. Biblical revelation presents God as not afraid of any form of criticism or questions, nor does he punish people for holding views contrary to his own. Rather, God encourages people to express their opinions and actively listens to them:

> 'Come now, let us settle the matter,' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.' (Isaiah 1:18, NIV)

On the other hand, Christian politicians who try to silence any form of media or the voice of opposition, as is usually the case with politicians in Africa, are clearly violating the holy-worldly component of double listening. In Nigeria, the media is constitutionally empowered to hold government accountable to the people.

> The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the

people. (*Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* 1999:Section 22)

The political curriculum of Christianity eschews any attempt by the political or civil service leadership to interfere in any process designed to hold them accountable to the people.

Examination by the Radar

There are always various governmental and non-governmental agencies that constantly direct their radars to the political and developmental activities of countries and societies. An example of these agencies is the United Nations Development Programme, which produces an annual Human Development Report, with summaries via the Human Development Index. Nigeria was ranked 152 out of 188 countries in the world in terms of overall human development in the 2015 Human Development Report (United Nations Development Programme 2015:210). The report was based on the situation during the regime of the People's Democratic Party. However, in the 2023 Human Development Report, Nigeria was ranked 161 out of 193 countries in the world in terms of overall human development (United Nations Development Programme 2024:276). That report was based on the situation of the country during the regime of the All Progressives Congress. Most of the time, these reports are credible, but politicians usually only accept the reports that are favourable to them. Based on the holy-worldly principle of listening, Christians in politics and governance will deliberately put themselves under the radar so that the consequences of their leadership can be examined.

Component 5: Manifesto on Governance

As soon as elections are over and politicians occupy government positions of leadership, people expect effective governance for the benefit of all. Though the challenges of governance are many, operating the political curriculum of Christianity necessitates addressing some serious questions of governance.

Questions of Budget

How can the cost of governance be reduced, thereby saving money to provide better services to citizens? Why is the budget for projects in the constituencies of legislators necessary? How can there be more effectiveness, efficiency, and

transparency in the tax system, without overloading the poor? How can budget padding, inflation, and other forms of corruption be addressed in the budget system? Why expend money to organise, locate, and attend official retreats and workshops in foreign countries? What subsidies are needed in the budget in order to make life easier for the citizens?

Christian politicians have no excuse whatsoever not to include various subsidies in the budget. Even without the constitutional mandate on the government to exist primarily for the welfare of citizens, the scriptural mandate 'Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act' (Proverbs 3:27, NIV) cannot be ignored. Every citizen deserves good, but the poor deserve more subsidies. It is not a secret how in Nigeria governments at all levels either did not provide or provided insignificant subsidies to the poor during the COVID-19 lockdowns. For example, Nigerians' requests for an electricity subsidy was turned down.

Questions of Balancing Politics, Governance, and Statesmanship

Given that government-sponsored primary and secondary schools offer Islamic religious studies and Arabic language as academic subjects, did President Goodluck Jonathan, in the build-up to the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, establish special Almajiri schools for political reasons or because of real needs? How can governance be distinguished from, and emphasised over or against, political patronage? How can the next election not interfere with current governance? How can the politicians be purpose-driven, progressive, futuristic, and strategic without letting personal interests and politics interfere? What steps need to be taken to purge corruption and ensure independence, protection of fundamental rights of citizens, and restoration of public confidence in elections, justice, crime-fighting, financial crime investigation, police, and other strategic agencies of the government? Do traditional leadership institutions need to be democratised and/or assigned constitutional roles in a democratic government?

Questions of Distinguishing between Priorities and Trivialities

There are pundits in Nigeria who consider Nigeria to be a country where trivial issues thrive, while priorities are abandoned. Some of the trivialities include assigning unnecessary public space, budget, and official treatment to unelected Nigerians like the wife of the president (even recognised as holding

the 'Office of the First Lady'), and fully sponsoring or subsidising religious tourism (called pilgrimages) for Christians and Muslims. Politicians in Nigeria are also fixated on cars and foreign travel (in the name of scouting for investors), the execution of needless projects, and a general misplacement of priorities. The political curriculum of Christianity in Africa must distinguish itself by focusing on priorities, instead of majoring on trivialities.

Component 6: Manifesto on Glocal Politics, Diplomacy and Leadership

This component of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa acknowledges that politics is both local (local, state, and national) and global (regional, continental, and international); that is, politics is 'glocal'. This acknowledgment is both strategic and pre-conditional, especially for Christians who participate in local politics in a manner that either directly or indirectly connects with global politics, diplomacy, and leadership. Such participants include members of state houses of assembly and the national assembly, political party officials at state, regional, and national levels, the president, and the vice president, as well as state governors and deputy governors.

Strategic Acknowledgement

Because politics is glocal, the Nigerian politician must, first, have an intellectual grasp of the constitution, history, development, operations, and legal frameworks of the Economic Community of West African States. This is the immediate international body of governments to which Nigeria belongs.

Second, credible knowledge of the African Union in its various stages of evolution, as well as its aspirations, is also key. Of strategic importance to Africa is *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*, a fifty-year roadmap for Africa launched in 2013.

Agenda 2063 is Africa's blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future. It is the continent's strategic framework that aims to deliver on its goal for inclusive and sustainable development and is a concrete manifestation of the pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity pursued under Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance. (African Union 2013a)

The Agenda 2063 encapsulates Africa's aspirations for the future and the flagship programmes that should facilitate achieving those aspirations. However, at this point, the majority of elites in the political class in Africa behave contrary to the demand of *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. For example, the mentality of politicians is still colonial: eating foreign food, divulging national information via foreign media channels, defending political agendas through agencies like the Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House), going to foreign hospitals, buying foreign cars, wearing foreign clothes, buying houses in foreign lands while in office, and generally prioritising foreigners and foreignness over citizens and the country. However, *The Africa We Want* clearly states, 'All remnants of colonialism will have ended and all African territories under occupation fully liberated' (African Union 2013b).

Third, understanding continental and intercontinental political bodies and processes is necessary for knowing how to locate Nigeria's interests in the international arena. The Commonwealth of Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, with Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates) are some of the intercontinental bodies with which the serious Nigerian politician must be familiar.

Fourth, the politician must be well oriented in global politics as represented by the United Nations, its bureaucracy, and its affiliated or related agencies. Otherwise, the 'giant' position of Nigeria in Africa will be of no significant benefit to Nigeria and Africa.

Strategic acknowledgement of the glocal situation of politics is only a preparatory step to preconditional understanding of this level of politics. Preconditional comprehension distinguishes the Christian politician from other politicians.

Preconditional Acknowledgement

Acknowledging the principle of holy-worldliness is a requirement for Christian politicians; without it their qualification for elective positions is questionable. What does Stott's principle of holy-worldliness mean for a world-class Christian, as opposed to a worldly Christian or self-centred Christian? Being a

world-class Christian as a politician is recognising that God saved you from the world in order for you to serve him in the world. Beyond this recognition, the political curriculum of Christianity requires Christians in politics to make some mental shifts in four areas.

First, it requires shifting from self-centred political thinking to other-centred political thinking. Unless this is done, Christian politicians will keep looting public funds and amassing illegally acquired wealth that even their future descendants cannot exhaust. Why should governors in Nigeria, for example, allot well-funded, lifetime pensions to themselves for not more than eight years of service in elected positions? Why are they receiving their pensions on a regular basis, while civil servants who spent three to four decades in active service die without receiving their meagre pensions?

There are a few examples of Christian politicians who practised other-centred political thinking while in public service. Peter Obi, former governor of Anambra State, is among the few. There is no evidence so far that he allocated lands or properties to himself while serving as governor. A way of shifting to other-centred political thinking is to view politics as a call to service for the number of years the electorates decide they need the politician. In other words, this component of politics does not view politics as an occupation, but a call to service.

Second, Christian politicians need to shift from local thinking to global thinking. Thinking this way is necessary because Christians serve a global God: 'For God so loved the world' (John 3:16, NIV). One way of learning to think globally is to undertake short-term political mission trips abroad, especially to more advanced countries. Peter Obi visited and studied Egypt prior to the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, at his own expense. No public funds or official resources should be spent to fund such trips.

Third, this calls for a shift from here-and-now thinking to eternal thinking. Shifting to eternal thinking means fixing eyes on the eternal, invisible, and permanent.

> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18, NIV)

A way of fixing eyes on life in the eternal is to work to improve life and the average life expectancy of citizens on this side of eternity. According to the 2023 Human Development Report, life expectancy in Japan was 84.8 years (the highest in the world). In Nigeria, life expectancy was 53.6 years, below many other West African countries: Senegal (67.9), Ghana (63.9), Gambia (62.9), Togo (61.6), Liberia (61.1), Sierra Leone (60.4), Benin (60.0), and Burkina Faso (59.8) (United Nations Development Programme 2024:274–277). Another way to fix eyes on eternal life is to seek to elongate the earthly component of it. This calls for the political leadership to be generational or multigenerational planners, thinking beyond the next election. Instead, planning should consider at least the next generation measured by life expectancy, which in Nigeria means planning in cycles of fifty years.

Shifting to eternal thinking also means doing God's will on earth. For this to be done politicians need to understand the political implications of being citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:18–21), while serving as Christ's ambassadors on earth (2 Corinthians 5:18–20). One of the implications is to refuse to take glory in shame. The way elected politicians, including Christians, shamelessly loot public funds, disobey the law, and bear fake documents and identities is appalling. These politicians are also arrogating preferential treatment to themselves and the people closest to them, lying on national television, and staunchly refusing to resign when clear evidence of violations of laws or inexcusable gross incompetence exists. The reconciliation element of being Christ's ambassadors on earth means governance and application of the rule of law for all citizens, not the deployment of the powers of government to witch-hunt or unnecessarily fight political enemies.

Shifting from here-and-now thinking also means eliminating excuses for not attaining people-oriented development. The dictionary of the political curriculum of Christianity does not have the word *impossible*. What is there is this: 'I can do all things through Him who gives me strength' (Philippians 4:13, NIV). If a Christian were elected to occupy the office of President of Nigeria, for example, they must appoint 'I can do' people to the leadership of

ministries, departments, agencies, commissions, and other bodies. The 'I can do' principle means to keep hiring and firing, for as many times as necessary, so long as 'I cannot do' people keep obstructing progress.

Fourth, eternal thinking requires making it practical by investing resources in heaven.

> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:20–21, NIV)

This passage refers to legally-acquired treasures. Warren (2002:192) appropriately observes that storing up treasures in heaven can be done through heaven-bound people:

> You've probably heard the expression 'You can't take it with you' – but the Bible says you can send it on ahead by investing in people who are going there!

That being the case, the tradition of Nigerian politicians donating huge amounts of money for building churches and mosques, while people need funds to start and support businesses, pay school fees, build community schools, supply drugs to health centres, develop farms, and increase food production, etcetera, does not necessarily make sense.

Recommendations and Lessons for Africa

Recommendations to Politicians

1. Ensuring the fundamental rights of all citizens, including religious rights, should be a key occupation of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa. For Nigeria, this includes the rights of Muslims to know about Christianity and decide to be Christians, and vice versa. It is also means ensuring the rights to inter-marry and engage in other social interactions. To encourage this, practitioners of the political curriculum of Christianity in Nigeria should seek to explore the possibility of making it a law that no Nigerians who attended only their

own religious schools prior to service in the National Youth Service Corps should be qualified for the service until this deficiency is cleared. The deficiency would be clearable with a semester's worth of academic work in a school where members of other religions are present. There must be evidence of having achieved a level of study between primary and undergraduate level in a school owned by non-religious bodies or proprietors.

2. The political curriculum of Christianity in Africa promotes the removal of trivialities from governance in order to direct resources and attention to the real needs of the people. In Nigeria governments should stop sponsoring religious pilgrimages. Doing so lacks fairness and goes against the principle of social justice for all. In many African countries, the creation of an 'Office of the First Lady' with all its attachments and budgetary support is a triviality. Implementers of the political curriculum of Christianity need to work towards scrapping it from the systems of such countries. If the president's wife needs executive or constitutional powers, let her contest for elections like any other citizen.

Recommendations to the Church

3. There should be regular presentations on 'Christians and Politics' from pulpits. This could happen as question and answer sessions on a quarterly basis, with competent Christian personnel invited to speak.

4. There is a need for quarterly and annual political evaluation reports on Christian politics in each African country where Christians are already actively involved in politics. In Nigeria, this responsibility could be assigned to the Christian Association of Nigeria. To facilitate this report, a national Christian body should have a master list of Christians holding political offices, Christians vying for political offices, and Christians in positions of leadership in parties. There should also be criteria for supporting and evaluating politicians and political parties, whether Christian or non-Christian, for measuring success in politics and governance, and for decision-making even within the Association.

Recommendations to Theological Schools

5. A core general course, 'Public Theology and Politics', should be formulated as part of the undergraduate curriculum in African theological institutions. This would be a way of giving learners deeper exposure and orientation for involvement in the world of politics.

6. Theological schools in Africa should introduce an annual 'Week of Politics'. Both Christian and non-Christian politicians could be invited as resource persons, so long as they have the competence and have met laid-down criteria for the event. Materials necessary for the conference include the Bible, the national constitution, and electoral laws. With proper planning, students could have these materials free of charge or at a minimal charge. This would increase awareness of the holy-worldly element of politics in theological colleges and universities.

Recommendation to Curriculum Specialists

7. Christian schools in Africa need to start offering courses on politics, as independent academic components instead of as part of other courses. A course, 'Civic Education and Politics', should be designed, constructed, and delivered from a Christian political perspective.

General Lessons for Africa

8. Theological colleges and universities in Africa should come together to facilitate the establishment of one African Christian School of Politics and Governance. This would be a place for training Christians doing politics at state, regional, national, and international levels to be trained in the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa.

9. The political curriculum of Christianity in Africa requires politicians, whether Christian or non-Christian, to know that they belong to the people of their various countries. Politicians occupying positions, particularly, at national levels should not act as if their loyalty lies in Britain, France, China, America, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, or any other foreign power. This means politicians should develop homegrown strategies for dealing with foreign powers and

organisations and to give more priority to national and continental interests.

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Mineral Extraction, Human Rights Violations, and the Church's Social Responsibility in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Abstract

The rights and dignity of citizens, especially women and children, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are being violated by local and foreign actors, including five United States tech firms, accused of subjecting the people to hazardous and dehumanising working conditions in mining sites, in the quest for the country's mineral resources, such as cobalt, copper, tin, tungsten, and tantalum. Research has linked the extraction of these minerals to toxic contamination that has resulted in negative health outcomes in women and children and grave violations of human rights such as forced evictions of communities from farmlands and homesteads, sexual assault, arson, and beatings. Locating this mode of violence and exploitation within the neocolonial and neoliberal logic of the sacrifice of African lives, this paper undertakes a critical historical, political, economic, and theological approach to analyse the violence and argues that various stakeholders, especially the church in DRC, have a crucial role to play in standing up against the violence and exploitation going on in DRC and in working for justice, peace, development, and restoration of the dignity and value of human life in the country. At the heart of the paper is the conviction that African lives matter.

Introduction

The extraction of cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in central Africa has been linked to child labour. In 2019, a historic case was launched by fourteen Congolese families against five big United States (US) tech companies – Apple, Google, Dell, Microsoft, and Tesla. According to the lawsuit filed in Washington, DC, by International Rights Advocates, a human rights firm whose vision is 'a world free of slave labour and other crimes against humanity', these tech firms were accused of 'aiding and abetting in the death and serious injury of children' (Kelly 2019) who were working in cobalt mines in the companies' supply chain. The lawsuit further indicated that the tech giants have 'special knowledge' that the cobalt used in their products is mined under hazardous conditions and linked to child labour. Children working in the mines, mostly owned and controlled by Chinese subsidiary firms, are paid as little as $2 a day for the backbreaking and dangerous work of digging for cobalt rocks with primitive tools in dark, underground tunnels. Some children have been killed in tunnel collapses while others have been paralysed or severely injured without any compensation from the companies. A plaintiff in the suit reported how her young nephew working in an underground tunnel was 'buried alive' when the tunnel collapsed. The family has not recovered his body (Kelly 2019).

In March 2024, an appeals court in Washington, DC, ruled against the Congolese families, insisting that the five US tech companies were not liable for any alleged support of the use of child labour in cobalt mining operations in DRC. Buying cobalt in the global supply chain, the court stated, did not amount to 'participation in a venture' under a federal law protecting children and other victims of human trafficking and forced labour (Stempel 2024). Notwithstanding, in April 2024, Amsterdam & Partners LLP, a law firm representing DRC's government, sent a letter to Apple CEO Tim Cook, again raising concerns over 'blood minerals' in Apple's supply chain. In a 53-page report, the law firm outlined several claims against Apple and other foreign tech companies, mostly related to the laundry of DRC's 3Ts (tin, tungsten, and tantalum). 'Many actors along the mineral supply chain have profited from the smuggling of DRC blood minerals', the report stated, adding that 'the global supply chain is thoroughly contaminated' (Amsterdam & Partners LLP 2024:11, 51).

Aside from the 3Ts, DRC also has rich deposits of other minerals such as cobalt and copper which are used in the production of lithium-ion batteries for smartphones, laptops, and electric cars. The country holds

> the seventh largest reserves of copper globally and is the third largest producer. It also holds approximately half of the world's cobalt reserves and accounts for more than 70% of global production. (Amnesty International 2023:6)

While empirical research has linked the toxic contamination associated with extracting these minerals in DRC to negative health outcomes such as congenital malformations and birth defects in children (Brusselen et al. 2020), the surging global demand for industrial-scale cobalt mining in the country continues to result in forced evictions of entire communities from farmlands and homesteads, destruction of the ecosystem, depreciation of air quality, contamination of water, and grave human rights violations such as sexual assault, arson, and beatings (Amnesty International 2023:9-16).

There is growing concern about the problems of extractivism in many parts of the developing and developed worlds (Koster and Deane-Drummond 2024; Okoi and Nalule 2023). Writing about the Latin American context, which is similar to the African experience in many ways, Elizabeth Gandolfo (2023:21) states:

> Extractivism violates the sociality and sacred calling of our species by pitting the wealth, power, comforts, and luxuries of some human beings against the health, dignity, and survival of others.

In the violence and destruction of life that accompanies the plunder of DRC's mineral resources, the lives of many Africans are being compromised for the sake of power, profit, and possessions that are enjoyed by a minority. Existing economic inequality with the developed world that relies on mineral resources from the developing world suggests that the victims of extractivism are often not the beneficiaries. This explains why, despite its rich deposits of precious minerals, DRC is still among the poorest countries in the world. In the

2023/2024 Human Development Report, the country ranked 180th out of 193 countries (United Nations Development Programme 2024).

Anthropological scholars argue that mining is

> a privileged site for accessing the totality of global capitalism and the convergence of different scales of the so-called world system. (Smith 2021:33)

In addition to sacrificing human lives, extractivism also destroys and sacrifices ecosystems to the gods of greed and corporate profit, thus posing significant risks to sustainable development. While Apple and the other US tech firms have denied complicity in the criminal abuse of children and in the exploitation of DRC's minerals, it should be stated that the resource-based violence spawned by the scramble for DRC's minerals has a much more complicated history, involving different actors, both foreign and local. To get a sense of this history, it is important to go back in time and see where it all began.

Catastrophic Convergences of Greed, Terror, and Plunder

The modern story of DRC is a story of greed, terror, and plunder at the heart of Africa's entry into modernity. Written in the imaginative landscape of Africa, this story continues to shape how Africa is perceived and its place in the world. As one African political theologian claims,

> behind the problematic state of politics in Africa are stories that carry assumptions about Africa and African societies, which in turn shape Africans and African societies. (Katongole 2011:7–8)

It all started with Belgian king Leopold II (1835–1909), who acquired sole ownership of the Congo Free State in 1885 and immediately set about the plunder of his African estate. In his insatiable quest for raw materials, mostly rubber, Leopold, through his proxies, visited untold violence and brutality on the people. Colonial state officials were required to cut off the hands of Congolese people who refused to provide their allotted rubber quota, and to mete out other forms of cruel punishment. By the time Leopold's reign of terror

ended, the number of dead Congolese numbered between eight and ten million. As one historian states, it was 'bloodshed on an industrial scale' (Hochschild 2020:4).

The end of formal colonial rule has not brought much reprieve to the Congolese people when one thinks of postcolonial incarnates like Mobutu Sese Seko who ruled, plundered, and pauperised his country for more than three decades after independence, leaving three-quarters of his people living on less than $2 a day. A year before Mobutu's death in 1997, civil war broke out in the country, triggered by decades of sociopolitical difficulties and economic frustrations. According to Rigobert Minani (2022:45), a Congolese Jesuit priest who heads the research in peace, human rights, democracy, and good governance at DRC's *Centre d'Études Pour l'Action Sociale* (CEPAS), on the eve of the war, DRC had been mired in

> a failed democratization process for at least seven years, its economy was at its lowest, and international cooperation had been suspended since May 1992. In short, the state was politically unstable and economically asphyxiated.

The combination of these factors not only favoured the outbreak of the war but also made possible

> the invasion of the country, the collapse of its security apparatus, and a scramble to loot the DRC's mineral resources that involved more than nine African countries. (Minani 2022:45–46)

A catastrophic combination of Mobutu's declining political legitimacy and ill-timed economic and structural reforms proposed by international financial institutions resulted in the privatisation of mining companies, a decision which proved fatal for DRC's economy. As Minani (2022:46) states,

> The action amounted to a selloff of national wealth and it empowered illegal armed groups and other military actors. The period also coincided with the explosion of violence in the Great Lakes countries, with war in Burundi and genocide in

> Rwanda. The DRC experienced not only internal violence, but also spillover fighting from other countries near its borders. Mining companies raced to obtain mining titles sold at low prices because of war. And they also negotiated with the groups that had military control in the areas to be developed, giving the armed groups resources and power. From that moment on, control of mines became part of the war strategy.

In 2009 Joseph Kabila, who succeeded his father as president following the latter's assassination, signed a deal with Beijing, which gave the Chinese government access to mining concessions in exchange for development assistance. Following the concession, China took control of most of the primary industrial copper-cobalt mining sites in DRC. Presently, China dominates the international market for cobalt (Gross 2023). This situation has complicated DRC's economic woes and has created trade inequality that benefits foreign mining companies over DRC and its people. There is no doubt that corruption is a big part of the problem. Big foreign stakeholders come waving around large sums of money, which they use to pacify government officials, local elites, and rebel groups in order to maintain access to the mining sites. Findings by various anti-corruption groups such as Transparency International have revealed that the multinational mining company Glencore paid at least US$27.5 million in bribes to secure important business advantages for its mining operations in DRC between 2007 and 2018. To cover up its corruption cases, the company paid an additional US$180 million to DRC authorities in December 2022 (Transparency International 2024).

Despite its failure to promote transparency in the mining economy, prosecute corrupt officials, and create the conditions for broad legal and economic reforms, the DRC government has accused its neighbour Rwanda of grave complicity in the exploitation of the country's mineral resources and their smuggling into the international market, and of furthering instability in the country through alliances with proxy militia groups and military leaders and financing the ongoing civil war. This allegation has been confirmed by the US government:

> In many cases, these minerals directly or indirectly benefit armed groups and move out of the country through Rwanda

> and to Uganda before moving to major refining and processing countries. (U.S. Department of State 2024)

Presently, there are more than 250 local and 14 foreign armed groups fighting for territorial control of the mines and other resources in DRC's eastern provinces. There are allegations that former Congolese army general and warlord Bosco Ntaganda,

> who fought in all of Rwanda's proxy militias, was smuggling an estimated $15 million per week from eastern DRC into Rwanda

from 2006 to early 2009 (Amsterdam & Partners LLP 2024:25). Big Western players such as British national David Bensusan, a former CEO of Minerals Supply Africa, the biggest exporter of minerals from Rwanda, have also been accused of coordinating the smuggling of DRC's minerals to Rwanda and on to the international market (Amsterdam & Partners LLP 2024:27).

Since 1996, as many as six million Congolese have been killed and nearly seven million are currently displaced. Despite reforms in the country's mining code in 2017, more than 40,000 child miners continue to illegally toil in dangerous conditions (Constantine and Wolff 2023). There are no less than two million people in the country who depend directly on artisanal mining activities in order to make a living (Amsterdam & Partners LLP 2024:7). Due to the ravages of poverty, these citizens find themselves with no alternative but to risk hazardous working conditions in the mines. Siddharth Kara, who has been researching modern slavery, human trafficking, and child labour for more than two decades, notes that the level of degradation and exploitation in the cobalt mines in DRC is distressing. Here is how he describes the situation:

> Imagine an entire population of people who cannot survive without scrounging in hazardous conditions for a dollar or two a day. There is no alternative there. The mines have taken over everything. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced because their villages were just bulldozed over to make place for large mining concessions. So, you have people with no alternative, no other source of income, no livelihood. Now, add to that the menace in many cases of armed forces

> pressuring people to dig, parents having to make a painful decision, 'Do I send my child to school or do we eat today?' And if they choose the latter, that means bringing all their kids into these toxic pits to dig just to earn that extra fifty cents or a dollar a day, that could mean the difference between eating or not. So in the 21st century, this is modern-day slavery. (quoted in Gross 2023)

Without excusing the African purveyors of the problem, I contend that what is happening in DRC is not an isolated incident but part and parcel of a broader African crisis of dignity and development that came to life at the dawn of colonial modernity. Central to the crisis is the racialised otherisation of Africa and Africans in the Western imagination. In his well-researched anthropological work, which focuses on the lives and experiences of eastern Congolese people involved in extracting and transporting minerals needed for digital devices, James H. Smith (2021:55–57) points out that the Enlightenment trope about Africa as 'an illustrative example of the violence and horror of the State of Nature' has been reproduced in

> Euro-American representations of the allegorical journey down the Congo River [as] a movement backward in time that also entails a corruption of soul.

In the following section, I will undertake a socio-ethical analysis of the moral cost of extractivism.

The Cost of Extractivism: A Socio-Ethical Analysis

Everywhere in the world where extractivism is taking place, there is a huge cost borne by citizens in those extractive communities. Scholars have referred to such communities as 'sacrifice zones' in order to illustrate that the lives of people in those communities are seen as expendable, as their health and wellbeing are sacrificed for the sake of corporate profit (Miller 2023:1625). According to Marcelo Lopes de Souza (2021:224), in a sacrifice zone

> not only human lives are disposable […] actually, everything is disposable: fauna, flora, whole ecosystems, and landscapes. In

> the eyes of Lord Capital, everything can be sacrificed – it is just a matter of economic and political opportunity.

Ben De Bruyn (2023:1478) has also noted that sacrifice zones are driven by the 'slow violence of global capitalism'. Often

> inhabitants of sacrifice zones do not possess the means to avoid such intense pollution burden and afford to move to cleaner and healthier territories, thus being truly trapped populations. (Gayo et al. 2022:2)

Religious terms such as 'purgatory' and 'hell' have been used to describe the living condition in sacrifice zones (de Souza 2021:225). The testimony of Kara about DRC's situation lends credence to the imagination of sacrifice zones. He says:

> I spoke with many families whose children, husbands, spouses, had suffered horrific injuries. Oftentimes, digging in these larger open-air pits, there are pit wall collapses. Imagine a mountain of gravel and stone just avalanching down on people, crushing legs and arms, spines. I met people whose legs had been amputated, who had metal bars in where their legs used to be. And then the worst of all is what happens in tunnel digging. There are probably 10,000 to 15,000 tunnels that are dug by hand by artisanal miners. None of them have supports, ventilation shafts, rock bolts, anything like that. And these tunnels collapse all the time, burying alive everyone who is down there, including children. It's a demise that is almost impossibly horrific to imagine. And yet I met mothers pounding their chests in grief, talking about their children who had been buried alive in a tunnel collapse. And these stories never get out of the Congo. People just don't know what's happening down there. (quoted in Gross 2023)

Kara's submission illustrates an existential situation of violence and dehumanisation, in which the victims are those at the margins of Congolese society, especially women and children. Ecofeminist scholars have noted that

environmental harms 'are not gender neutral' but disproportionately affect 'poor minoritized women and girls living in the presence of extractive projects' (Koster and Deane-Drummond 2024:2). From the point of view of sacrifice zones, DRC is only one of many theatres across Africa where the social condition under which people live is emblematic of 'death camps', signified by '*the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*' (Mbembe 2019:68). Mbembe (2019:86) believes that our world has evolved into a vast killing field. The result is the 'normalization of the social state of warfare' (Mbembe 2019:115) where the violence unleashed on whole populations produces victims whose bodies are mutilated or outrightly massacred according to the model of ancient sacrifices (Mbembe 2019:86). The aim of the actors at the centre of this enterprise is that of

> maximally destroying persons and creating *death-worlds*, that is, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the *living dead*. (Mbembe 2019:92)

Pétronille Vaweka, a Congolese grandmother who won the 2023 Women Building Peace Award of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) for her work in mediating local peace accords in her country's wars, provided vivid images of this reality during her speech at the award ceremony in Washington, DC, in February 2024. Speaking about the tragedy unfolding in Goma, in eastern DRC, she said through a translator:

> During all the work I did in my life, I saw so many people who are crying, but tonight it's me who has tears in my eyes. (United States Institute of Peace 2024: 00:18–00:45)

In narrating the acute level of misery in the region, Vaweka asked:

> Why do we have all of this misery in the Democratic Republic of the Congo? Why do we have this suffering? It is because in the DRC we have underground such a wealth of natural resources. We have so many minerals underground which the world needs. So why do we have this misery? Why does

> it bring us all of these horrible things? […] It should bring us joy and happiness but, no, it is a curse. So, the whole world needs these minerals. Why can't we find together a responsible, civilised way so that we can all benefit of [sic] these minerals in a fair way, a way which is just in some type of Free Trade Agreement so that we will all be winners in the end? Why do we prefer to have thieves who go over the borders, who take all of these minerals and then we have war? (United States Institute of Peace 2024: 02:49–06:09)

Although Vaweka does not mention names, her mention of a Free Trade Agreement and thieves who go over the borders to take DRC's minerals suggests that there are powerful forces behind the exploitation of her country's resources. Congolese attorney Herve Diakiese Kyungu has revealed that foreign extractive companies and high-ranking Congolese officials, including members of the current president's family, are involved in the plunder and smuggling of the country's minerals (Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission 2022). In this respect, whatever critical thought one might have about the neocolonial exploitation of Africa's resources by foreign entities, it is crucial to admit that such exploitation could not succeed without the active connivance and cooperation of local actors who also benefit from the exploitation and oppression of their people. As Ilo (2011:109) notes, 'If we Africans continue to play the victim, our so-called victimizers will not stop victimizing us.' This, however, does not negate the fact that there is a historical and structural violence embedded in neocolonialism that ensures there is a 'profoundly unequal redistribution of the resources of life' on a planetary scale (Mbembe 2017:45). This logic drives the violent extraction of resources in DRC and in many other places across Africa and the developing world.

Pope Francis has criticised the imbalance in the governance of today's global economy whereby a minority enjoy the kind of prosperity not afforded to the majority. He sees this as the result of an idolatry of money, comparing it to the biblical golden calf:

> The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. Ex. 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money

> and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. (Francis 2013:47)

For Francis, an economy that excludes the majority and does not safeguard the value of human life is a deadly economy. 'Such an economy kills' (Francis 2013:45).

Faced with awareness of the grave human rights violations that accompany the mining of minerals which go into producing the technological products that we enjoy, there is a moral responsibility that must fall upon consumers. The American theologian and economist Daniel K. Finn (2019:2) has pointed out that, given the way supply chains work, there is a causal relationship that exists between consumers and producers, which

> provides the material foundation for the moral claim that consumers are complicit in – and so in some degree morally responsible for – the injustices suffered by the distant producers of the things they buy.

This implies that consumers cannot be indifferent when injustices are discerned in the supply chain that delivers the goods and products they enjoy. If we know that 'our participation in the global economic system renders us morally accountable for the injustices within it' (Finn 2019:144), the least we can do as consumers is

> to alter our consumption patterns by purchasing 'fair trade' or 'ethical trade' products and favoring brands known for their efforts to ensure responsible production. (Finn 2019:5)

This attitude corresponds to what Christian social ethics calls solidarity. It is a moral and social attitude that arises from an awareness of the sufferings of certain individuals and communities and the interdependence between the lives of the individuals and communities and those of other men and women in the rest of the world.

When Vaweka told the audience at her award ceremony,

> I would like to have […] all of you here in front of me help us so that we can find a strategy, so that this unbelievable wealth of resources is developed in such way that we can find the strategy which makes us all winners

she was inviting her listeners to not be indifferent but to enter into solidarity with the suffering people of her country 'so that nobody needs to suffer' and so that 'people in the Congo [...] can live their life in happiness and peace' (United States Institute of Peace 2024: 06:15–07:54). Christians in the West who are members of the same body of Christ with their African brothers and sisters are challenged to see the connection between the material prosperity that they enjoy and the disposability of African lives that makes this prosperity possible, and thus stand up against the structures of sin present in their societies that allow such injustices to go unchallenged. Beyond this moral call, local and international regulatory structures need to be put in place to enforce a more just governance regime in the extractive sector. I now turn to analyse some of the efforts that have been made in this regard.

Local and International Regulatory Efforts and Frameworks

Worried by several reports alleging the involvement of armed groups in mineral exploitation in DRC, US president Barack Obama in July 2010 came up with Section 1502 in the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act to sever the link between mining and conflict financing in DRC. According to the piece of legislation, US companies registered on the US stock market were required

> to report on an annual basis whether they had sourced tin, tantalum, tungsten, or gold from the eastern DRC or neighbouring countries and, if so, whether those minerals had financed conflict. (Radley 2023:1)

The legislation was celebrated as a milestone in the US government's effort to substantially weaken the capacity of armed groups in DRC to finance conflict. Given that US companies such as Apple and Intel had no way of verifying the origin of the minerals they sourced from DRC or whether those minerals had financed conflict, the passing of the legislation made most international buyers

stay away from the region rather than put their organisation's reputation at risk. Although the US government's decision forced the DRC government under Joseph Kabila to initiate the process of reforming the mining sector, such as instituting mineral certification systems, this did not quite succeed. The need for such certification was reinforced by OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Minerals of 2011. The DRC government ratified the OECD guidelines in February 2012, with the result being that the country has seen 'a shift towards a foreign corporate-led model of mining-based development' (Radley 2023:3). As earlier noted, Chinese companies have taken over most of the mining concessions in DRC.

A policy document of the White House, *U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa*, insists that China's trade relations with Africa have circumvented good business ethics. 'The People's Republic of China', the document notes,

> sees the region as an important arena to challenge the rules-based international order, advance its own narrow commercial and geopolitical interests, undermine transparency and openness, and weaken U.S. relations with African peoples and governments. (White House 2022:5)

In addition to China, the document also takes a swipe at Russia for viewing Africa 'as a permissive environment for parastatals and private military companies, often fomenting instability for strategic and financial benefit' (White House 2022:5). Beyond these, the document affirms the US government's commitment to helping African countries develop policy frameworks for economic growth through the management of its strategic and valuable mineral resources, and outlines a set of goals that will help to strengthen democratic governance, deliver security, improve transparency, support reforms, expose corruption, and tackle climate change (White House 2022).

Earlier in 2022, the US Department of Justice had secured the conviction of the Swiss company Glencore and its subsidiaries for violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) by acts of corruption and bribery to secure improper business advantages in DRC. Pleading guilty to one count of conspiracy to violate the FCPA, Glencore 'agreed to a criminal fine of $428,521,173, and

agreed to criminal forfeiture and disgorgement in the amount of $272,185,792' (U.S. Department of Justice 2022). US district judge Lorna Schofield handed down the sentence to Glencore in February 2023 and ordered the company to pay US$700 million in connection with its guilty plea (Cohen 2023).

The commitment that US administrations have shown in tackling the international dimension of the crisis in DRC should be commended.

> The U.S. government continues to take steps aimed at helping transform the illicit flows of these minerals into a responsible trade rooted in the DRC that helps build the economic foundation for a sustainable peace in the DRC and the broader region. These steps include encouraging responsible investment in and sourcing from the region, including by U.S. companies, identifying stronger due diligence mechanisms that U.S. and other companies can voluntarily implement in sourcing minerals from the African Great Lakes Region, and issuing periodic statements regarding conflict concerns in the region. (U.S. Department of State 2024)

In 2023, Apple announced that it was accelerating its work to expand the use of recycled materials across its products. Its target is to design all batteries in Apple products from 100 percent recycled cobalt by 2025. Additionally, the company plans to produce the magnets in Apple devices from all rare earth elements. It has also stated that since 2022 it has

> expanded its use of key recycled metals, and now sources over two-thirds of all aluminium, nearly three-quarters of all rare earths, and more than 95 percent of all tungsten in Apple products from 100 percent recycled. (Apple 2023)

Apple's goal is to 'one day make all products with only recycled and renewable materials' in line with its commitment to make every product carbon neutral in 2030 (Apple 2023). Reaching these goals will significantly divest Apple's reliance on newly mined minerals given that there are around 2.2 billion active users of Apple products worldwide. Moreover, the company has indicated that it is also 'pursuing ways to directly support communities whose livelihoods

depend on mining' (Apple 2023). These are significant commitments, and every effort should be made to see that they are fully implemented.

The role of global civil society organisations such as Global Witness, Oxfam America, and Natural Resources Governance Institute (NRGI) in improving the governance regime in the extractive sector in developing countries is also commendable.

> These all recognize, in different ways, that natural resources can provide a means, when properly used, for poorer nations to decisively break with poverty. (Addison and Roe 2018:3)

Why DRC's case remains seemingly intractable is partly the result of lack of political will to implement mining policies, enforce norms, and prosecute offenders. In the midst of these challenges, there is one institution that many people still look up to: the church. But can the church really make any difference? In the final part of this paper, I examine the role of the church in the Congolese people's struggle for justice and dignity.

The Church in DRC: Any Sign of Hope?

A discussion of this nature cannot afford to ignore the role of the church in DRC. Christianity is the majority religion in DRC. Of the 89.5 million people in the country, 94.97% are Christians (Aid to the Church in Need 2023). DRC has the largest Catholic population in Africa. Statistics from the Vatican reveal that there are over 52 million Catholics, representing more than half of the country's total population (Holy See Press Office 2023). Although these statistics might be contested, as data from other sources suggest, what is incontestable is that the Catholic Church constitutes 'a powerhouse' in DRC (Lokola 2020:191) and that religion plays a significant role in political life (U.S. Department of State 2022). This raises a key question: how could DRC be overwhelmingly Christian and yet have these atrocities happen in the country? Can the church really be a sign of hope for the Congolese people?

Hope, according to German theologian Johann Baptist Metz, is what theology and the church are called to offer in a world of injustice and suffering. For Metz (2007:23), the relevance of theology and the church will have to be determined

by their capacity to offer an account of hope amidst 'the concrete historical-social situation in which subjects find themselves: their experiences, their suffering, struggles, and obstacles'. One of the real challenges of modern Christian theology is the predisposition to rush to offer the all too familiar answer to the question of injustice and suffering whereby all things are put right by God in another life, in the eschatological future. The Spanish Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino (1993:234) contends that this hasty leap from Good Friday to Easter Sunday is problematic, for it deprives theology of the oxygen needed to confront human suffering in historical time, especially when it has to do with the sufferings of innocent victims of history who are not even able to fight for themselves. This is why Metz argues that Christian hope cannot be hope solely for the future, but also hope for *this* world. It is hope

> with which men and women, faced with the accumulated suffering of the just, stand up again and again against the prevailing unjust conditions. (Metz 2007:84)

South African theologian Allan Boesak (2014:41) states that 'Hope tears the veil of separation between all struggles for justice and opens wide the window on the world'. It is only from this horizon of hope that

> the interrelatedness of life and the connections between struggles for justice, human rights and dignity, and struggles for the life of the earth

become theologically plausible (Boesak 2014:54).

Having said this, let me examine some concrete steps that the church in DRC has taken in light of the country's challenges. Christian bodies, mainly Catholic and Protestant, have been speaking out against the injustice, oppression, and exploitation of the people as well as the armed violence that has lasted for almost three decades. Raphael Okitafumba Lokola (2020) has brilliantly documented and analysed the role of the Catholic Church and specific Catholic leaders in the country's struggle for justice, development, and peace. Similarly, Minani (2022) has focused on various statements that the Congolese Catholic bishops have issued for nearly two decades regarding good governance of the mining sector. In 2007, speaking about how the extraction of the country's

minerals has become a source of wealth for some and a source of great misery for others, the bishops stated:

> Instead of contributing to the development of our country and benefiting our people, minerals, oil, and the forest have become causes of our misfortune. How do we take the fact that our fellow citizens, without consideration or compensation, are stripped of their land […]? Is it permissible for Congolese workers to be treated without regard for their rights and human dignity? (Minani 2022:48)

At an extraordinary meeting in November 2022 to address mounting socio-political challenges in the country, the bishops rebuked international actors:

> The international community which in its duplicity blows hot and cold, carries a grave responsibility for its indulgence towards the multinationals and the countries which are predators of our natural resources. What sort of peacekeeping are we talking about when the number of deaths never ceases to multiply? (Aid to the Church in Need 2023)

Thousands of DRC's Christians have taken to the streets at various times to protest against the violence in the country's eastern region. One such protest in December 2022 highlighted emerging religious fissures in the country's crisis as Islamist militant groups grow stronger in the region and are taking advantage of the social chaos to kidnap and force their victims to convert. In a 2021 communique, the Catholic bishops stated that the aggressors aim to exploit 'the weaknesses of the regular armed forces in order to achieve their political and religious goals', which include

> the occupation of the land, illegal exploitation of natural resources, gratuitous self-enrichment and the Islamization of the region without regard for religious freedom. (Aid to the Church in Need 2023)

Other Christian bodies like the Ecumenical Council of Congo (COE) also play a significant role in political affairs, although there is hardly any scholarly

academic documentation of its work. In a similar vein, there are interfaith bodies working to bring Christian and Muslim leaders together to dialogue and propose solutions to the country's challenges.

Since 2006, CEPAS has been calling for an overhaul of the country's mining sector. Its campaign with other local and international civil society groups, the Congolese Catholic bishops' conference (CENCO), and mining evaluation experts succeeded in laying a foundation for DRC government's revisiting in 2019 of 61 contracts signed during the war. The government invited CENCO and CEPAS as observers of the process and entrusted CEPAS with the responsibility of publishing the official government report at the end of the process.

> Unfortunately, when the time came to actually renegotiate contracts, it was done exclusively between the government and mining companies with no outside experts or observers. And because of confidentiality language included in the contracts, no details were made public. (Minani 2022:48–49)

During his visit to DRC in 2022, Pope Francis took the path of prophetic social critique to call out foreign actors orchestrating the armed violence in the country in order to continue to exploit the country's resources.

> Hands off the Democratic Republic of Congo! Hands off Africa! Stop choking Africa: it is not a mine to be stripped or a terrain to be plundered. (Francis 2023a)

The pope's planned visit to Goma, the centre of the armed violence in the eastern region, could not take place because of security concerns. But when he met with the victims in Kinshasa, after listening to their sad and painful testimonies, he went on to issue a warning to the beneficiaries of the armed conflict:

> You are enriching yourselves through the illegal exploitation of this country's goods and through the brutal sacrifice of innocent victims. Listen to the cry of their blood (cf. *Gen* 4:10), open your ears to the voice of God, who calls you to conversion, and to the

> voice of your conscience: put away your weapons, put an end to war. Enough! Stop getting rich at the cost of the poor, stop getting rich from resources and money stained with blood! (Francis 2023b)

Reflecting on the pope's visit, Nigerian Catholic bishop and social activist Matthew Hassan Kukah (2023:7) wrote that it has 'provided pointers and encouragement for local actors to carry on where the Holy Father left off', adding that his messages 'have left us with working tools to bring reconciliation to our diverse and sometimes fractious communities'. At any rate, as church leaders in DRC continue to discern the sort of actions that can best transform the country's situation and bring peace and development, the following conclusion reached at the public reasoning process of the October 2019 Amazon synod is helpful for thinking about the church's role in the DRC context:

> We may not be able to modify the destructive model of extractivist development immediately, but we do need to know and make clear where we stand, whose side we are on, what perspective we assume. (Deneulin 2021:79)

Conclusion

The background of this article is the gross human rights violation of Congolese people, especially children, forced to work under dehumanising and hazardous conditions in cobalt mines. While this implicated some key US tech firms that benefit from DRC's mineral resources, the article showed that the problem is much more complex and involves the complicity not just of successive DRC governments, politicians, and local elites, but also several other African countries. Furthermore, it analysed the theological implications of extractivist violence, using resources from Christian social ethics to illumine the DRC context. This led to a discussion of some local and international efforts to promote enforceable agreements, policies, and regulatory norms to govern the just and equitable management of DRC's mineral resources. The article concluded by examining the church's social responsibility and some concrete actions it has taken to work for justice, peace, and development in the country, especially the reform of the mining sector. While standing as a beacon of hope to the poor and oppressed is central to the church's social commitment, the

article noted that the DRC situation does not admit of any quick fixes that can rapidly transform present realities. Nonetheless, hopelessness is not an alternative.

The apostle Paul reminds Christians that 'hope does not disappoint us' (Romans 5:5, RSV). This hope must always take account of the gospel ethos of God's preferential love for the oppressed poor and, in particular, for all children. Consequently, all forms of violation of children must be unequivocally condemned. Hopefully, all those at the other end of the chain will sooner than later be able to see that 'the blood-caked corpse of that child lying in the dirt is one of their own' (Kara, quoted in Gross 2023). In conclusion, if there is going to be a future of peace and prosperity for DRC, I believe it can only be rooted in a recovery of African self-respect and the inalienable dignity of African lives. African lives matter.

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The Africa We (and God) Want: the Role of the Church in Promoting Equal Participation for Women and Young People

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Abstract

In May 2013, the African Union (AU), formerly the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with the adoption of *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. This treaty marked a shift from the union's historical focus on independence and anti-apartheid struggles to a vision of Africa as a global powerhouse. Envisioned as a fifty-year master plan, *Agenda 2063* emphasises Pan-Africanism, sustainable development, peace, freedom, security, and continental integration. Among its key aspirations is Aspiration 6, which seeks to empower and unlock the potential of women and young people as critical contributors to the continent's transformation. This article examines the church's role in addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with Aspiration 6. It highlights the significance of a contextual-*missio Dei* approach to public, feminist, womanist, child, and youth theologies, advocating for practical frameworks to promote equity and inclusivity. The paper concludes by proposing strategies for integrating these theological perspectives to ensure equal opportunities for women and young people in homes, churches, and broader society, aligning with the broader goals of *Agenda 2063*.

Introduction

In May 2013, the African Union (AU) formerly the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) marked its fiftieth anniversary. At the golden jubilee celebration, the heads of states gathered signed a treaty – *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* – which was to refocus the affairs of the union from the fight for independence and against apartheid towards placing Africa as a dominant player on the globe (African Union n.d.). The agenda becomes a fifty-year master plan for the continent in facilitating Pan-Africanism and an African Renaissance through continental integration, peace, sustainable development, freedom, and security. The treaty with its various aspirations and flagship programmes targets different groups of people and sectors of Africa. Among these aspirations is Aspiration 6 which is geared towards empowering and harnessing the potentials of women and young people in achieving the agenda. This article seeks to reflect on the role of the church regarding the plight of women and young people in line with Aspiration 6 of the AU's *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. The article concludes by proposing a contextual-*missio Dei* approach to public, feminist, womanist, child, and youth theologies and praxes as the way forward toward granting equal opportunities to women and young people in the home, church, and society.

A Brief History of AU (OAU)

In May 1963, the OAU was formed as a united front to address the various issues that were confronting Africa as a whole, particularly colonialism. Pan-Africanism

> was to protect, promote the dignity of the black race and assert their right to self-governance. This was against the orchestrated dehumanization of Africans through the Atlantic slave trade and the subsequent colonial brutalization. (Akani 2019:1367)

Pan-Africanism traces its roots to centuries ago; in 1787 a black cleric Prince Hall embarked on an unsuccessful campaign in Boston for poor blacks to return to Africa. Also, Bishop McNeal Turner formed the American Colonization Society. George Charles, the president of the African Emigration Association, spoke in 1886 to the United States Congress about plans to establish a United

States of Africa, leading to a Pan-Africanist congress held in Chicago in 1893. Names like Henry Sylvester Williams, Martin Delany, and Alexander Crummel are significant in their efforts towards Pan-Africanism (Adejo 2009). W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey similarly saw the need for the recognition and study of African cultures and history, emphasising the need for the return of Africans in the diaspora back to Africa (South African History Online 2011).

Moreover, on the African continent, significant intellectuals and patriots like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Nyerere of Kenya, Sékou Touré of Guinea, and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia also championed the Pan-African ideologies by organising a series of conferences. The independence of Ghana in 1957 led by Kwame Nkrumah had a significant influence on efforts towards the Pan-African dream. Disappointingly, not all African heads of state embraced the idea of a United States of Africa, which was held particularly by Kwame Nkrumah, as there were issues of sovereignty, security, currency, and the like at stake. They would later settle for a united organisation with a common goal to address colonialism and socio-economic, political, and security issues that confronted the continent. The criterion for membership was independence, hence South Africa was the last to join (South African History Online 2011).

In May 1963, there were delegates from thirty-two African countries who met in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa to establish OAU. In terms of structure, the heads of state formed the General Assembly while the foreign ministers formed the Council of Ministers. There was a secretariat with a general secretary and different commissions that focused on the various aspects of their objectives. One of the major achievements of the OAU was the fight against colonialism and apartheid. Also, it is worth noting the creation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the South African Development Coordinating Commission (SADCC), the North Africa-Greater Area Free Trade Area and the Central Africa Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries, and the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) among others (da Silva 2013; South African History Online 2011).

The deliberate efforts to address refugee situations and youth organisations were also very significant. These strides were not without challenges; the issues of sovereignty and the extent to which Africa could unite on various grounds still linger. Africa's indebtedness to the West has not been dealt with;

the OAU has been blamed particularly for the continent's poverty due to its decolonial and neo-colonial ideologies. The organisation had a drawback of constant coups and dictatorships with no proper approach to dealing with such situations; hence, guerrilla tactics as a mechanism to overthrow power became somehow acceptable. Reliance on external funding was also crippling as the OAU had internal funding challenges (South African History Online 2011). There was therefore the need to reconceptualise and reform the organisation; hence, the African Union (AU) was born in 2002 in this regard (da Silva 2013; South African History Online 2011).

Although the original ideology of Pan-Africanism was maintained, the AU is different in structure as it dissolved the various forms of central government systems like the Assembly for Heads of State and leaned more towards a decentralised system. Initially, the OAU would not interfere in the internal affairs of member states; however, the new union deemed it relevant to intervene in cases of human rights crises, genocide, and unconstitutional changes of government, and in situations where local conflict is a threat to regional stability (da Silva 2013).

The Constitutive Act of the AU envisages the establishment of a supranational type of executive body that can promote integration and sustainable human development more effectively than the OAU. The act has the following bodies as principal organs:

The Assembly of the Union;
The Executive Council;
The Pan-African Parliament;
The Court of Justice;
The Commission;
The Permanent Representatives Committee;
The Special Technical Committees;
The Economic, Social and Cultural Council;
The Financial Institutions. (Constitutive Act of the African Union n.d.)

Among the AU's major objectives, as stated in Article 3 of the Act, are:

- Active greater unity and solidarity between African countries and the peoples of Africa;

- Acceleration of the political and socio-economic integration of the continent;

- A common market and economic community;

- International cooperation, taking dual account of the charter of the UN and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

- A common defence policy for collective security. (Adejo 2009:135)

Contentions remain about whether AU was a mere rebranding of OAU or was an actual shift (Adejo 2009). Akani (2019:1367) discovered that previous programmes of the AU show African leaders have 'abandoned or [been] coerced to abandon the self-reliant strategy of Pan Africanism'. Among the several initiatives to realise the Pan-African dream, which also includes an African Renaissance, is the *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*, which is now the blueprint to guide the union's activities in the next fifty years (African Union n.d.).

Agenda 2063: Aspiration 6 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The *Agenda 2063* has seven aspirations in all; the aspirations are delimited goals for specific areas towards achieving 'the Africa We Want'. Aspiration 6 states:

> *An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.*
>
> All the citizens of Africa will be actively involved in decision making in all aspects. Africa shall be an inclusive continent where no child, woman or man will be left behind or excluded,

on the basis of gender, political affiliation, religion, ethnic affiliation, locality, age or other factors.

Goals:

Full gender equality in all spheres of life

> strengthening the role of Africa's women through ensuring gender equality and parity in all spheres of life (political, economic and social); eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls;

Engaged and empowered youth and children

> creating opportunities for Africa's youth for self-realisation, access to health, education and jobs; ensuring safety and security for Africa's children, and providing for early childhood development. (African Union n.d.)

The AU has a policy to recognise the charter of the United Nations (UN) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For this reason, it is appropriate to approach *Agenda 2063* vis-à-vis the social development goals (SDGs). The SDGs are global aspirations stated in the UN's *Agenda 2030* to address and eradicate poverty, also to ensure the protection and safety of the earth and promote peace and prosperity for all people. The seventeen goals focus on the climate, poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, prosperity, peace, and justice (United Nations n.d.). The UN aims to achieve them by 2030. However, reports show that the COVID-19 pandemic and wars have hindered progress a great deal. It is uncertain if these dreams will be realised at the anticipated time (United Nations 2022). Boaheng (2022) is of the opinion that even though Africa's predicaments have been attributed to pandemics such as Ebola and COVID-19, the problem has to do with political structures and their operations.

SDG number five is on gender inequalities: 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' (United Nations n.d.). The United Nations 2022 report on SDG 5 shows that it would take forty years for men and women to be on par regarding national political representation in leadership, and more than

one in four women have experienced some sort of abuse. It also indicates that, although women form 39% of global employment, they form 45% of global job losses. Furthermore, it is reported that only 57% of women have a say in their sexual and reproductive health. There are also issues with gender-responsive budgeting that need significant attention from governments.

Youth and children are affected broadly by the impact of the pandemic and wars on the various SDGs, particularly SDG 1: 'No Poverty', SDG 2: 'Zero Hunger', SDG 3: 'Good Health and Well-Being', and SDG 4: 'Quality Education' (United Nations 2022). The UN report has proven a retrogression in achieving all the SDGs, hence the current state of women and young people at the global level is devastating, which includes Africa (United Nations 2022). Aspiration 6 is geared towards granting equal opportunities and participation for women and young people in all spheres of life. The question is what the role of the church is in addressing these issues.

The African Church and Agenda 2023

The church, *ekklesia* in Greek, is the called-out ones who are the body of Christ; it also normally refers to the physical building where Christians gather for fellowship. The church has physical, spiritual, political, economic, and social dimensions to its ministries (Odeleye 2016). The African church in this context includes different denominations, African-initiated churches, and those started by foreign missionaries; once the church is on this continent, regardless of the origin or denomination, it is part of this conversation. According to Ayanfe (2016), the church is a dominant player in sustainable development; he highlights how prophets were relevant in national affairs because they gave guidance in biblical times. He further posits that prophecy is needed for sustainable development. Boaheng (2022) has similarly indicated the need for theological and spiritual dimensions to the *Agenda 2063*. Bello and Osakinle (2016) are of the opinion that the church and development are bedfellows; hence they move hand in hand. Development has been part of the Christian life, and for that matter the church's agenda, since the colonial days as colonialisation and Christianity were synonymous. Education accompanied the work of the missionaries then and now, although they are accused of imperialism. Healthcare was another integral part of missions, which was also coupled with condemnation of the traditional health systems of native doctors

and herbalists.No doubt, missionary enterprise in Ekiti as in most parts of Africa presents the church historian with a dilemma of irreconcilable contradictions.

In modern days, religion is usually separated from national affairs, but that is a mistake and the church in this sense must get involved as in the days when the prophets were part of national development in the Bible. Religious institutions are not only sacred but also act as sacred agents that call for reform (Bello and Osakinle 2016:44–45).

Regarding *Agenda 2063*, Boaheng (2022) asserts there has not been much theological engagement with the treaty, hence the need for such engagement. Interestingly, Boaheng seems to overlook the gender aspect of Aspiration 6 as he ignores that part in his summary of the aspirations. However, it is heartwarming to acknowledge a significant publication in theology which is mainly focused on *Agenda 2063*: a 2020 book edited by Sunday B. Agang, Dion A. Forster, and H. Jurgens Hendriks entitled *African Public Theology*. This chapter and the entire publication are similarly aimed at bridging the gap as posited above. I therefore engage some of the scholarship in the above-mentioned book later in this endeavour. The role of the African church is to reconstruct our theologies, ethos, and praxis if we truly want to see the Africa we want, and the Africa God wants, where women and young people are fully included and integrated.

The Plight of Women and Young People in the African Church

It is essential to highlight the place of women and young people in our churches to enable us to deal with the situation. To start with, it must be seen that women, the youth, and children are marginalised in Africa which in turn is reflected in the church. In this rich continent of ours, socio-culturally, it is rather unfortunate that it is just a man's world. As a woman, a pastor for over two decades, and a seminary lecturer for over a decade, I know the reality is that even this space remains a man's world.

> Patriarchy in the African cultures is just a way of life and the norm. In fact, this is the order of the day, anything contrary is either applauded with some '*Wow*' or detested with utmost fierceness. (Amenyedzi 2021c:173)

The man/father is always in charge; the mother and children do not have much say. The position of the African woman is a wife, mother, servant, and in dire instances a slave (Amenyedzi 2021a, 2021c). Although women are assuming leadership roles in all walks of life, it is evident that the inequality gap is still huge. The above report shows it will take four decades to close the lacuna in the political arena. That is just one aspect; how about other areas besides politics?

In present-day Africa, there are still churches that frown upon the leadership of women. Even in cases where women assume leadership, they are very few and it is not without patriarchal tendencies which often hinder their smooth progress. The women's experience is not only regarding leadership: the general discrimination and subjugation in society at large is also replicated in the church. According to Ozyegin (2018) patriarchy is structural and organisational, with principles and ideologies that reinforce the subjugation of women in socio-cultural institutions where men have absolute rights over women. This is just the norm in all spheres of life for the African woman. One of the unfortunate prevailing instances in the church is spiritual abuse. The Bible has been used to reinforce domestic violence; Pauline scriptures on silence, submission, and parenthood especially have been engaged in this regard. It is evident that pastors, especially men, have not been helpful to women who experience abuse in the church, which they have been compelled to endure as their biblical obligation (Amenyedzi 2024a; Cassiday-Shaw 2012; Phiri 2001).

For the young people, who are the youth and children of Africa, socio-cultural demands are placed on them to remain in the background without a voice. The norm is for a child to be seen but not heard. A young person with a voice, who tries to challenge misnomers, will definitely be tagged as disrespectful and uncultured. The young people include both the boy children and the girl children. Mombo (2020) underlines the recent cries of the boy child against discrimination as the girls are getting all the attention and opportunities. This makes me wonder if the tables are turning. I do not think so; the advocacy for the girl child is not and must not be at the expense of the boy child. We need a society where all genders have equity and access to rights, privileges, and opportunities in all spheres of life as stated in Aspiration 6. In the church, the activities of young people are usually limited to youth and children's ministries with less involvement in the main church activities. Klaasen (2018) admits that

power relations and misconceptions are the bases for alienation and marginalisation of the youth in faith-based organisations, and that the youth are in the margins (which is usually the space for the other) instead of the centre where decisions are made. The question here is: how do we get our young people involved in all aspects of life, including the church, in order to learn from the older generation and also contribute their quota to the sustainable development of the Africa we want (see Chiroma 2020)?

The AU has proposed the Africa we envisage to be one that does not discriminate against women and young people, but we all know that, per our socio-cultural and religious orientations, if nothing is done deliberately and rigorously this dream will be practically unattainable. Assuredly, the good news is that, as Christians, we are a people of hope; we trust God that if the church assumes its rightful position in the world at large and in Africa in this case then this is possible (Hendriks 2020). Women with disabilities and young people with disabilities should not be forgotten as their experiences are more severe. They experience multiple discriminations. I have indicated elsewhere that the African woman with disability experiences '3D disability' – three dimensions of disability, discrimination, and disadvantages (Amenyedzi 2021a, 2021b). Having pinpointed some of the underlying issues concerning women and young people in society, particularly in the Christian context, the African church has the role to reconsider our theological-biblical stances, ethos, and praxes moving forward. Below are some useful theological considerations in this endeavour, bearing in mind that our theologies inform our ethos and praxes which will in turn reflect the church's role in ensuring that women and children experience equity and access to rights, privileges, and opportunities in the church and society at large.

African Public Theology and *Agenda 2063*

Scholars from various theological disciplines assert and propose the need for an African public theology in the quest to actualise the aspirations of the AU's *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (Agang, Forster, and Hendriks 2020). Even though we appreciate our continent passionately, it is also sincerely true that the current state of Africa is the one we do not want, hence the desire for 'the Africa We Want' which is also the Africa God wants (Agang 2020). Public theologians identify the divorce between the sacred and secular worlds,

making Christians somehow reluctant to embrace public and secular life as fully part of their Christian life (Agang 2020; Forster 2020). It is no new knowledge that it is impossible to separate the African people from spirituality. To the African, there is always a spiritual meaning to any occurrence in life, be it good or bad. The traditionalist will attribute their success or misfortune to the gods and ancestors while Christians would attribute theirs to God. For this reason, Christians in Africa would fast and pray for any situation for divine intervention.

A typical example is the declaration of national fasting and prayers in Ghana by the president when COVID-19 was first recorded in the country. The impact of the pandemic in Ghana was not as severe as other countries, and many Christians believe God intervened indeed. Another example from Ghana is the official prayers offered by the speaker of parliament before proceeding with any business of the day. These are but a few indications that spirituality is part of our public and secular lives already, even if theologians do not step in. The church must just take advantage of the already-existing structures and religious options in society and institutions to make an impact. While many have blamed the demons for Africa's woes, to Agang (2020:3) the actual darkest demons of Africa are 'bad governance, corruption, socio-economic injustice, religious competition, tribal and ethnic conflicts and political domination'.

What Africa needs now in waging warfare against the demons is an African public theology, one that calls for all Christians, not only the clergy but including the laity, not to limit their Christian lives to privacy but to also engage in the public space and all spheres of life (Agang 2020; Forster 2020). Such a theology is one that is biblically based (Musa 2020) but relevant to all aspects of life politically, socially, culturally, economically, spiritually, and all you can name (Michael 2020). We must keep in mind that biblical accounts prove God's involvement in the public lives of his people. Prophets and kings worked hand in hand in ruling God's people. The Levitical laws were not limited to their private and religious lives but belonged to their public lives too.

The church must not cease to be the 'salt and light' of Africa if we want to see the Africa we want and the one God endorses (Sebahene 2020). This implies that the body of Christ, churches in Africa regardless of denomination, the clergy, and laity alike all need to unite and make deliberate efforts to remain as salt which is relevant for preservation, taste, and healing and as light that will

always shine forth in the darkness to show the way. Having underlined the need for African public theology, now the onus lies on us as theologians and Christians to apply specific theologies to different relevant contexts. In the case of this chapter, the focus will be on feminist, womanist, child, and youth theologies as addressed below. I propose that, in line with the values of the South African Theological Seminary (SATS) which this article stems from, the public theology we do in addressing Africa's issues must be one that is 'Christ-centred', 'Spirit-led', and 'Bible-based' (South African Theological Seminary n.d.).

A Focus on Feminist and Womanist Theologies

The place of the woman in the church starts from the theological construction of who a woman is and how God is portrayed. Christianity, among other religions, presents God as a patriarchal God with male priests who exert power over women (Amadiume 2015). There are those who profess the traditional and male-only theological view who even subscribe to the inferiority view of the woman. To such, there is no room for leadership roles of women over men. The notion is that only male priests existed in the Old Testament, Jesus had only male disciples, and other Pauline biblical references as mentioned below (see Culver in Clouse and Clouse 1989:25; Foh in Clouse and Clouse 1989:69–82). African churches continue to grapple with complementarianism and egalitarianism. Complementarians, even though they acknowledge the equality of men and women, are of the view that women can only hold complementary positions in the church (GotQuestions.org n.d.). Their discourse is based on interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:9–15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 focused on the silence of women in the church and submission of women in marriage. The egalitarians, contrariwise, uphold a Pauline view of the equality of all genders as in Galatians 3:28 where Paul states

> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (*Holy Bible*, NIV)

African women theologians have argued that African theology is patriarchal; therefore they continue to make strides in developing feminist and womanist liberation theologies to emancipate the African women within the church

setting and society as a whole. Oduyoye together with other matriarchs formed the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians to empower women in theology and ministry (Oduyoye 1995; Oredein 2016). Their several publications address gender inequalities and other related issues of discrimination. Masenya and Dube propose gendered reading and interpretation of the Bible. Masenya (1997) proposes a Bosadi womanhood approach while Dube (2020) proposes a postcolonial feminist reading of the Bible. Claassens (2016, 2020) writes on dignity, trauma, disability, and biblical interpretations from a feminist perspective. Mombo (Mombo and Joziasse 2012; Mombo 2022) focuses on disability and gender while Chirongoma writes on Mother Earth and environmental issues (Chirongoma and Kiilu 2022).

I have elsewhere proposed a womanist theology of disability in dealing with the extreme exclusion and lack of participation of women with disabilities in African churches and society and have also developed a methodology for doing African women research within African contexts: the Afrocentric Womanist Paradigm (Amenyedzi 2022a; 2024b). There are many other female voices on leadership, contextualisation, domestic violence, and many more feminist and womanist discourses. Most of these theologians argue from *imago Dei*, *missio Dei*, and egalitarian perspectives. These women and some men have constantly argued for reframing our theologies, ethos, and praxis to fully include women in our churches. Women are created in the *imago Dei* and the *missio Dei* includes women too. In fact, Jesus did not exclude women from his ministry as usually portrayed. A very significant instance is revealing himself to a woman (women) after resurrection. If Jesus himself entrusted the resurrection message to women to proclaim, who are we to prevent them (Amenyedzi 2021c)?

There is the adage that 'charity begins at home', so, if the church can play a role in ensuring gender equality, it must begin in the church and then spread out to society as a whole. If this is not so in the church, then it would be crippling to even raise this issue outside the confines of the church.

A Focus on Child Theology

The AU's *Agenda 2063*, Aspiration 6, recognises and proposes the need for the young people to be involved and not left behind. The question is: in an Africa

where age counts and where the adult is in charge and has the final say, how can this dream be actualised? Indeed, the church has a role to play. Talking of children, socio-cultural constructions of whom a child is in our African continent make us relegate them to the background. Decisions are made for them regardless of what they feel or think or the consequences those decisions may have on them. These attitudes towards children are also present in our churches, reflected in our theologies, ethos, and praxis.

Biblical and theological conversations around children and childhood are normally approached from three perspectives. First is the theology of childhood mainly addressing the child-parent relationship, 'child innocence', and 'spiritual naivety'. Second is child theology that focuses on how Jesus puts children at the centre of missions and Christian living. Last but not the least is children doing theology (see Geiger 2013). The challenges, exclusion, and discrimination children experience are not limited to the society alone but likewise occur within the church. The issue of child spirituality remains a contention as different denominations and church traditions have their theologies and dogmas around that. Age is key when talking of child spirituality; hence, the dispute is whether children are old enough to understand spiritual things and experience God for themselves. The acceptable age for partaking in communion, baptism, and confirmations and assuming leadership roles remains debatable in most African churches.

Weber and de Beer (2016) affirm that we do poor theology about children if we do not include their voices and experiences; therefore, they propose a child theology in Africa that acknowledges the children's role, position, and voice in the church as vital in intergenerational praxis. It is interesting to note that even the view of children in *Agenda 2063* is problematic. It states

> *An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.* (African Union n.d.)

This suggests that with children the main concentration is on caring for them, which is typical of African cultures. The AU itself must reconstruct the perception of the African child from recipient to collaborator. In a continent where children are assets and the passport to inheritance for mothers in their

husband's estate, it is a taboo to be married without children (and the wife is always in trouble). One of the major prayer points in our churches is for babies; unfortunately, many so-called prophets have taken advantage to oppress and exploit women by taking them through inhumane ordeals in the quest for miracle children. The notion of children is that of a possession that needs to be preserved for their benefit, instead of a full human being created in the *imago Dei* who must be treated with value, dignity, and respect. Moving forward,

> the vision of Child Theology Africa is to advance a child-friendly continent by doing theology with, for, about and through African children. (Weber and De Beer 2016:1)

Some renowned child theologians, including those from Africa, present relevant discourses on how children experience God and child theology in the book titled *God's Heart for Children* (Tan, Petallar, and Kajidori 2022). If the African church reconstructs its theologies and praxes towards inclusion of children, there is the possibility of impacting societal attitudes towards children, which will enhance the African dream of equality and inclusion.

A Focus on Youth Theology

Young people include children and youths; sometimes we make the mistake of clamming them together but the reality is that their experiences are different. Youth is the period in-between childhood and adulthood but is mostly treated as childhood in African cultures. Adolescence is often used in place of youthfulness; however, while an adolescent is a youth, a youth entails more than adolescence. If the idea is to involve children, then it is just right to equally grant opportunities to the youth. It is difficult to define who is a youth. While different organisations, institutions, and churches put a particular age to who is a youth, socio-culturally, in Africa, age does not matter but rather independence and responsibility. So, in a scenario where there are two young people of the same age, and one is employed and married and the other is unemployed and still dependent, without question the former would be the adult while the later remains the child (Amenyedzi 2021b).

The youth go through various developmental stages, including puberty. On our continent, puberty is marked by various initiation rites to mark the transition

from childhood into adulthood. These rites are normally enshrined in the cultures and traditional belief systems that are not so charming to the contemporary youth, though the older generation upholds such ceremonies as significant and as instilling moral values into the younger generation. The absence of these initiations has been dreaded; moreover, one cannot reject the fact that some of these rites are often accompanied by some unacceptable practices like female genital mutilation and staying in the forest for boys, which all have their ethical, psychological, and health implications. There is always a constant clash between youth and adults on procedures, ideologies, ethics, and moral values. How does the church step in to address such circumstances? As indicated early on, the church cannot be excused for discrimination against and exclusion of the youth in the general life of the church and leadership. Here again, the starting point is reconstructing our theological discourses on the youth.

Youth theology, which reflects on the youth ministry approach, has been Eurocentric from time immemorial. It is for this reason that youth theologians in Africa have called for contextual and decolonised youth theologies and approaches (Bautista 2018; Ndereba 2021; Weber 2015, 2017). Klaasen (2018) calls for theologies and praxis that place the youth at the centre. Aziz (2022) proposes youth ministry as a public practical theology. Our theologies must be framed around contemporary issues and the experiences of the youth so that they will be relevant to them. Digitalisation must be considered in this discourse as this is the *new normal* and a common space for the youth. Chiroma (2020) has alluded to the idea that, in pursuit of the aspirations of *Agenda 2063*, there is a need to value intergenerational relationships where the younger generation must respect and learn from the older generation and the older generation must learn to also listen to the young generations, although this would not be an easy process.

Proposing a Contextual-*Missio Dei* Approach for Engaging Women and Young People in the African Church and Society

It is established that there is a dire need for spiritual and theological dimensions to the *Agenda 2063*, which are the responsibility of the church in collaboration with other stakeholders (Agang, Forster, and Hendriks 2020; Boaheng 2022). Sebahene (2020) is of the opinion that the African church as

the salt and light needs to shine forth to show the way and to preserve the nations towards actualising the 'Africa We Want' and the Africa God endorses. The situation of women and young people in Africa cuts across a long spectrum, in fact all spheres reflected in all the aspirations of *Agenda 2063* and the SDGs. The issues have to do with poverty, (un)employment, education, digitalisation, health and wellbeing, (no) hunger, gender equality, migration, trafficking, environment, pandemics, ocean life, marginalisation, exclusion/inclusion, and many more. All these relevant issues affect women and children in one way or another.

After all is well said, what next? There are proposals for theological interventions as mentioned above like public theology, feminist and womanist theologies, liberation theologies, inclusive child theology, decolonised and contextual youth theologies, etc. As we endeavour to reconstruct our theologies, what are the practical steps towards actualising *Agenda 2063* for the church in Africa? I propose a contextual-*missio Dei* approach. This approach must encompass our theologies, ethos, and praxis. A contextual-*missio Dei* approach is one that is relevant to the African cultural context and is all-inclusive – all-inclusive in the sense that the *missio Dei* includes everyone. The Great Commission was to all nations and every creature, meaning women and young people are also included. Women were used tremendously in the Bible to prophesy, care for prophets, bring deliverance, birth the saviour, minister to Jesus Christ and the apostles, and the list goes on and on. Similarly, young people in the Bible were called as prophets and kings and won wars, and Jesus particularly defied culture by placing children at the centre of Christianity.

A contextual-*missio Dei* approach will ask vital questions in theologising and praxis, such as: what are those elements in our cultures concerning women and young people and how dehumanising or redeeming are they? How are women and young people appreciated in our societies? What are the religious/theological views on women and young people and how do these views impact them? Moving forward, we would want to identify those redemptive elements in our cultures, theologies, and praxis that will enhance the full participation of women and young people in the home, church, and society at large (see the Afrocentric-Womanist Paradigm [Amenyedzi 2022a] and the Afrocentric Youth Paradigm [Amenyedzi 2022b]).

To this end, the African church has a significant role to play in actualising Aspiration 6 of *Agenda 2063* through interventions at the individual church, denominational, council, associational, and ecumenical levels to ensure that conversations on women and children are not pushed to the margins but placed at the centre of our theologies, ethos, and praxis. The set of questions proposed in the contextual-*missio Dei* approach will undoubtedly be a useful asset.

Conclusion

The article was a reflection on AU's *Agenda 2063* Aspiration 6 which calls for no women and young people to be left behind in any facets of life on the African continent. Africa being a patriarchal society, women and young people do not have a voice; hence they experience discrimination and marginalisation in society at large but also in churches. The church has a role to play in realising the Pan-African dream as stipulated in *Agenda 2063*. This can become a reality if the church desists from separating the sacred from the secular and understands that our spiritual, private, and public lives are interwoven and so must be captured in our theologies, ethos, and praxis regarding women and young people. This means that our theologies and ministry approaches must deliberately create spaces for women and young people at the centre instead of leaving them in the margins. To this end, I propose a contextual-*missio Dei* approach that is contextually relevant to the African continent and all-inclusive, as the *missio Dei* includes all.

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Engaging Theological Education with Young People for Urban Flourishing: a Case Study in Nairobi

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Abstract

This article situates theological education within the strategic vision of contributing to an emerging, thriving African city. It examines the challenges and opportunities that face urban youth, particularly in Nairobi, and then offers creative strategies that theological education can employ to empower and engage young people to take an active role in shaping the futures of their cities. This article does a case analysis study intended to bring in insights and suggestions for churches, para-church organisations, and theological training institutions desirous of effectively equipping the young person with the necessary knowledge, character, and skills needed to demonstrate the love of Christ and produce a meaningful Kingdom of God impact on African urban growth and well-being.

Introduction

In the dynamic city of Nairobi, a vibrant representation of African cities' struggle and aspiration for life-giving urbanism, attention to the critical place of theological education in nurturing young people for Jesus and guiding their ambitions and contributions toward urban flourishing is urgently needed. The same can be said of all rapidly growing urban spaces in modern times, like Nairobi; engaging meaningfully with the youths through churches and equipping them for community transformation has great significance. This article, therefore, looks at theological education in relation to the aspirations of youth in Nairobi to show how theological education could contribute toward making youth take up active responsibility in shaping and flourishing their

cities. With due consideration for the peculiarities of Nairobi, this paper attempts to give valuable lessons from theological institutions and explore how theological education might be able to prepare and involve young people in a manner that could ensure the flourishing of urban communities in Africa and beyond.

The large youth demographic in African cities indicates that engaging them is a necessary and strategic imperative. For instance, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has highlighted the magnitude of this population. It states,

> In Africa, the number of youth is growing rapidly. In 2015, 226 million youth aged 15-24 lived in Africa, accounting for 19 per cent of the global youth population. By 2030, it is projected that the number of youth in Africa will have increased by 42 per cent. Africa's youth population is expected to continue to grow throughout the remainder of the 21st century, more than doubling from current levels by 2055. (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2015:1)

However, despite the huge population, the church and theological institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa have not stepped up to meet the needs of the growing population. Bariu (2017:309) points out that

> Many reasons have been considered as to why Christianity in Kenya and Africa as a whole has a minimal transformation in societies. Some of the reasons are a lack of adequate discipleship, lack of sound biblical doctrine and theology, weak leadership, and limited incarnation of the gospel message into African culture.

This article captures the story of the Mathare Youth Forum (MYF) journey as a critical case study in responsive, contextual Christian theological education that interconnects the church into urban life and contributes towards transformation in the urban space. Therefore, it reviews literature within the scope of theological education and engagement of youth in cities in conjunction with its associated effects and impacts on urban development and

African city experiences. It also presents the views of theological educators, young people, and community leaders about engaging youth for urban flourishing in Nairobi.

MYF had 40 participants from informal settlements, representing various African Instituted churches (6), the Anglican Church (5), Independent Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, (27), and the Presbyterian Church (2). The Independent Pentecostal churches and other AICs are the most prevalent congregations in these informal settlements, which explains their numerical strength within MYF. The Anglican and Presbyterian churches also have a notable presence in the area and were invited by some Pentecostal and AIC congregations' participants.

Defining Theological Education in Informal Settlements

From the outset, it is important to outline what theological education implies in this article. It does not carry the same meaning attributed to the term 'theological education' in an academic institution. In this case, a concept of theological education for informal settlements and institutions of theology demonstrates a process portrayed by two paradigms informed by their contexts, audience targeted, and purposes.

On the one hand, theological education in slums and informal settlements is from below, drawn from the lived experiences of the community members, seeking practical solutions to their issues and changing their communities. On the other hand, theological institutions approach it in a more structured and scholarly way, putting emphasis on predetermined frameworks, professionalism, and doctrinal accuracy. According to Plantinga et al (2010:28), 'Theology has the reputation of being an abstract and arid intellectual discipline, divorced from *terra firma* and all too often speculating in matters far removed from everyday concerns.'This has been the focus of theological institutions. These differences show how people think about and practice theology differently in privileged and marginalised spaces. To create a contextually transformative theology, it is important to talk about and combine these different approaches.

Theological Education as Theological Reflection

Theological education in and with slums and informal settlements must take the shape of theological reflection. In this way, it does not emphasise knowledge transmission; instead, it becomes a dynamic process in which faith, scripture, and lived experiences intersect in a real and honest dialogue. This reflective approach will enable the learners to confront the real-world challenges and understand God's presence and purposes within their contexts. Education does not stop at abstract theories but fosters critical thinking, spiritual growth, and practical application by emphasising theological reflection, thus enabling individuals to respond faithfully to life's complexities. In such a way, theological education turns into a journey that shapes mind, heart, and actions, and that equips learners for significant and impactful living of the gospel.

Paver (2021), through his book *Theological Reflection and Education for Ministry: The Search for Integration in Theology*, puts forward his assertion that theological reflection offers an integration of theory with practice or theology with experience, starting from real-life experiences, with pastoral supervision being used as the vehicle for reflection. While his aim is to inspire reforms in theological schools and seminaries, his ideas are quite relevant to the context of theological reflection for urban transformation. The process of theological reflection effectively connects the theological academy to the realities of urban life.

The practice of theological reflection, which leads to missional action, transforms abstract ideas and theologies into practical steps. As Pillay (2015:4) points out, 'the Kingdom of God is an abstract concept yet becomes personal and known when it is transformative.' Thus, theological reflection serves as a methodology for practical theology designed for youth forums, churches, parachurch organisations, and theological institutions. Pillay introduces two essential concepts that aid in understanding theological reflection: naming and weaving.

Years ago, Trokan (1997:144) noted that 'theological reflection is an excellent tool to enable students systematically to explore life's experiences, to reflect

critically upon their meaning, and to theologise explicitly about the God event in their lives in light of the Judeo-Christian tradition.'

Harnessing Africa's Young Population

> With a median age of 19.7 in 2020, Africa's population is already the youngest in the world. This is a significant age gap compared to 31.0 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 32.0 in Asia, 33.4 in Oceania, 38.6 in Northern America and 42.5 in Europe, the oldest continent. Currently, around 60% of Africa's population is younger than 25 years, and more than a third between 15-34 years old. By 2100, Africa should still have the youngest population worldwide, with a median age of 35. (Rocca and Schultes, 2020)

To devise good strategies for the engagement and empowerment of the youth, one needs to understand the statistics and dynamics surrounding the young population in Nairobi in the bigger context of Africa, seeking to create thriving cities across the continent.

For instance, Hall (2017:9), quoting the United Nations demographic estimates of 2017, writes, 'the Republic of Kenya in the year 2017 is a "young" country, with an estimated 61 per cent of its population being either children – age 0 to 14 – or youth – age 15 to 24.' On his part, Kashoi (2024:1) observes that 'Kenya is a country of the youth according to the 2019 Population and Census results, which shows that 75% of the 47.6 million population is under the age of 35.' Most importantly, the 2019 national census shows that the 'population pyramid for urban areas indicates that the largest proportion of population falls between ages 20 and 34 years for both sexes.' (Gitogo 2020:5). Therefore, it would only be befitting to conclude that Kenya is a youthful nation.

Notwithstanding what the church and theological institutions do with these findings, others are also paying attention to this fact. The discussion by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2014) on *Harnessing the Possibilities of Africa's Youth for the Transformation of the Continent* noted the growing significance of the youthful population in driving economic and social change across the continent. They also underscored how innovations and new

technologies can be used by the youth and governments to unlock their potential for transforming economies and improving the social welfare of citizens. They also recommended that attention be focused on grasping opportunities for identifying practical ideas, policies, and programs, sharing experiences, and adapting them to help the continent and its cities thrive.

As Bariu (2017:310) lamented, 'It is disheartening to see that Kenya, with over 80 per cent Christians, still experience devastating ethnic violence, AIDS pandemic, bad governance, massive corruption, and increasing poverty.' This calls for an imperative that for the church to strategically engage in the affairs of the continent, there is a need to combine the approach to youth discipleship, mentorship, and leadership development with indispensable elements capable of birthing a revolutionary, transformative force to actualise the gospel message of hope, justice, freedom, and abundant life for the people of Kenya and Africa.

Discipleship of Youth and Urban Transformation: Present Scenario

Research responses showed that every church has some discipleship process. During focus group discussions, there were different understandings and approaches to making disciples among Nairobi churches. The term discipleship has been interpreted and applied differently within these congregations. Responses from mainline churches indicated that while many have organised discipleship programs, there is a significant gap in how these programmes impact different spheres of life. Observations were made that youths aged 18 to 35 tend to move into youth programs and branded discipleship classes. Often, these programs distract youth with activities that do not connect to the heart of a contextualised discipleship class. Secondly, the more significant number of discipleship classes that intend to influence young people in spiritual maturity and character development fail to grasp or address the important matters of justice or how faith relates to and impacts political, economic, cultural, and environmental change within the city.

Participants from the Pentecostal and Charismatic arms of Evangelical Christianity in Nairobi indicated a kind of discipleship that equips one to support pastors and church leaders and to be preachers and church planters.

In doing so, they remarked that these are not organised programmes and rely too heavily on the Holy Spirit's action in practical ministry. There is an over-emphasis on believers' acceptance and reliance on the Holy Spirit as necessary for successful ministry, sound Biblical interpretation, effective sermon delivery, and good leadership. This is combined with the belief that loyalty to the servant of God as a disciple and dedicated service to the church are prerequisites for receiving the anointing that leads to fruitful ministry.

Almost all the youth in MYF, a grassroots approach to the Bible within the Mathare informal settlement, attend discipleship groups in their respective churches. In the classes and groups, discussions showed that the meaning of the word 'disciple' is understood differently across the congregations. For some, it means a young person who is dedicated and obedient to their pastor and will do whatever their spiritual leader asks. Other churches use the term disciple to describe a young person who is training to become a preacher and church planter. Most participants acknowledged that this was the first time they had heard of community reading, contextualisation and community engagement.

What has emerged from the responses is that there is not much difference between the disciples in Nairobi's informal settlements and those in the affluent churches of the city as far as their vision of urban life is concerned. Other than in the resources available for ministry and discipleship, most urban youth have aspirations and dreams no different from those of their counterparts in other settings. The discipleship lessons being taught and practised tend to emphasise prosperity theology, self-improvement, and personal spiritual experiences. In this regard, the theology being imparted and the ministry being conducted seem to disconnect them from their real-life contexts. Therefore, the teachings appear distorted, foreign, and irrelevant as the emphasis on health, wealth, and prosperity is inherently individualistic, though premised on prayer, faithful tithing, generous giving, biblical knowledge, and commitment to serving God in the church.

As someone who has lived and worked in Nairobi for several years, I have noticed that specific scriptural passages about health, wealth, power over demons and illnesses, and speaking or praying in tongues are highlighted to support this perspective. These passages often keep young people hopeful

that their circumstances will improve. However, it is insufficient to teach disciples that their only actions should be to pray more and harder, to decree and declare, to bind demons and the enemies of their progress, to "lose" blessings, to prophesy health, wealth, and prosperity, and to look forward to a brighter future.

In most instances, this religious teaching and practice do not save people from such situations because, despite prayer and devotion to God, people suffer in poverty and other adversities continuously. This discipline fails to consider the systems and structures responsible for the situation and how such systems and structures perpetuate oppression and injustice. These Christians are denied the power to rise against abuse and oppression because they are trained only to look at their spirit and hope for liberation only in the afterlife. Worse still, to be good disciples, they religiously follow the command of Romans 13 about unconditional obedience to authority.

This theology, therefore, finds a ready resonance in the informal settlements and the city of Nairobi mainly because of the abject poverty in which many people find themselves. It is estimated that 60–70% of Nairobi's population lives in slums or similar conditions (Wamukoya et al, 2020:11). Besides, for those who are poor and suffering, the theology of hope is imperative. As Torre (2017:4) notes, ‘in a flawed, sinful, and unjust world, hope may perpetuate systems of oppression more than it may motivate sustained resistance.’ Through hope, the church in Nairobi might actually damage the Christians and their communities because its understanding of hope would result in perpetuating injustice.

Of course, not all discipleship and Christian education programs are restrictive in their methodology. Indeed, some have inspired practical community activities and youth empowerment programs. Suppose theological education is going to be appropriately integrated and its potential for urban communities tapped. In that case, there needs to be a rethinking of what discipleship is and what it can mean within an urban environment. Understandably, the need for effective discipleship requires an understanding that its form must be contextual. This kind of programme should specifically deal with the problems and challenges of the city or particular community. Therefore, this programme would develop Christ's disciples to use their faith in active living in the church

and society. It requires changing one's direction to establish a more relevant learning model or finding one for the youngsters to equip them with better ways of interacting in the environments.

Relevant Christian Theological Education

A responsive discipleship programme contextualised in the urban setting also testifies to the need for relevant Christian theological education. There exist different levels of environment in which Christian education occurs. As Barbaniang (2024:78) presents, 'While Sunday school and religious education are part of Christian education, theological education is offered at seminaries and Bible schools'. Christian education cannot have one-dimensional goals at the home level, in Sunday school, or through discipleship initiatives. As a result, political forces impact its governance, content, scope, and purpose, all of which are intended to achieve particular objectives. For example, an essay by Karo-Karo (2024) demonstrates how 'Christian education in the family plays a significant role in the character development of Generation Z children.'

Machingura and Kalizi (2024:7) have pointed out an important observation. They said,

> The role that Christian Education plays in fostering effective discipleship and deep loyalty to one's Church's doctrinal orientation among members of the mainline churches and in transforming citizens' worldviews into a Euro-centric Christian life seems obvious.

This represents an important aspect which discipleship in the African church must steer clear of since contexts highly influence theology and theological education. In this article, Christian theological education examines fundamental beliefs, values, and ethical principles that are at the heart of Christianity, thereby enabling an individual to engage reflectively in complex urban challenges. Its scope goes beyond mere Christian knowledge; it seeks to give people a deep understanding of faith and its practical implications in social contexts.

Karo-Karo's (2024) approach is particularly relevant today in the face of recent calls by Generation Z for accountability and good governance in Kenya. He talks about how Christian education at home helps shape the character of young people and bequeaths them values for integrity and honesty. In this digital age, discipleship should be about teaching and embodying Christian values that also contribute to political, economic, and religious transformation in humane and empowering ways. Therefore, theological education and discipleship must begin to address how faith can influence the development and use of modern technology and the digital space. This would go a long way in bridging the gap of unemployment while at the same time upholding moral integrity in Artificial Intelligence, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

The power of Christian education to empower Christians to effectively engage the social, economic, and political realities in urban areas can be limited if it focuses merely on theoretical religious teachings. This narrow focus can hamper its effectiveness in fostering holistic transformation in urban communities. By being non-contextual, it is robbed of critical analysis because it discourages questioning and critical thinking necessary for any meaningful engagement, which is essential for understanding and tackling the root causes of urban challenges. Furthermore, it can be exclusive, failing to embrace diverse perspectives, which may unintentionally alienate individuals from various faith backgrounds or worldviews, thus obstructing the collaboration and unity necessary for urban transformation. It may, therefore, lack practicality in application because sometimes it lacks concrete strategies or tools on how religious principles translate into actionable steps in trying to address urban issues. Thus, there is a disjoint between theory and practice. It may also resist adjustment to modern urban contexts, characterised by reluctance to change, which limits its responses to emerging challenges and opportunities in urban environments.

In discussing theological education and discipleship in relation to the destructive prosperity theology that is infiltrating the Nigerian church, Adedibu (2024:89) argues, 'Relevant theological education has been the missing link in the wheel of Nigerian application.' He insists on the necessity of an education that is 'Action-oriented and transformative in its content as each context and generation has the responsibility to explore the concept of having faith in God and expressing that faith within their socio-cultural environment.' He also

states that ‘in this regard, the possibilities and potentialities of theological education could orchestrate the emancipation and liberation of any human society’ (Adedibu 2004:89). Relevant Christian theological education for the urban context promotes critical thinking and ethical decision-making.

Moreover, it helps people to understand various social problems from the perspective of faith, leading to informed choices and ethical leadership in the urban environment. It encourages community involvement and participation in empowering ways by engaging students or participants with urban theological knowledge that will enable them to connect with their communities, challenge social injustices, and strive for inclusive urban development. It also focuses on cultural relevance and contextual understanding. Such training in theology can be helpful in closing the gap between lessons of faith and realistic challenges, thereby increasing one's cultural awareness and the needs around them in an urban centre.

In addition, it also covers social justice through promoting values that involve mercy, fairness, and equality, which encourage people to take up the cause of the oppressed, foster social bonding, and strive for a more fair and equitable urban environment. It also places emphasis on leadership development to eventually assume leading roles that serve others with empathy, care for the common good, and contribute to changing things for the better, leading toward sustainable development in urban communities.

Mathare Youth Forum: A Case Study

Mathare Youth Forum (MYF) is a collaborative initiative of Resonate Global Mission, Inspiration Centre Mathare, the Center for Urban Mission, Footprints for Change, and Msingi Trust under the Urban Deacons Network. These are church-related and faith-based organisations committed to serving the underprivileged communities in Nairobi's informal settlements. Guided by the Nairobi Transformational Network, a ministry of Resonate Global Mission, the aim is to engage young people in theological discussions outside traditional, formal schools of theology. MYF adopted the methodology of Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs) from Latin America as a framework for reading the Bible and exploring theology with those living in poverty.

Anyon and Naughton (2003:1) explain that

> Youth empowerment has become a popular way to create effective programs and policies for youth and to help them develop leadership skills, self-esteem, and positive attachments to their communities. Youth empowerment strategies have particular appeal in high-poverty, urban settings where young people feel marginalised and poorly served by society's institutions. Increasing their voices in decision-making is especially effective in such environments.

MYF's approach to similar empowerment initiatives involves designing programmes and practices with young people, not for them. This shift of emphasis is considered paramount. For those who have been marginalised and disempowered for decades, eliciting their views, voices, and knowledge is an important part of determining what might be done and how. Consequently, there is a recognised need to develop youth leadership in knowledge, skills, character, self-esteem, and attachment to the community through a biblical activist-liberationist framework that upholds human dignity, the image of God in human beings, and freedom to exercise their God-given potential.

A good example of this is the process of empowerment in which young people actively participate in developing the curriculum used under the guidance of the organisations. This contrasts with the more typical approach whereby individuals and organisations develop youth empowerment handbooks from positions of authority without the active participation of young people. In such cases, decisions about what is beneficial or detrimental for youth and their communities are made by others. MYF stresses the importance of identifying what is desirable for ourselves, our community, and our city.

One such recent example is the engagement of youth in responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their communities in 2020 and 2021. The Mathare youth, through collaboration with one of the organisations in their network, Footprints for Change, launched the '5 for Mathare' campaign. It aimed at encouraging members to commit five minutes each day to praying for the neighbourhood. The Urban Deacons Network took steps by mobilising resources that offered food and toiletries to the most vulnerable people in

their communities. Although these are young people from the disadvantaged side of life, they came out to make some concrete contributions after only a few months of coming together.

Empowerment of youth involves deep involvement with the community, understanding the struggles, aspirations, and emotions of the people and continuous reflection upon their acts to solve community problems. It all started with one common promise. The concept was introduced by Holland and Henriot who, their influential work *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (1984)*,* explored the pastoral cycle that includes moments of insertion, social analysis, theological reflection, and pastoral response. This model has been adapted by different groups, including the MYF, which has redefined the stages as immersion, discernment, reflection, and response. Thus, the curriculum focuses on community immersion, contextual analysis, theological reflection on the issues at hand, and proactive measures to effect change.

Latin American BECs have read the Bible directly and collectively and found a just God who sides with the marginalised. This is similarly replicated in MYF, which has become a model for urban communities seeking to empower youth and offer theological training that will enable the flourishing of African cities. The young people who attended realised how unemployment, substance abuse, and poverty were all linked to the political elite's disempowering of them. While formal theological training is confined within the walls of the university, informal patterns open to the masses must be given complete recognition. The small, informal groups of Christians in the local settings provide the best avenue for questioning colonial ideas, approaches, and ways of knowing that have been perpetuated through the universities.

The BECs have continually expressed and communicated their reflections based on the Bible. Linked with this approach to interpretation, some theologians have called liberation theology a byproduct of this interpretative approach. Nevertheless, it remains dynamic at work, pointing out and denouncing unjust policies, processes, institutions, and structures. Imperfectly, these theologies resist complicity. They challenge us in a questioning deepening of our discipleship that is not controlled or manipulated by the urban ambient. Torre (2017) argues that only those who

have nothing to lose can be depended upon to imagine ethical practices that are genuinely liberating.

Therefore, the youth in MYF are also very engaged in activism and social justice initiatives in their community. They clamour for peace, livelihood security, environmentally safe neighbourhoods, and a spirit of creative care and service to the most vulnerable as they push for political change that benefits the community. Rather than merely focusing on congregational worship, small groups create opportunities to drive change in cities and neighbourhoods. Recently, they held an accountability forum when members scrutinised the audited accounts of the County Government of Nairobi to account for whether resources allocated to their constituency and wards are being utilised as they ought to be. They exposed the embezzlement of funds meant to construct roads, bridges, and open public spaces. Out of this, they had to take necessary actions to complete these roads. They tried to develop and grow this African city suffering from poverty due to corruption and mismanagement by promoting good governance and holding leaders accountable. The MYF represents an important example of how engaging young people through theological education can lead to urban transformation. Based in the Mathare slum of Nairobi, this forum empowers youth by providing theological teachings, encouraging community involvement, and developing leadership skills.

The MYF enables young individuals to tackle social challenges, advocate for peace, and initiate positive changes in their community. It offers various opportunities for skill enhancement, mentorship, and training, equipping youth with the necessary tools to spearhead transformative projects. Participants are motivated to champion social justice, human rights, and better living conditions in Mathare, playing a vital role in urban transformation. A sense of belonging, unity, and collaboration among the youth is developed through this forum, leading to a feeling of solidarity and collective action. MYF, through theological education and awareness, instils hope, resilience, and a sense of purpose in youths to work toward a secured future for themselves and the community with kingdom values such as justice, equity, peace, humility, and integrity. This shows how theological education can be a catalyst for urban transformation by engaging young people, nurturing leadership, and encouraging positive change in marginalised urban areas.

Theological Reflection as Conscientisation of Young People for Flourishing Cities

The theological reflection that MYF has been engaging in with young people is an important process of urban transformation. This becomes important because unless citizens, especially the youth, understand how their city or community works—who is in charge, and what citizens' roles are—they will not be meaningfully engaged in the city. It empowers them to critically address issues in society, challenge injustices, and work toward positive change in urban settings. Theological reflection equips young people with a deeper consciousness of social realities, inequalities, and ethical challenges, thus encouraging them to question the status quo and to dream of alternative ways toward a more just and equitable urban landscape. By cultivating a sense of social responsibility, moral agency, and compassion among young people, theological education becomes a catalyst for conscientisation—a process of critical reflection and action that fosters urban transformation through informed, ethical, and purposeful engagement with the complexities of urban life.

While theological reflection is the third moment in the pastoral cycle, MYF believes that it should be integrated into all stages of the cycle. Hence, experience, social analysis, and missional action as other moments of the cycle are approached theologically.

Montero (2011) provides one of the most poignant definitions of awareness raising: ‘Conscientisation is the liberating process of consciousness-mobilization that enables critical thinking about how we live and how the world we live in is ordered.’ By nature, it is a political process that seeks to turn individuals into 'ethically conscious citizens.' Montero goes further to say that it attempts to ‘uncover the effects of oppression and exclusion and increases awareness of unjust circumstances, events, and relations that have been ignored and normalised or considered part of daily life.’ The result is a community that is more aware and concerned.

Freire (1970) states that theological education has to pursue two objectives in the conscientisation process: finding the roots of oppression and promoting change both in the persons and the community. The different forms of

oppression that reduce the youth to a non-person condition have to be critically studied because such oppression is essentially dehumanising. He says one will be truly human when one is fully an agent in doing, thinking, and hoping. It is basically a matter of self-determination. Otherwise, the person could risk becoming alienated from all the activities. At all costs, the minds, their creativities, and all modes of productivity must be set free, or else people disjoin from life. His second imperative is to modify reality with critical thinking praxis. This is a learning process grounded in inquiry (problem-posing), in which the questions are about the problems they experience in their social context.

The theory of conscientisation holds that people of faith are uniquely positioned to be core change agents for society. In his seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1963:42) emphasises conscientisation when he writes, 'the church in the colonies is the white people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the native to God's ways but the ways of the white man, of the master, or the oppressor.'

It is possible to view current discipleship programmes as being a threat—a form of colonised discipleship. Notably, most, if not all, churches established in the city today bear a resemblance to colonies. Apart from this colonial element, Smith (2007), in his missionary analysis of Pentecostal churches in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya, noted that these Pentecostal and charismatic churches mainly operate as private businesses in the informal economy. The bottom line is that they are managed and controlled by individuals and organisations that may or may not have a legitimate interest in God's mission.

While Uwan's work (2018:2) reflects an American evangelical perspective, he asks significant questions on disciple-making, which resonate with the African context:

> What kinds of disciples are being made? Do the minds and the lives of these urban disciples reflect a baptism of faith in the marginalised brown-skinned Palestinian God-man, Jesus Christ, who was bludgeoned and hung naked on that rugged cross at Calvary? Or does their baptism reflect faith in a

> capitalist white Jesus clothed in a Polo blazer, khakis, and loafers?

Uwan (2018:5) further observes: 'Urban disciples are trained implicitly and explicitly to disdain their culture, traditions, and appearance. Implicitly, they are taught that only white men have “solid theology” because those are the only theologians read and quoted by the urban disciple-maker’ and underscores the need for the process of conscientisation in urban congregations.

> The colonised mind is a telltale sign that the urban disciple has been indoctrinated with a false theology that derives from the Empire instead of the Kingdom of God. Empire theology is focused on time without regard for unseen and eternal things. It only serves the interest of the powerful, maintains the status quo, and perpetuates the demonic narrative of white superiority against those in the margins. It requires nothing of its propagators and everything of those on the margins to whom the theology is given. It ensures that the first remains the first and the last remains the least. (Uwan 2018:6)

There is a desperate longing for decolonised and liberated theological training among the youth population in African cities, let alone in informal settlements. As Wink states in *Naming the Powers* (1984), African urban centres also need a theology and/or a way of reading the Bible that would challenge existing powers to return to their founding intent and simultaneously liberate those continually enslaved by such systems. This calls for people of faith to question and hold accountable leaders and structures that dehumanise, combat corruption, and resist the socio-economic and political injustices that contribute to instability in their communities. It underlines that the struggle should not be left solely in the hands of activists and politicians; instead, it calls people of faith to practice an active faith by rejecting exploitative capitalism and by standing in solidarity with the poor and marginalised. They need to challenge dangerous ideologies to advance equity, justice, and dignity as enshrined in the Bible.

Based on what goes on in discipleship practices within the church today and what many youths face, this conscientisation needs to be embraced without reservation to ignite critical awareness among repressed populations within church communities to rise to action. Many young people have shown enthusiasm for this kind of dialogue during class discussions. There is, therefore, a need for new wine in new wineskins. This educational approach, designed for and with young people, will highlight the political, economic, and cultural factors contributing to urban precarity in Africa. According to Freire (1970), the process of conscientisation moves the oppressed from a magical awareness to a critical awareness. The training model will create a new breed of leaders, missionaries, theological educators, advocates, and activists who can bring about change. The church does not have much to gain from maintaining the status quo in African cities' socio-political, economic, and cultural aspects while expecting different results.

The Intersection of Theological Education with Youth Aspirations

It is important for churches and theological institutions to see the connection between theological education and the aspirations of young people in Nairobi. As earlier acknowledged, the vast population of youth presents excellent opportunities for the growth of African cities, and theological reflection provides an opportunity for young people to interrogate and engage their faith, identity, and purpose within the urban context. That is why a pedagogy from below resonates particularly with youth in informal settlements and other marginalised communities, making them pay attention to their experiences and utilising the Bible and other relevant literature to empower them to solve the social, economic, and spiritual challenges within their contexts.

The dreams of young people can be seen in the effort they put into education, entrepreneurship, and innovation, with the hope of contributing meaningfully to their families and communities. It is crucial to link these aspirations to the vision of their cities. As God in Jeremiah 29:7 encourages the nation of Israel to seek the welfare of the city, so the prosperity of young people is linked to the prosperity of the places where they live. If it prospers, they, too, will prosper. Theological education, therefore, can inspire youth to connect their

aspirations to a missional purpose, seeing their contributions as part of God's redemptive work in the urban landscape.

Such a relevant theological education process carries the potential to open the eyes of young people and provide them with important tools to identify and challenge death-dealing systems in their cities and to foster their capacity for change. The scriptures would come alive to the youth because it envisions liberation and well-being. As a result, these young individuals can be the agents of change, turning around systemic urban poverty, inequality, and environmental concerns. Flourishing cities would result from collaboration among those who merge spiritual insight with innovative ideas and civic participation. Consequently, theologically educated youth would take on important roles in urban planning, social entrepreneurship, community leadership, and peace-building processes, demonstrating stewardship, justice, and hospitality—values relevant to sustainable urban development.

The Call to Shift

The future of African youth and cities requires a shift in focus, both in the church and in theological institutions. The current challenges inter alia of marginalisation, inequality, poverty, and unemployment in urban areas must become a priority. The message of the kingdom of God, therefore, invites theologians and theological educators to offer theological education in light of such challenges, reflecting the biblical teachings of *imago dei* (image of God), social justice, community and solidarity, stewardship and care for creation, and prophetic witness.

The dignity, well-being, and complete expression of young people is an imperative. The image of God (Gen. 1:27) speaks to the intrinsic dignity and value of all individuals. The image of God highlights the potential within young people to fully participate in city-making and, at the same time, reinforces the need to empower them to take an active role in shaping their city's future. Micah 6:8 places seeking justice from exploitation and oppression alongside loving mercy and walking humbly with God. It informs an engagement with youth in challenging social injustices, inequalities, and systemic issues that impede urban transformation.

A reading of Matthew 25:40 uncovers the salient features central to the kingdom of God, especially in building healthy communities. The people of God are challenged to care for the needy in society. This is a rebuke of the rich and powerful on the one hand, and, on the other, an encouragement to embrace a collectivist culture, one of solidarity and care so that the community advances together. Theological education at the grassroots and family levels is best suited to mobilise and inspire such action.

Coupled with the above texts are Genesis 2:15 and Isaiah 1:17. Since urban environments are threatened by environmental degradation and irresponsible stewardship of creation, theological education has a lot to say about climate change and care of creation. Such a way of reading and applying God's word resonates with the future of African cities and their flourishing. The second text invites young people to seriously consider the issues of oppression and disadvantages that characterise African cities today. Thus, theological education provides the ethical, moral, spiritual and theoretical foundation for actively working for more just, equitable and flourishing urban communities.

Pathways Forward

The church and theological institutions are not left without innovative approaches to theological education, such as:

i. Incarnational discipleship: Jesus' becoming flesh and blood (John 1:14) is an example of theological education and Christian discipleship that is rooted in community, addressing the needs of the people, and proclaiming the kingdom of God. Theological education cannot continue to focus on the academy but rather it must focus on where the people of God are and on making them change agents.

ii. Faith-Driven Impact Labs: To link faith with innovation, entrepreneurship, and digital technology the church must take deliberate steps to develop curricula, avail resources, and create partnerships that would link the aspirations of young people with the vision of their cities.

iii. Theology of the Common Good: Religion has been responsible for some of the conflicts in Africa and its cities. A theology of common good means respecting others, promoting reconciliation and unity among different groups, seeking justice, and promoting policies and systems that work for all in the city. Robust conversations happen in school discipleship groups such as the one at the MYF.

We can make theological education relevant to the goals of Nairobi's youth by empowering a generation that would not only dream about an African city that prospers but also works toward its actualisation, living out the kingdom of God in tangible ways.

Thus, the churches, para-church organisations, and theological institutions have a role in initiating, nurturing, and sustaining theological education among young people in Nairobi and other African cities through diverse approaches, such as the youth-centred programmes that must be designed to meet the needs, interests, and learning styles of young people in Nairobi, ensuring relevance and engagement. These centres can host robust transformational conversations that spur active participation and appropriate responses to the challenges facing young people and other urban dwellers.

Another powerful model is engaging young people in Nairobi through the internet, social media, and digital platforms to access theological education material, discussions, and resources. In addition, mentorship programs and leadership development initiatives can empower young people in Nairobi and other African cities to become change agents with theological knowledge and competencies for urban transformation. It would be one way of integrating arts, music, and cultural expressions into theological training, thus making the learning more interesting and relevant to the diversified youth in Nairobi and across Africa.

Conclusion

The Mathare Youth Forum provides a good case study of theological education that is relevant to young people and inspires them to be actively involved in shaping the future of their city. The young demographic and its attendant challenges and opportunities, depending on how they are responded to,

demand a responsive theology. Young people must be prepared through reflective learning, active service in a community, and leadership experience to become committed change agents for urban settings that uphold equity, solidarity, and well-being for all citizens. As we begin to look more deeply at the intersections between faith, education, and social progress, it becomes ever so clear that theological education provides a critical resource for the nurturing of a new generation of leaders who seek to build urban spaces shaped by the values of love, justice, and hope for the future.

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Exploring Current Development of Pastoral Care in Africa Through a Relational View of the Trinity

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Abstract

Pastoral care in Africa has gone through series of changes and been adorned by many colours since the entry of Christian mission to the continent. It began as a theological discipline but later became interdisciplinary, drawing from psychology, anthropology, and others. With the influx of African theological reflections on pastoral care, different themes and approaches continue to emerge. Current discourse on pastoral care on the continent favours communal care instead of individualisation of care. The concept of care of the community by the whole community finds its expression in the African communitarian ethos. The article conducts a contextual analysis of pastoral care in Africa through a relational view of the Trinity. The paper concludes that a relational view of the Trinity provides a stronger foundation for a contemporary, context-specific, communal pastoral care in Africa.

Introduction

The concept of pastoral care in Africa continues to witness series of changes since the entry of Christian mission into the continent. It began with Western missionary ideologies and grounded itself in the shepherding paradigm of scripture (Magezi 2019:8). Pastoral care began as theological discipline but later became interdisciplinary, drawing from psychology, anthropology, and others (McClure 2012:269). With the emergence of African theologies, several changes continue to take place in the field of pastoral theology due to the complex realities of the African lived experience. Consequently, several themes

and approaches to pastoral care in Africa continue to emerge. These developments have been influenced by socio-political and cultural changes as well as emergent theories aimed at addressing complex existential issues in our society.

According to Lartey (2004:90), pastoral care entails caring activities undertaken by people of God. Similarly, McClure (2012:269) observes that 'pastoral care indicates various responses of a person or persons motivated by God's love for another or others'. This implies pastoral care is undertaken by those who love God. Van der Watt (2023:2) observes that pastoral care practices are integral to the mission of the triune God in our societies. Since it is the mission of God, it is also the mission of God's people and it should be undertaken by all members of the faith community. Although there are several approaches to pastoral care, McClure (2012:275) observes that the current dimension of pastoral care should challenge the whole faith community to assume the responsibility of corporate caring for all by the whole congregation, as compared with the traditional notion of care for an individual by privileged, ordained leaders. Pastoral care by the whole faith community should be grounded in a theological resource that underlines the beliefs and practice of the church. One important belief of the church in Africa is the doctrine of the Trinity.

Sakupapa (2019:2–3) relates that the doctrine has become an ecumenical doctrine and a relational paradigm of the Trinity has gained a wide acceptance as a foundation for communal living in Africa. A relational view of the Trinity suggests that the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit presents a relational view of God that should characterise the life and ministry of Christians. In this paper, a relational view of the Trinity is conceptualised as a communion of mutual love, equality, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness observed in the triune God (LaCugna 1991:391; Tanner 2010:207; Venter 2012:1). Pembroke (2006:7) asserts that relationality, which is the central motif of the Trinity, is foundational to pastoral responses. This implies that pastoral care should be grounded in a relational paradigm. The current focus of pastoral care as communal-context, specific care (Scheib 2002) sits well with the African communitarian ethos and could benefit from a relational view of the Trinity.

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the current development of pastoral care in Africa through the lens of a relational view of the Trinity. It seeks to underscore resources from the relational view of the Trinity that could inform context-specific, communal pastoral care in Africa. The paper begins with a brief description of the historical development of pastoral care, with emphasis on Africa as well as on a relational paradigm of the Trinity in the African context. It then proceeds with how pastoral care in Africa could be informed by a relational view of the Trinity.

Historical development of pastoral care in Africa

This section provides a snapshot of the key changes in the field. Attention is given to the movement from the individualisation of care to mutual care of the community by its own members.

From its inception, pastoral care denoted the notion of shepherding (McClure 2012:269). This concept of shepherding connects with the theme of God as a shepherd (Ezekiel 34), hence places pastoral care in the confines of theology. The field of pastoral care has witnessed significant changes over the years. New developments in the field and practice of pastoral care have largely been attributed to changes in the socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts (Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern 1999:14), as well as the emergence of theories in theology and the social sciences (Van Arkel 2000:142). Some of the key developments have been in the area of the tension between theological and psychological domains, the need for pastoral care to respond to ethical issues in our society, the sterling contributions of feminist pastoral theologians, the growing attention to the role of pastoral anthropology, and the call to move towards communal care rather than the individualisation of pastoral care (Dillen 2011; Mouton 2014; Van Arkel 2000:142).

Pastoral care in Africa has also gone through different forms and stages, starting from the missionary movement, before the emergence of African theological reflections on pastoral care in the context of Africa (Magezi 2019:8). In the twentieth century, pastoral care gave more attention to theological reflections on the African continent by African theologians. The awakening of interest in theological reflections on pastoral care and the emergence of African theologians led to the formation of the African Association for Pastoral

Studies and Counselling (AAPSC) in February 1985 in Kenya. Among other things, the association aimed at promoting African perspectives on pastoral care and counselling through research and training that was consistent with the African context (Magezi 2016:2; Magezi 2019:8). As a result, several scholars emerged, with series of contributions coming from key African pastoral theologians such as Emmanuel Y. Lartey (Ghana), Vhumani Magezi and Daniel J. Louw (South Africa), Wilhelmina J. Kalu (Nigeria), and many others across the continent. These advances in pastoral theology in Africa ushered in key developments that are worth briefly discussing in this section.

In the first instance, pastoral care became rooted in African theology: the theology done by Africans to respond to contextual issues, that is, theology to deconstruct and reconstruct certain structures in African societies (Du Plessis 2021:1). It called for the need to undertake a theology that seeks reconstruction, taking into consideration all aspects of life (Mugambi 1995:7–9). African theological reflection sought to rally faith communities to embark on a transformative praxis that aims to promote justice and human dignity in African society (Magezi 2019:10). According to Lartey (2013:121–122), there is a need for the decolonisation of pastoral care in Africa. Arguing from the perspective of postcolonial practical theology, Lartey suggests the need for creativity, innovation, and improvisation grounded in the indigenous African communitarian ethos in order to undertake a pastoral care and healing that goes far beyond the individual to be care for the whole community by the whole community. This underscores the need for care that is grounded in a communal-contextual paradigm of pastoral work (Klaasen 2023:1; Scheib 2002:31).

Secondly, African pastoral theological reflection favours interdisciplinary approaches due to the multi-faceted and complex issues in the living realities of human life. The African context and the lives of the people are inundated with complexities; consequently, reflections on and the practice of pastoral care should take on integrated approaches (Magezi 2019:11–12). In the opinion of Louw (2015:14), they should adopt a ‘zigzag’ approach in which the praxis methodology and spiral hermeneutic paradigms are appreciated. Magezi (2019:12) asserts that for pastoral care to meet this demand, it should be undertaken by people who ‘embody Christ and become agents and beacons of desire and wounded healers of life despite the zigzag patterns of suffering’.

Another issue of key concern is illness and healing. Pastoral care should aim at bringing wholeness; Magezi (2019:11) and Louw (2017:1) describe this wholeness as 'cura vitae'. In order for pastoral care to address holistic wellbeing and needs, it should be integrated into the ministry of the church in Africa (Magezi 2016; Molla 2018; Van Arkel 2000). In this way, faith communities will undertake a ministry of caregiving that is rooted in faith praxis and Christian spirituality, which is consistent with lived experiences in the African context (Bowers 2009:94–100; Magezi 2019:9; Mucherera and Lartey 2017). This implies that pastoral care should adorn the clothes of Africa's daily experiences.

Furthermore, pastoral care in Africa should challenge faith communities to hear the voices of the vulnerable and take efforts to heal their suffering (Hendriks 2014:61–80; Molla 2018:189). This involves listening and responding to the daily lived experiences of abuse and the dehumanisation of the marginalised in African society. Magezi (2019:11) observed that faith communities should address societal structures such as patriarchy and any hierarchy that promotes marginalisation of women and children. Hearing the voices of children could also be considered as responding to the signs of the times (Van Arkel 2000:145). This is against the backdrop that there are increasing issues of social injustices such as abuse of children and women, conflicts, and the dehumanisation of certain classes in society. Consequently, pastoral theology should also aim at addressing these ethical issues in society (Molla 2018:189).

Also, pastoral care in Africa should carry out a ministry that is clothed with genuine compassion, love, and care for people. Commenting on the concept of compassion in pastoral care, Louw (2011:1) used the term 'ta splanchnic' to describe a sense of deep and strong feeling of mercy and compassion expressed by the intestines. This implies that our compassion towards others should be genuine and not superficial. This compassion calls for a pastoral ministry that could be described as 'embracing the other and reaching out to the other' (Magezi 2019:12).

Closely linked with compassion is love. McClure (2012:269) observes that 'pastoral care indicates various responses of a person or persons motivated by God's love for another or others'. This implies pastoral care is undertaken by

those who love God. Similarly, Koopman (2010:41–42) believes that theological responses should rest on the assertion that 'for God so loved the world' (John 3:16; ESV). This confessional belief has three dimensions, namely the inherent public nature of God's love, the rationality of God's love for the world, and the meaning and implications of God's love for every facet of life (Smit 2009:526). The Trinity presents this dimension of love. The inherent nature of God's love is the foundation for the communion in the three persons of the Trinity. Scheib (2014:707) suggests that love could be a starting point for reflections in pastoral theology. He grounds this argument in the notion that love is an 'essential characteristic' of the triune God.

In the light of demonstrating love, care, and compassion, pastoral care enters the public space. Dillen (2011:209) observes that pastoral care is largely 'public care' and advocates for the need to focus attention on this paradigm. In this vein, pastoral care enters the arena of public theology. John de Gruchy observes that 'public theology is a Christian witness' (2007:40). Public theology challenges faith communities to leave the church walls and be actively visible in the public space (Magezi 2019:6). The notion of pastoral care as public practice, according to McClure (2012:276), promotes critical reflections on policies and socio-cultural factors that influence suffering. It advocates for a ministry of care that brings liberation. Similarly, it is noted that there are implications of public issues for pastoral theology, and that, in the same vein, pastoral care has public implications (Miller-McLemore 2014). This discourse implies that pastoral care is both private and public. Although, historically, pastoral care has been predominantly focused on individual needs, recent developments call for attention to issues in the public arena.

This new dimension of pastoral care challenges the whole faith community to assume the responsibility of corporate caring for all by the whole congregation as compared to the traditional notion of care for an individual by privileged, ordained leaders (McClure 2012:275). This could be considered as living out one's belief to the watching world. God, therefore, expects that this relationship of love is expressed in and among believers, and in the communities they serve (Smit 2015:12). These new frontiers of care call for a Christian spirituality that mobilises the whole faith community to create a space in which wounded and broken members will find a haven. As they receive their healing, their lives become another means of promoting healing to other

suffering members of the community and of the larger society (Gunderson 1997:8; Gunderson, Magnan, and Baciu 2018:236). In the words of McClure, it is the 'care for the community and its members by the community and its members' (2012:275).

Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern (1999:80) described this as pastoral care in the 'living web', which seeks to move from individualised care to include paying attention to the social, cultural, economic, traditional, political, and religious factors that cause or promote injustices and the dehumanisation of children in our communities. Similarly, Molla (2018:194) believes that the notion of the living web expands the scope of care to communal care and public ministry. Consequently, the ministry of care could be directed towards societal transformation and helping to alleviate suffering. In the light of this, it is argued that theological reflections on a pastoral response should be placed in a particular context (Dunlap 2009:12; Klaasen 2023:1). This supports the assertion that all theology is contextual (Bevans 2018:30). Pastoral responses should be rooted in contextual theological approaches in order to take into consideration the lived experiences of different people in different contexts. It underscores the critical role of context in the work of pastoral theology's task of helping faith communities to adorn their cloth of caring, healing, and transforming society (Du Plessis 2021:1; Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern 1999:19).

In Africa, these current developments in pastoral care sit well with the importance of community life. Stinton (2012:13) observes that theological formulation in Africa should be placed within the context of community since community is central to daily lived experiences of Africans. It implies that current movement in pastoral care finds affinity in the African culture that leans towards communal life (Grobbelaar 2012:41). The next section gives further attention to communal care through a relational view of the Trinity.

A relational view of the Trinity in the African context

Christian doctrines are truths about God that are formulated with scripture as their chief source. They are not just speculative ideas that are held, neither are doctrines ends in themselves but are aimed at having practical implications for faith praxis and Christian spirituality in the faith community (Marmion and

Nieuwenhove 2011:12). The doctrine of the Trinity has radical implications for the daily living of Christians (LaCugna 1991:1). That is, the Trinity should inform our faith praxis and Christian spirituality. It could be argued that the Trinity does not only teach about the inner life of God. In this paper, a relational view of the Trinity is conceptualised as a communion of mutual love, equality, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness observed among God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (LaCugna 1991:391; Tanner 2010:207; Venter 2012:1). A relational view of the Trinity, in the thoughts of Catherine LaCugna, is 'the primacy of communion among equals, not the primacy of one over another' (1991:391). As a result, adherence to the doctrine of the Trinity should inform the mode of being and way of living in faith communities in Africa.

A relational view of the Trinity is considered the source of the revival and renaissance in trinitarian theological discourse (Kärkkäinen 2017:xvi). The motivation for using the Trinity is the fact the doctrine of the Trinity is widely held by faith communities in Africa. In the opinion of Sakupapa (2019:2), the Trinity is 'ecumenical discourse'. The relational notion of the Trinity has gained wider attention in African theological discourse also due to its emphasis on community life, and the fact that it is connected to the African communitarian ethos (Sakupapa 2019:3). The social analogy of the Trinity connects with themes of African theologians due to the African communitarian ethos. Consequently, several African theologians (Bitrus 2017; Mwoleka 1975; Oduyoye 2009; Ogbonnaya 1998; Sakupapa 2019) discuss the Trinity in relation to community life.

For instance, Mwoleka (1975:204) believes that the Trinity is not an abstract concept or a puzzle to be fixed but a model for community. The communion observed in the three divine persons points to life sharing together. Similarly, Oduyoye (2009:141–145) submits that a relational understanding of the Trinity provides an egalitarian notion for all sexes to live together. She argues further that baptism in the name of the Trinity signifies participation of life in the Trinity. This is consistent with earlier work of LaCugna that the trinitarian life is also the Christian life. This participation points to the communion of fellowship in the Trinity, which is a foundation for caring for another. Commenting on the African notion of the relational view of the Trinity, Ogbonnaya (1998:89) uses the term 'Divine Communalism' to advance the argument that three divine

persons, although distinct in their personality and functions, are one. In spite of the fact that Conradie and Sakupapa (2018:46) raise suspicions about Ogbonnaya's construction of the African community of gods and the trinitarian communion, it could be argued that Ogbonnaya's notion is consistent with the relational motif of the Trinity and African communitarian ethos.

Bitrus (2017:187) made another important contribution of a relational notion of the Trinity to faith praxis and socio-political and economic systems in Africa. According to this, a relational understanding of the Trinity opposes patriarchal dominion, which is typical of African community life, and an authentic African communal life is the trinitarian life. This is in agreement with the observation of LaCugna's (1991:338) that the Trinity presents a relational concept in which there is no subordination between the Father and the Son or the Spirit. It is a kind of relationship of equality, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness that is required for communal care (LaCugna 1991:391; Oduyoye 2009:141; Tanner 2010:207). This relationality observed in the triune God offers no place for dominion and hierarchy, which could hinder the relationality that is needed for care by the whole community in African societies.

In effect, a relational view of the Trinity in African theological thought is consistent with Western ideas on a relational view of the Trinity by key scholars such as Jürgen Moltmann, John Zizioulas, Catherine LaCugna, and Miroslav Volf. These theologians advocate that the notion of relationality, communion, and mutuality in the triune God should form the basis of human communities. The implication is that effective communal pastoral care could benefit from a relational paradigm of the Trinity. According to LaCugna (1991:391),

> the primacy of communion among equals, not the primacy of one over another, is the hallmark of the reign of the God of Jesus Christ.

In the same vein, Moltmann also uses the concept of 'Imago Trinitas' to drum home his relational view of the Trinity. He argued that since human beings are created in God's image, they are expected to live out that image on earth (1985:241). Similarly, Volf (1998:4) argues that ecclesial communion should reflect the trinitarian communion and advocates for a 'non-hierarchical but

truly communal ecclesiology based on a non-hierarchical doctrine of the Trinity'.

The implication is that faith praxis and Christian spirituality should imitate the trinitarian relationship. That is, a relational notion of the Trinity could inform and reform a communal pastoral care in Africa.

A relational trinitarian paradigm of pastoral care in Africa

It could be argued that the current focus of pastoral care leans towards communal care and sits well with a relational view of the Trinity. This focus on pastoral care that aims at demonstrating compassion and reaching out to each other as well as giving voices to the marginalised seeks to transform the whole community. The trinitarian nature of God, according to Bevans (2018:34), emanates from the 'relatedness and giftedness' of the three distinct persons to each other. This connectedness and serving one another depict the traces that should reflect in faith communities as the whole community seeks to care for one another. Making reference to David Cunningham's notion of 'Trinitarian practice', Bevans (2018:43) observed that theological reflections should be grounded in the notion that the Christian faith is a trinitarian faith since it seeks to invite faith communities into the trinitarian mission of the Christian God in the world. As a result, Mwoleka (cited in Bevans 2018:43) concludes that the trinitarian faith is more about 'imitating' the trinitarian God and extending the divine mission. This calls for a pastoral ministry that challenges faith communities to participate in the Trinity and extend it to the larger society.

The notion of relationality as a central theme in the Trinity is also a key concept in pastoral care. This is because the relational dynamic of the context in which pastoral care takes places has attracted theological reflection (Dillen 2011:204). Consequently, the importance of the topic of this study to reflect on a pastoral response from the paradigm of a relational view of the Trinity cannot be overemphasised. Reflecting on the current developments in pastoral care from the paradigm of relationality, which is the central theme of the Trinity, certain key elements are worth discussing. As Pembroke puts it

> since the relational element is at the very centre of pastoral work, it seemed to me that the doctrine of the Trinity must

> have the potential to make a major contribution to pastoral theory and practice. (2006:7)

Firstly, proponents of a relational view of the Trinity opine that there is a 'community' in God. God exists in relationship as the Father, Son, and Spirit. That is, the belief is that there is communion and relationship in the Trinity (Ogbonya 1998:89). Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God – the image of the Trinity – and called to share in this communion (Oduyoye 2009:143). Since human beings are created in the image of God, it also implies that we are created for communion with God, others, and the entire creation (Medley 2002:2). Marmion and Nieuwenhove (2011:2) observed that sharing in the dynamics of the triune God has important, far-reaching, practical 'implications for anthropology, ecclesiology, and society'. The community of believers are invited to participate in this community of mutual love and fellowship that exist in the triune God. Smit (2015:11) commenting on Moltman gave a vivid summary of the New Testament testimony as 'the great love story of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' in which the whole creation and humankind are all together. The participation in this communion is a strong foundation for communal pastoral care.

In the same vein, Migliore (2004:68) opined that God's love, presented originally through God as the Father, is humanly enacted in this world by the Son and becomes vital and present until today through the Spirit. The Father adopts us into the covenant community through the redemptive work of the Son and our lives in that community are empowered through the indwelling of the Spirit. According to Smit (2015:10), at the individual level, God's children are called individually and, at the group level, are called collectively to participate in the life of the Trinity. The faith community becomes the family of God, which is expected on one hand to participate in the life of the Trinity and on the other hand to extend the grace and the love of the Trinity to the world through caring activities. This is what Volf (1998:417) opined is the 'social program' of the Trinity, where the self-giving love of the divine Trinity is expected to constitute faith praxis and Christian spirituality. The faith community is called to share in this self-giving love. Donovan (2000:357) observes that openness to participate in the love of God and the extension of love to all human beings is the basic predisposition for pastoral theology. This

is because pastoral care has its root in the openness of one's life to God as well as the openness to God's acts in the life of others.

In the paradigm of care by the whole community to the whole community, the notion of mutuality observed in the Trinity could make a significant contribution. The notion of mutuality is key in the Trinity. Life in this community should be built upon the notion of primacy of equals and not primacy of one over the other (LaCugna 1991; Mwoleka 1975:204; Oduyoye 2009:143; Sakupapa 2019:5). Mutuality implies the possibility of coming to a balance of power, where both parties have an influence on each other and whereby each partner has the possibility to express his or her own opinion, to give to the other and to receive from the other (Dillen 2011:205; Scheib 2002:34).

In addition, the caregiving and pastoral ministry of faith communities should aim at transforming the faith community to function in line with trinitarian ecclesiology. Volf (1998:191) asserts that ecclesial communion should reflect the trinitarian communion. This challenges faith communities to continually explore and pursue parallels of trinitarian communion for the ecclesial communion (Bitrus 2017:187; Mwoleka 1975:204; Scheib 2002:29). Consequently, the mode of being of faith communities as well as their structures should reflect the relationality in the triune God. That is, pastoral care should be fashioned to be parallel to the relationship of equality, love, and mutual fellowship. When relationships become truly mutual, it is more likely to promote the atmosphere required for a communal pastoral care. Tanner (2010:370) argues that in the Trinity all forms of hierarchical structures in relationships are replaced with mutuality and reciprocity, which affirms the dignity of all individuals. This notion of affirmation of the dignity of all could create a safe space for mutual care for one another. Participation in the Trinity results in deconstruction and reconstruction of ecclesial structures that remove all elements of barriers, subordination, abuse of power (Kärkkäinen 2007:185).

Secondly, the relationship of love and fellowship that exists in the Trinity points to communal care (Scheib 2002:31). It implies that all members should experience that love and fellowship that create a safe environment for all. The fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is extended to human beings. It is also an invitation of all into fellowship, which creates a space for all – men,

women, children, rich, and poor – to come into friendship with God and among themselves (Kärkkäinen 2007:106-107; Oduyoye 2009). The notion of friendship as an element of pastoral care has received some criticism. It is believed that the notion of friendship could be romanticised such that the boundaries as well as the power balance in pastoral relationships are crossed (Dillen 2011:206; Dillen 2017:3). However, it is argued that friendship emphasises mutual fellowship and an adequate balance of power, where the dignity and the contributions of all members in the pastoral relationship are appreciated (Dillen 2017:3). Commenting on the notion of friendship, Kotze and Noeth (2019:1) assert that this kind of friendship creates both a private and a public space where Christians live in freedom and in a non-hierarchical way. This understanding provides the basis for a community in which all human beings strive to extend care to each other. This is important for the way Christians live since there is no hierarchy among friends; it calls for an atmosphere of love, care, and the upholding of the dignity of all human beings because we are all created in the image of God.

According to Moltmann, in the Trinity 'each Person receives the fullness of eternal life from the other' (1981:173–174). In other words, in the notion of communal care, each member receives life through the caring nature of the triune God in the other. This supports the concept of *uBuntu* in the African context, where members of the community assent to the idea that one exists because of the other, and that one's life is meaningful through the relationship that is formed with the other. The relational space of love, compassion, and care in faith communities serves as a protective layer for all its members.

Again, the idea that pastoral care should rally the faith community to carry out this ministry of caregiving aimed at the transformation of society is in line with the trinitarian paradigm of pastoral response. It is the extension of the Trinity to larger society. This is what Volf opined about the Trinity as a 'social program'. This social programme involves the faith community's effort to demonstrate trinitarian relations and strive to build structures that are parallel with trinitarian relations. Commenting on Moltmann's notion of trinitarian community, Kärkkäinen (2007:113; 2017:203) observed that all forms of the notion of hierarchy and dominion are foreign to the nature of the triune God. In the Trinity, God as the father does not imply exercising power over but rather being a loving parent. Using concepts like fatherly and motherly parent,

Moltmann proposed a community that is built on trinitarian ideas, in which there is an equal fellowship of men and women, children and adults, as well as the rich and the poor (Oduyoye 2009:89).

The context of Africa is inundated with community and cultural structures, which if mainly hierarchical could hinder communal pastoral care. McDougall (2005:139) supports this opinion by indicating that our communities should be structured based on egalitarianism as explained in the concept of 'imago trinitatis'. According to Matei (2004:213) the antidote to this societal problem of abuse of power and dehumanisation of the marginalised is to hold a trinitarian view of God in which we promote a 'community of equals, vulnerable and open to the human suffering, who experiences this suffering in himself'. Pastoral responses informed by a relational view of the Trinity should strive for creating relational spaces for communal care.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the trinitarian paradigm of pastoral care is consistent with Miller-McLemore's notion of 'pastoral care in the living web'. This concept espoused that pastoral care should respond to the whole community. That is, it examines and responds to the social, political, and cultural structures and practices that treat people in relation to their gender, race, status, and physical ability (Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern 1999:80). The living web is the space that could promote oppression and injustice if not informed by a triune God. The living web in a relational paradigm of the Trinity is a space of interconnectedness, mutuality, and care for each other and of the whole community. The living web in the Trinity becomes a relational space of life giving and life flourishing together, that is, the whole community flourishing. According to Miller-McLemore, pastoral care in the living web of life seeks to address injustice and promotes acts of liberation, resistance, nurturance, and empowerment in public spaces. The focus on the living web as a public space implies a shift from pastoral care's focus from care of individuals to communal care, which is contextually relevant.

The notion of pastoral care in the living web is communal in nature. As a result, pastoral care in the living web of Africa should be rooted in the trinitarian paradigm in order to rally faith communities to carry out a transformative pastoral ministry that promotes a living web of justice and compassion for each other in faith communities and in the public space.

To this end, the location of pastoral care as an integral part of the church's ministry in Africa is in line with current trends in pastoral care (Magezi 2016; Scheib 2002; Van Arkel 2000) where care is provided from the perspective of the Christian faith and spirituality within the context of faith communities (Magezi 2019:9). For pastoral care to be integrated into ministry praxis implies care that is rooted in the mode of being and praxis of faith communities. This calls for theological resources that emanate from the being of the church. There is a need for an ecclesiology that is relational and finds its expression in the spaces created in the Trinity and extended to all creation. This is the motivation for utilising the resources of a relational view of the Trinity to inform and reform a pastoral response in Africa.

Conclusions

The paper relates that pastoral care in Africa has gone through series of changes and been adorned by many colours since the entry of Christian mission to the continent. It began with Western missionary ideologies. Pastoral care began as a theological discipline but later became interdisciplinary, drawing from psychology, anthropology, and others . With the emergence of African theologies, several changes continue to take place in the field of pastoral theology due to the complex realities of African lived experiences. Although pastoral care began primarily as care for individual needs by an ordained or trained individual, current discourse has shifted from individualisation of care to communal care – care of the whole community by the whole community. The article opines that current discourse on pastoral care as communal care is trinitarian. The concept of care of the community by the whole community finds its expression in the African communitarian ethos – *uBuntu*. It is consistent with a relational view of the Trinity, which emphasises love, connectedness, mutuality, and reaching out to each other in a relational space that is life-sharing and life-flourishing. The paper concludes that a relational view of the Trinity provides a stronger foundation for a contemporary, context-specific, communal pastoral care in Africa.

It is, therefore, recommended that pastoral care practitioners on the continent pursue practical measures aimed at empowering the whole community to be actively involved in the care of the community. Finally, there is need for further

reflections and research on the importance of trinitarian-informed pastoral approaches in specific contexts in Africa.

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Assessing Women's Leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda: Challenges and Opportunities for Governance

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Abstract

This paper assesses the challenges and opportunities for woman leadership within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, specifically in governance roles. Drawing upon a document analysis and survey, the study examines the barriers faced by women leaders within the presbyterian church in attaining to leadership positions and the opportunities available for their advancement. It discusses two positions about the correct roles for females in church leadership and rejects the complementarian position, which believes that women should not be allowed to participate in leadership positions initially reserved for males. This study supports the egalitarian position, which asserts that men and women should share equally in church leadership. Though presbyterian women face various challenges, like the low number of women with theological degrees and their cultural context, they are now in different church leadership positions. The Presbyterian Church in Rwanda has a good number of opportunities available to women, including access to theological training, eldership, and deaconship. This study shows that empowering women within the church not only benefits the individual women themselves but also enriches the entire faith community and contributes to the church's mission of serving the broader society. The study recommends that the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda should continue to expand access to theological education for women by offering scholarship support for their studies, implementing policies and practices that promote

gender equality within its governance, and creating opportunities for women leaders to collaborate and network with one another, as well as with women leaders from other denominations and organisations.

Introduction

The issue of woman leadership in the church is not new. According to Paul's letters to the Corinthians, early Christian churches struggled to discern God's plan for the correct roles of female believers in church ministry and leadership. Believers spent much time wondering if God wants men and women to have distinct roles in the church or if men and women should share equally in church leadership. For many centuries, believers and scholars debated incessantly between two views: complementarianism, which states that women should not be allowed to participate in ministry or leadership positions initially reserved for males, and egalitarianism, which states that men and women are equal and should be accorded the same opportunities for ministry positions and leadership without regard to gender. Worldwide, churches lack a common understanding about women's inclusion in church leadership (Sumner 2007:250–251). This confusion motivated the researcher to conduct this study in order to contribute to the existing literature.

The Presbyterian Church in Rwanda was started by Protestant missionaries from Germany in 1907 (Twagirayesu and Van Butselaar 1982:25–36). Their first stations included Zinga in Eastern Province, opened on 3 August 1907, Kirinda, opened on 28 August 1907, Rubengera in Western Province, opened in 1909, and Remera in Southern Province, opened in August 1912 (Nsengimana 2023:4–5). Unfortunately, the German missionaries due to the left due to the First World War. They were replaced by the Belgian Society for Protestant Mission in Congo (Nsengimana 2023:5). Given that that society did not have enough church workers, it decided to rely on missionaries from other Western countries including the Netherlands and Switzerland who were from a Reformed background. In 1959, the Protestant mission in Rwanda became an independent church and received a legal recognition on 23 August 1960. The church adopted the Presbyterian polity of church governance, which accepts equality in Christ (Nsengimana 2023:5; Twagirayesu and Van Butselaar 1982:25–36).

Politically, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda accepts rules about gender equity. From the top level, the structure of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda accepts the equality of men and women in Christ. Starting with the general synod, when the moderator is male, the vice-moderator must be female, and vice versa. The general synod includes persons of both sexes. The church is organised into seven presbyteries which coordinate all parishes located within their jurisdictions. From the presbytery level to the grassroots of the church, men and women have an equal right to serve as pastors, elders, and deacons.

Theologically, women's inclusion in church leadership takes into account the cultural and societal context of Rwanda. Presbyterian church governance recognises the contribution of women within Rwandan society and their importance within the church as part of holistic ministry and witness. Presbyterian theology emphasises the importance of recognising the spiritual gifts and callings of all members (Smith and Kemeny 2019:1–2). This theological perspective leads to an openness to women serving in leadership roles based on their gifts.

In Africa, the ordination of women did not come quickly with the beginning of the missionary period. Kariuki (2024:2), referencing Mbiti, said that

> the relationship between Christianity and culture has remained complex. The mainline churches were influenced by the traditions, wisdom, art, and way of life of worship that the Africans practiced before the advent of Christianity.

In Rwanda, the role of women in the presbyterian church has evolved over the years.

> The Presbyterian Church was the first denomination in Rwanda to embrace women's ordination in 1976. And women Pastors are equally treated as men in the ministry. However, the number of women pastors is still insignificant. It was observed during the centenary celebration in 2007 that ordained women in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda accounted just about twelve percent. (Mukamakuza 2009:51)

Women have equal access with men to education and administration. During the election period, the general synod requests that each parish prioritise gender equality. In cases where there are few candidates, preference is given to women to ensure that they also progress alongside their male counterparts.

However, despite these advances and efforts by the general synod to prioritise gender equality, societal norms and patriarchal cultural practices continue to hinder women from fully realising their leadership potential within the church. Though the structural policies advocate for the inclusivity of women in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, cultural resistance often undermines these efforts, creating a gap between policy and practice. Women face many challenges including limited representation in the leadership and governance within the church. Little has been published about the specific challenges and opportunities faced by women in church leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. This paper assesses the evolving role of women in leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, exploring both the challenges and opportunities for creating a more inclusive governance structure.

In so doing, this paper asks: What initiatives and strategies have been implemented by the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda to promote gender equality and women's leadership in governance? What institutional barriers and challenges exist within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda that hinder women's participation in governance roles? And what opportunities for leadership development are available to women within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda? This paper employs both feminist theory and organisational theory to assess women's leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory began as a prominent framework for analysing gender dynamics, power structures, and social inequalities (Tong 2009). This perspective synthesises key concepts within feminist theory, examining its historical development, theoretical underpinnings, and contributions to various disciplines. Based on a range of scholarly literature, this study explores foundational feminist concepts such as patriarchy, social structure, theological training, and cultural context (Collins 2000). Additionally, this review discusses

recent developments and debates within feminist theory, including postcolonial feminism and transnational feminism. This study aims to deepen understanding of feminist theory and its implications for the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda.

According to Yale University (2020), feminist theory focuses on gender equality and the representation of women in all spheres of society, including religious organisations. Feminist theory has a good number of pioneers like Naomi Weisstein, who was a feminist psychologist, and Lawrence Kohlberg, who deepened the research on boys and young men, and later compared men and women on their levels of moral development.

Feminist epistemologies – feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory, and feminist postmodernism – focus on the question of who can know, or who is the knower (Elizabeth 2014:50–54). Each epistemology suggests its own approach to investigation. Feminist empiricists conduct what most people understand as 'science' (Campbell and Wasco 2000:774–777). Feminist standpoint theorists point out how traditional approaches to science fail to acknowledge the influence of the context and the perspective of the 'knower' (Naples 2008:11–13). They argue that women's experiences have not been adequately represented by mainstream research because they have been framed within, and interpreted by, dominant (i.e. men's) conceptual categories. That is, women's experiences have been understood in concepts and language largely developed by educated white men (Wigginton and Lafrance 2019). Feminist theory provides a powerful framework for analysing the challenges and opportunities faced by women leaders within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda regarding governance roles.

Organisational Theory

Organisational theory is the sociological study of formal social organisations, such as businesses and bureaucracies, and their relationship with the environment(s) in which they operate. In *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities* (4th ed.), W. Richard Scott examines organizational theory through three primary perspectives. First, the rational systems view defines organizations as collectivities oriented toward specific goals, characterized by highly formalized social structures. Second, the natural

systems perspective sees organizations as collectivities where participants share a common interest in the system's survival and engage in informally structured collective activities. Third, the open systems approach conceptualizes organizations as interdependent flows and activities involving shifting coalitions of participants embedded in broader material-resource and institutional environments (pp. 27-28).

Morgan (2006:22) argues that organisational theory is the study of the structure, functioning, and performance of organisations and the behaviour of groups and individuals within them. Organisational theory analyses the organisational structures of institutions and their barriers, leadership programmes, and change management.

With regard to this research on women's leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, organisational theory allows us to identify structural and institutional factors that shape women's opportunities for governance roles within the denomination. It provides valuable insights into the structural and institutional factors that influence women's leadership within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. Using organisational theory, this study examines the governance structures, policies, and practices within the church that either facilitate or inhibit women's participation in leadership roles. It demonstrates that, by promoting gender equality and inclusivity, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda can create a more equitable and effective leadership environment.

Conceptual Framework

Throughout this paper, the term 'leadership' is used in the context of gender issues. 'Leadership' refers to holding an official position within the church, such as that of pastor, elder, or deacon. These positions usually involve some type of formal recognition or ordination. Instead of using the term 'gender', this paper uses the terms 'male' or 'men' and 'female' or 'women' in their biological sense. Particularly important for this paper are the concepts of complementarianism and egalitarianism.

Complementarianism

Complementarianism generally holds that, while God equally values both men and women, certain church leadership positions are restricted exclusively to

men. Complementarianism argues that men are to be leaders in the family and in the church. Complementarians cite key Bible verses that fall into three general categories: verses that refer to male headship, verses that seem to prohibit female church leadership, and verses that analogise church leadership to the family structure (Pagan 2019:17). Key verses for the complementarian concept include 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (KJV)

> Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence

and 1 Corinthians 14:34–40:

> Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.

Complementarianism also appeals to 1 Timothy 3:1–7 about the election of elders:

> If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive.

Complementarianism asserts 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–40 prohibited female leadership in the church. It also asserts that use of masculine pronouns in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 to refer to elders excludes women from church leadership positions. Finally, they also note how Paul compares church leadership to the family structure, a structure in which men are to lead.

Based on these verses, complementarians argue that women can hold no position of authority over men in the church. Women cannot hold official offices in the church, and may not publicly preach when males are present (Pagan 2019:15–16).

Egalitarianism

Egalitarianism asserts that men and women are equal in the family and the church. Domestically, husband and wife submit to one another. In the church, both men and women can take up leadership positions. Female members can be ordained as pastors, elders, and deacons. They can also be senior pastors. Key verses relied upon by egalitarianism include Galatians 3:27–28, Ephesians 5:21, Genesis 1:27, and verses that seem to indicate that women held leadership positions in the New Testament church (Pagan 2019:17).

Egalitarians argue that there are a good number of women who served the church in a leadership capacity and/or in prominent roles. Among these are Deborah (Judges 16:3), Esther (Esther 8:3–12), Phoebe (Romans 16:1), Junia (Romans 16:7), and Priscilla (Romans 16:3). Passages such as 1 Corinthians 11:2–11 do not disapprove of women praying and prophesying in public; rather they assume that women will pray and prophesy in the church. Egalitarians surmise that these examples from scripture provide evidence of the appropriateness of women to various positions in church leadership in the New Testament church (Pagan 2019:13–14).

Egalitarianism believes that there are no distinct gender roles in either the church or the family. Their analysis leads them to conclude that in Paul's instructions to the churches there is no universal prohibition against women serving in church leader positions. Egalitarians affirm that church leadership positions, whether held by males or females, should be based on a person's spiritual gifts and calling, not based on gender. They rely on key verses such as

Galatians 3:26–29 which asserts that there is no lasting distinction between men and women:

> For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

According to this passage, there is no differentiation in humanity's destiny on the basis of gender, race, or status. Women, as well as gentiles and slaves, have a shared destiny of authority and rule. The restrictions placed on females in church leadership are not God's ultimate plan for reconciliation of all people (Pagan 2019:29). However, most evangelical egalitarians seek to distance themselves from the radical feminist position that denies any gender distinction. They also seek to distance themselves from the secular philosophies of the feminist movement.

Theological Considerations

A theological reflection on the topic of assessing women's leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda must take into account the biblical perspective on gender equality, the role of women in ministry, and the potential challenges and opportunities for governance.

Genesis 1:27 emphasises the equal dignity of male and female as both are created in the image of God. This equality provides the theological foundation for affirming women's leadership within the church and calls for mutual partnership in ministry. Luke 10:38–42 and John 4:1–42 highlight the inclusion of women by Jesus Christ himself. The gospels demonstrate that Jesus Christ elevated women to positions of importance and entrusted them with proper roles in his ministry. This is shown by the conversations he had with them, the respect he demonstrated, and the role they played during his ministry.

The New Testament provides a good number of women who contributed a lot to the growth of the early church. Priscilla (Acts 18:2), Phoebe (Romans 16:1-

2), and Junia (Romans 16:7) are good examples to illustrate the role of women in church leadership today. 1 Corinthians 12:7 indicates that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts to all believers – both men and women – for the common good. It is therefore necessary to accept that women are also recipients of these gifts and of God's call within the church.

In texts such as Galatians 3:26–29, the apostle Paul sought to emphasise the unity of all believers and the lack of distinctions among them. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul was laying the groundwork for the church, through the ages, to move from the reality he observed with his natural eyes to the reality he undoubtedly was given the grace by God to observe through his spiritual eyes. To adequately assess God's plan for women in church leadership, we must view God's word as an expression of his will, not only for the time in which it was written and delivered but for all time. His clear desire is that his people would live in communities where there are not distinctions between male and female (Galatians 3:29). Women, as well as men, should be able to participate in church leadership positions. Although there are some challenges to the inclusion of women in church decision making, this study shows that women have played a significant role in the church's history.

In the United States, women have been active in various areas of ministry and leadership. Since 1956, when the Presbyterian Church in the USA ordained its first woman minister, the number of women serving as ministers has increased significantly (Harrison 2020:2). The leadership positions in which women have served have also expanded. Women have been elected to serve on various committees and boards within the church, and have been elected to serve as moderator of the general assembly. They have served as missionaries, educators, and pastors. Many women have also been involved in social justice and advocacy work, including the fight for equal rights for women and minorities. Women have played a crucial role in the church's history, and their involvement in ministry and leadership continues to expand (Hunter 2016:1–2).

Female participation in church leadership in European churches has increased gradually in the past several decades. In some Protestant churches like the Church of England and the Lutheran church, women are well-respected and play an essential role because they are given space. They have been ordained

as priests and bishops, and they serve the church very efficiently (Lutheran World Federation 2022:11). This trend reflects a broader shift in European churches towards recognising the contributions and gifts that women bring to ministry and leadership roles (Dijkhuizen 2022:266–267). Though many European countries have policies valuing gender equality in church leadership, some conservative denominations do not understand the inclusion of women in church leadership. Fortunately, there is ongoing dialogue and advocacy for change. Nowadays, many church leaders and scholars understand well the importance of including women in church leadership (Peterson 2019:289–291).

The Asian continent is another context for female participation in church leadership. As argued by Kim (2023:1-2), Asian churches are increasingly promoting gender equality and inclusivity. In countries such as the Philippines and South Korea, women have assumed prominent roles in various church ministries, including pastoral leadership, teaching roles, and administrative positions. This improvement towards greater inclusion has been motivated by theological reinterpretations and a commitment to gender justice within the church. However, like in European churches, women in Asia face the challenges of traditional views on gender roles and of institutional resistance (Yih 2023:2–3).

Despite a patriarchal tradition, Africa has done its best to include women in church leadership. This is confirmed by the Anglican Church of South Africa (2016) which asserts that, in many African nations, Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches have increased the presence of female church leaders, including as pastors and bishops. However, African women face the essential challenge of lacking theological education and of traditional interpretations of scripture in the African cultural context (Gahamanyi and Zacharia 2023:327). To address these challenges, churches in Africa can offer scholarships and leadership training to women in order to promote equality within church structures. Nevertheless, the trend towards recognising the benefits of women in church leadership in Africa is evolving (Oyewole 2022).

In sub-Saharan Africa, female participation in church leadership has experienced notable growth in recent years, though it still faces numerous obstacles. There has been a gradual shift towards embracing gender equality

in church leadership. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa elected its first female bishop in 2016 (Anglican Church of South Africa 2016). The United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe has taken steps to ordain more female pastors and integrate them into various leadership roles (United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe 2023:1-2). Some churches excel at providing scholarships and leadership training to women in theology.

In East Africa, female participation in church leadership is an evolving area with significant potential for growth and impact. In Kenya, the Anglican Church is ordaining more females as priests. In Tanzania, the Lutheran Church emphasises gender equality by ordaining more female pastors and promoting their inclusion in decision-making bodies. This goes with the rise of women in religious institutions (Anglican Church in Kenya 2023; Lutheran Church in Tanzania 2024).

The government of Rwanda has very good policies on gender equality. It has been supportive of gender equality initiatives, which has pushed or inspired churches to greater understanding of the importance of including women in leadership structures. There is a growing number of women taking on leadership roles such as pastors, deacons, and elders. Despite these advancements, challenges remain, including cultural perceptions and limited access to theological education for women. Nevertheless, the church has decided to send more females to theological institutions at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. There is a certain number of women in the church leadership (Mukamurera and Twagirimana 2019:151).

A Survey of Women's Leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda

For this study, 32 pastors and theological students, all of whom are members of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, were surveyed. Twenty-five persons (or 78%) responded. The survey included six closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. All participants received informed consent which explained the purpose of the survey, the nature of the questions, and the time it may consume. Participants were assured of the voluntary nature of their participation and of their freedom to withdraw from the survey at any time

without any repercussions. To ensure confidentiality, all data has been anonymised.

Sex of the Respondents

Sex of respondents	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Male	17	68%
Female	8	32%
Total	25	100%

The distribution of respondents based on gender reveals that 68% of the respondents were male, while 32% were female. This reflects the reality of the field where men often outnumber women almost in all positions of authority within the church (Dill et al. 2021:120) As Ng, Chin, and Jin (2020:2–3) argue, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles within many denominations.

Leadership Roles within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda

Leadership Roles within the Presbyterian Church	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Pastors	14	56%
Theology Students	11	44%
Total	25	100%

The second question of the survey was about the leadership role of respondents within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. More than half of the respondents identified themselves as pastors, indicating a significant representation of clergy members in the survey sample (56% of respondents). This finding shows that the study was concerned with the hierarchical structure of the church where pastors hold prominent leadership positions and play a central role in guiding congregations (Dill et al.2021:121–122).

The presence of theology students also indicates the involvement of individuals in training for future leadership roles within the church. Forty-four percent of respondents identified themselves as theology students. Their presence in the survey accredits the survey because they form a group of individuals engaged in theological education and training for future leadership roles within the church (Hartman and Connolly 2020:14).

Understanding of Respondents on Inclusion of Women in Church Leadership

Believe that women's inclusion contributes to church health	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Yes	25	100%
No	0	0%
Total	25	100%

The respondents were asked to give their opinion on whether the inclusion of women in leadership roles contributes to the overall health of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. The data revealed unanimous agreement among respondents, 100% expressing belief in the positive contribution of women's inclusion to the overall health of the Presbyterian Church. This finding aligns with Ng, Chin, and Jin (2020) who assert that recognition of the value and importance of gender diversity in church leadership and decision-making processes contributes to vibrant growth. The reality of the Presbyterian Church

in Rwanda shows that the inclusion of women in church leadership positions contributes to the health of the church because both men and women are gifted for the benefit of the church and community. Working together absolutely enhances organisational effectiveness and fosters a sense of belonging among members (Peterson 2019:287–288). This is confirmed by the absence of respondents expressing a contrary belief. The respondents, all of whom are from the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, appreciate what their church is doing for gender diversity and inclusion. However, although the church has made progress in respecting gender equality, there is no shortage of challenges, as the following table indicates.

Main Challenges Women Leaders Encounter Regarding Church Governance

Main challenges encountered by women	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Low number of women with theological degrees	10	40%
Cultural context	6	24%
Patriarchal traditions	5	20%
Structure of the church	4	16%
Total	25	100%

As it is shown on this table, the main challenge women leaders encounter regarding church governance within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda is the low number of women with theological degrees. Forty percent of respondents affirmed that the low number of women with theological degrees is the persistent barrier to women in church leadership. This lack of education limits their access to leadership roles and to opportunities for advancement (Peterson 2019:287).

Patriarchal traditions and cultural challenges were identified by 20% and 24% of respondents respectively. These may relate to the Rwandan culture which perpetuates gender inequalities and influences the distribution of power within the church and within local government. The structure of the church was also cited as a challenge by 16% of respondents, who argued that institutional structure may contribute to the marginalisation of women in leadership positions. Some churches limit women's participation in the leadership process. Fortunately, Presbyterian women have a big number of opportunities that help them access various leadership positions as is shown on the following table.

Opportunities Available to Women Leaders

Opportunities for women leaders	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Access to theological training	17	68%
Eldership and deaconship	6	24%
Others (not specified)	2	8%
Total	25	100%

This table on opportunities available for women leaders within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda shows that the church has several avenues through which women can engage in leadership roles. The first one is access to theological training. A total of 68% of respondents argued that Presbyterian women have enough space within the theological institutions. Educational empowerment and equipping women with knowledge and skills is very important for effective leadership within religious contexts. Secondly, women in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda may become elders and deacons. Twenty-four percent of respondents affirmed that women have the opportunity to serve in formal leadership positions within the church hierarchy. Despite a long list of challenges, Presbyterian women are trained

and are playing their role within the church without any discrimination because the church believes that men and women are created equal before God. Therefore, they must play their role in the communities.

As Nkeshimana (2019) argues, Presbyterian women in Rwanda have the opportunity to serve as ordained pastors, providing pastoral care, preaching, teaching, and offering spiritual leadership within a congregation. They can participate in governance structures and decision-making processes within local congregations and presbyteries. Women can lead various initiatives of the church that engage with the wider community, promoting reconciliation, peace-building, and social justice. A subset of respondents (8%) specified other opportunities without providing further details. Further research is needed to explore these unspecified opportunities and their implications for women's leadership development within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. Having identified challenges and opportunities, respondents were asked to offer suggestions to further promote women's leadership within the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda.

Suggestions to Further Promote Women's Leadership

Suggestions to further promote women's leadership	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Yes	22	88%
No	3	12%
Total	25	100%

The table above shows that 88% of respondents were willing to give their suggestions while 12% refused. Further research is required to identify the reasons why respondents were unwilling to give their suggestions. One possible reason is that the following question was open-ended, requiring that the respondents express their own ideas. This may have intimidated some respondents.

Specific suggestions to promote women's leadership

Specific suggestions	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Increase the number of women with theological degrees	10	40%
Mobilise women to participate in leadership	5	20%
Provide equal scholarships for theological training	4	16%
Train women training on church ministry	2	8%
Organise seminars and debates on women's contribution to church development	1	4%
Promote gender equality	1	4%
No answer	2	8%
Total	25	100%

Forty percent of respondents argued that increasing the number of women with theological degrees would promote women's participation in church leadership. Twenty percent proposed to mobilise women to participate in leadership. They highlighted the need for education and empowerment to encourage women's active involvement in leadership roles. Sixteen percent argued that the Presbyterian Church should provide equal scholarships for theological training. Two other respondents, who represent 8% of respondents, suggested training women on church ministry. They asserted that equipping women with the necessary skills and knowledge for ministry

roles is important for promoting their leadership. One respondent, who represents 4% of respondents, suggested that the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda should organise seminars and debates on women's contribution to church development. The church should also promote gender equality by ensuring fairness and equal opportunities for both genders within the church. Two respondents, 8% of respondents, did not provide an answer, which may suggest a lack of opinion, knowledge, or interest in the topic.

The study indicates that the best way to promote women's leadership in the church is to increase the number of women with theological degrees. An important way to promote women in leadership is to provide equal scholarships, include women in decision making, and train women on church ministry. In so doing, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda will have lessons to teach other denominations about women's inclusion in church leadership.

Conclusion

This assessment of women's leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda discussed two views on the proper role of females in church ministry and leadership. It rejected the complementarian position, which believes that women should not be allowed to participate in leadership positions initially reserved for males. In so doing, this study affirmed the egalitarian position, which asserts that men and women should share equally the church leadership. The study explored the biblical perspective on and historical development of the inclusion of women in church leadership. It focused on the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for women in church leadership.

Though traditional patriarchal structures, cultural norms, and the low representation of women in leadership positions have historically limited women's participation in leadership, there are clear evidence of progress and a growing recognition of the valuable contributions that women can make to church governance. The church's efforts to increase access to theological education for women and to promote their inclusion in decision-making roles are positive steps toward achieving gender equity. The church should provide equal scholarships and include women in decision making. The study showed that empowering women within the church not only benefits the individual

women themselves but also enriches the entire faith community and contributes to the church's mission of serving the broader society. It is reasonable for the church to promote gender equity at all levels of governance.

Recommendations

Based on this assessment of women's leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda and the challenges and opportunities for women in church governance, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda should, first, continue to expand access to theological education for women by offering scholarship support for their studies. Second, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda should implement policies and practices that promote gender equality within its governance. Third, the church should organise seminars and workshops that focus on the importance of women's leadership and the benefits it brings to the church and the society. Fourth, the church should create opportunities for women leaders to collaborate and network with one another, as well as with women leaders from other denominations and organisations. This will help the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for women's leadership.

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Prophetic Obsession and its Challenges in African Churches: a Christian Polemical Perspective

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Abstract

This research critically examines the unchecked rise of questionable prophetic practices in Africa, exposing their distortion of biblical teachings and exploitation of vulnerable believers. It challenges the growing trend of elevating prophetic utterances above scripture, which fosters manipulation, deception, and spiritual confusion. The study explores the corruption of prophecy within contemporary African Christianity and its societal consequences, particularly the misinterpretation of divine messages for personal gain. Employing qualitative research, it analyses prevailing prophetic traditions, their harmful effects, and the urgent need for theological accountability. This paper calls for a reformation that prioritises biblical truth, encourages daily scripture engagement over prophetic sensationalism, and rejects unverified prophetic claims that undermine sound doctrine.

Introduction

Polemics is a branch of theology that addresses controversies within or involving the Christian church, defending essential doctrines and denominational beliefs. It extends beyond doctrinal debates to encompass ethics, church organisation, law, liturgy, missions, and even art (Nicole no date). As Carson observes, engaging in serious theological reflection inevitably involves polemical issues – polemics often arise alongside doctrinal discussions, prompting necessary engagement with internal disputes (2009:155).

One of Africa's most striking contemporary theological controversies is the rapid rise of prophetic movements within Christianity. This trend reflects a growing desire among believers for direct divine guidance, often sought through prophetic utterances claimed to be revelations from God (Deke 2015:11–12). However, the increasing obsession with prophecy has not been without controversy or consequences. Many individuals have taken extreme, sometimes devastating actions based on supposed divine messages.

A tragic example I witnessed occurred in Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria. A young man, invited by friends to a revival programme at a Pentecostal church, was told by the preacher – a self-proclaimed prophet – that his hardships were caused by his mother, whom he labelled a witch. In despair, the young man returned home and attempted to set his mother on fire using the little petrol he had. Fortunately, neighbours intervened in time to prevent a tragedy. Sadly, this incident is not isolated, highlighting the dangers of unchecked prophetic declarations and their impact on vulnerable individuals.

Similar occurrences across Africa highlight the dangers of unchecked prophetic influence, where manipulation or misinterpretation of supposed divine messages can lead to harmful consequences. Scholars and theologians have noted that the growing attraction to prophetic pronouncements often shifts believers' focus toward contemporary revelations at the expense of the foundational truths of scripture (Twongyeirwe 2021:97). Such deviations undermine the authority of the Bible, which repeatedly warns against false prophets and upholds scripture as the ultimate guide for faith and practice.

This paper critically examines contemporary prophetic practices in Africa, exploring their theological and societal implications. It calls for a firm re-centring of the Bible as the foundation of Christian belief and conduct while advocating for a balanced approach to prophetic insights that values genuine prophecy without succumbing to its abuses. Ultimately, this research aims to deepen believers' discernment regarding prophecy's role within Christianity, reaffirming the pre-eminence of biblical revelation in navigating the diverse spiritual influences present in today's world.

Biblical Understanding of Prophecy

A proper appreciation of prophecy in the Bible requires thoroughly examining how it is treated across the Old and New Testaments. This includes establishing the criteria for a true biblical prophet, distinguishing between true and false prophecy, and understanding prophetic revelation's scope, limitations, and implications. This study is not merely a historical or theological analysis but is crucial for identifying how doctrine is distorted in contemporary Christianity.

Prophecy in the Old and New Testaments

In the Old Testament, prophecy is fundamentally a divine message delivered by individuals chosen explicitly by God – prophets (Jon and James 2012:79). These prophets, including Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah, served as God's messengers, calling his people to obedience and faithfulness. Old Testament prophecy operated within a covenantal framework, where prophets reminded Israel of their covenant obligations and warned of impending judgement and restoration (Hamon 1999:63–64). Because of this covenantal structure, prophecy in the Old Testament often reflected both divine discipline and the promise of redemption.

In the New Testament, prophecy plays a significant role but takes on a new form within the framework of the new covenant inaugurated by Christ. Jesus is identified as the ultimate prophet in whom the prophecies of the Old Testament find their fulfilment (Hebrews 1:1–2, Luke 24:44). This function is further elaborated in the apostolic writings, and it is predominantly charged with edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3).

> The prophetic gift in the New Testament, though it manifests itself in various ways, is always submitted to the authority of apostolic teaching and subsumed under the broader narrative of Christ's redemptive work. (Lamorte and Hawthorne 2001:961)

Role of Biblical Prophecy

Biblical prophecy is broad in scope, influencing individuals and the faith community (Powell 2006:237). It edifies, exhorts, and comforts believers by providing immediate spiritual guidance, encouragement, and correction.

Prophecy demands a response – faith, obedience, and alignment with God's will. Additionally, prophetic gifting plays a crucial polemical role, revealing God's will and calling people to redemption. This function is evident throughout scripture, as seen in passages like Jeremiah 35:15 and Judges 6:7–8. At its core, prophecy discloses God's involvement in human history. It encompasses moral and ethical judgement, spiritual interpretation of events, denunciation of evil, and divine pronouncements, including promises and warnings.

A well-rounded understanding of biblical prophecy – rooted in the Old and New Testaments – is essential in contemporary Christian practice. Such understanding enables believers to discern true prophets, recognise the scope of prophecy, and uphold its role in maintaining scriptural authority and doctrinal integrity. A balanced and biblically informed approach to prophetic ministry ensures it fulfils God's purpose of strengthening and guiding his people.

Identifying a True Prophet of God

A true biblical prophet is distinguished by specific characteristics centred on their divine mission and message. A genuine prophet receives direct revelation from God through visions, dreams, or audible messages. Because their communication comes from God, their message is rooted in divine authority rather than human imagination (Hamon 1999:147). As outlined in scripture, a true prophet's words will never contradict God's revealed nature and purposes. Instead, prophecy maintains continuity with God's covenant, guiding his people toward faithfulness rather than leading them astray. Therefore, alignment with scripture is essential in evaluating the legitimacy of any prophetic message.

Another key mark of a true prophet is their moral and ethical integrity. Prophets such as Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, and Jeremiah lived lives of purity and unwavering devotion to God's truth, even in the face of opposition and persecution. Their faithfulness serves as an enduring example for believers. Through their prophetic ministries, God transformed the lives of those who listened, affirming that true prophecy conveys divine truth and produces real spiritual change.

Distinguishing between True and False Prophecy

The responsibility of distinguishing between true and false prophecy falls upon the church, as it is essential for maintaining doctrinal purity and spiritual well-being. False prophets in scripture are identified by their deceptive messages, which promote idolatry, moral compromise, personal power, and financial gain. Unlike true prophets, whose messages are rooted in divine revelation and ethical integrity, false prophets manipulate prophecy for personal or material advantage (Micah 3:11, Matthew 7:15).

In the New Testament, believers are explicitly instructed to test prophetic claims and discern the spirits, ensuring that any prophecy aligns with the apostolic gospel. True prophecy always upholds a Christ-centred focus, affirming Jesus Christ's incarnation, atonement, and resurrection as God's ordained means of salvation. Any prophecy that deviates from or contradicts these core truths is false and should be rejected. The dangers of false prophecy can be mitigated by adhering to a biblically defined framework, drawing from both the Old and New Testaments. These scriptural principles guide the modern church in discerning genuine prophecy and ensuring its alignment with God's revealed truth.

The Scope and Content of Prophecy in Scripture

Prophecy in scripture is broad, addressing significant events, shaping individuals, and transmitting divine truth. Prophetic messages encompass moral, spiritual, social, and eschatological dimensions of human experience. Biblical prophecy can be categorised into two primary aspects: foretelling and forth-telling. Foretelling refers to the prophetic ability, through divine inspiration, to reveal future events. The central themes of foretelling are God's judgement and salvation. This is evident in prophecies concerning Israel's destiny, the coming of the Messiah, and eschatological events (Isaiah 9:6–7, Daniel 7:13–14, Revelation 21:1–4). Such prophecies highlight God's sovereignty over human history and his unfolding plan for redemption.

Forthtelling, on the other hand, involves declaring God's truth and purpose within a present context (Powell 2006:238–239). This aspect of prophecy emphasises moral exhortation, calling people to repentance, faithfulness, and obedience to God's commandments (Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8). Forthtelling addresses everyday moral and ethical concerns, condemning wickedness,

idolatry, and societal corruption while urging communities to live according to God's ordained laws.

Biblical prophecy can be classified into three main categories. (1) Prophecies concerning Israel's future – these prophecies pronounce God's judgement on Israel for unbelief and disobedience while also promising restoration after a period of trial and exile (Jeremiah 29:10–14, Ezekiel 36:24–28). They emphasise the conditional nature of Israel's relationship with God, which is tied to obedience and faithfulness. (2) Messianic prophecies – these prophecies foretell the coming of the Messiah and describe his birth, life, death, and resurrection as part of God's redemptive plan (Isaiah 53, Micah 5:2, Psalm 22:16–18). They reveal God's promise of salvation and its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. (3) Eschatological prophecies – these prophecies focus on the end times, revealing that God's kingdom will ultimately be established on earth (Daniel 12:1-3, Revelation 21:1-4). They depict God's final judgement and the restoration of creation, culminating in the fulfilment of his divine purpose. Together, these elements of prophecy demonstrate God's active role in history, guiding humanity toward redemption and the fulfilment of his eternal kingdom.

An Analysis of Unhealthy Prophetic Practices in African Churches

The most significant growth in ministry across the African continent in recent decades has been within the prophetic movement, marked by the rise of charismatic leaders who claim to possess divine revelation and power. This phenomenon is often accompanied by the manifestation of miraculous events (Twongyeirwe 2021:98). These prophets further assert that their messages are directly from God, offering solutions to all forms of affliction – financial struggles, health challenges, or personal crises – often reinforced with biblical references that seemingly legitimise their claims.

However, a critical examination reveals that, despite their assertions of divine authority, there is often a departure from foundational biblical teachings and theological principles. This trend highlights the strong appeal of prophetic pronouncements in times of existential uncertainty while simultaneously presenting ethical and theological challenges due to their irresponsible

propagation. Addressing these concerns requires a careful theological evaluation of prophecy rooted in scriptural fidelity, discernment, and a balanced approach to spiritual expressions within Christianity. Consequently, some of the prevalent unhealthy prophetic practices in Africa and their implications include the following.

The Pursuit of a Better Life and Destiny

Through prophetic declarations, pursuing a better life and destiny has become a dominant trend in African society, particularly in response to everyday struggles. This pragmatic style of prophecy encourages people to seek immediate solutions to their problems, believing that prophetic pronouncements offer a direct resolution rather than relying on biblical teachings (Twongyeirwe 2021:97). As a result, prophetic words are viewed as powerful instruments for financial breakthroughs, healing, and success, fostering a transactional approach to faith in which offerings and rituals become mere means to an end (Bishau 2013:56).

This elevation of prophecy above scripture has led to a significant theological deviation from traditional orthodoxy. Augustine Deke notes that some prophets in Africa claim their prophecies are more immediate and authoritative expressions of God's will than the Bible itself (2015:11). Consequently, followers tend to prioritise prophetic messages over personal Bible study, thereby undermining the foundational authority of scripture in matters of faith and practice. A key factor contributing to the appeal of these prophets is their ability to present their messages as guaranteed to manifest both physically and spiritually, particularly in times of crisis. They cultivate an exclusive sense of divine favour by positioning themselves as closer to God than their followers. This creates the perception that their words are infallible, much like the teachings of Jesus Christ, reinforcing dependence and unwavering devotion. While the intention behind these prophetic declarations may be to bring transformation, such practices risk distorting foundational theological truths and fostering reliance on charismatic leaders rather than encouraging a personal relationship with God grounded in scriptural truth.

Lack of Personal Commitment to Studying God's Word

The lack of personal commitment to studying God's word presents a significant cultural and theological challenge to the prophetic movement. Many believers,

weary from personal study demands, prefer to trust the revelations and interpretations of prophets about scripture. This leads to a superficial understanding of Christian doctrines and morality, hindering the depth of biblical knowledge necessary for discernment and spiritual maturity (Gwamna 2008:106). Part of this stems from the fact that in traditional African religious life, spirituality is often mediated through diviners and spiritual guardians rather than a sacred text (Abbas 2019a:178). As a result, there is a cultural trend where people seek divine wisdom from personal intermediaries instead of engaging with scripture directly. The consequences of this lack of personal interaction with the Bible are twofold. On one hand, it creates a dependency on prophetic figures, which can lead to spiritual stagnation. On the other hand, it makes individuals more vulnerable to manipulation (Tishken 2010:201). This increases the risk of subscribing to doctrines and practices that contradict the teachings of the Bible because the individual lacks the foundational knowledge to critically assess prophetic claims against scripture (Shoko and Chiwara 2013:134)

While the quest for prophecy in the lives of Christians in Africa may address cultural and existential needs, the absence of personal engagement with the Bible creates numerous theological and spiritual challenges. To address this issue, promoting a culture of personal scripture study as fundamental to Christian faith and practice is essential, fostering discernment, spiritual maturity, and doctrinal fidelity.

The Presence of Spiritual Forces as a Causative Factor of Evil

In many African prophetic movements, there is a prevalent belief that spiritual forces are the root cause of adversity and misfortune. Prophets often attribute the hardships faced by individuals or communities to influences such as demonic forces, witchcraft, and ancestral curses (Quayesi-Amakye 2011:298). This worldview, deeply rooted in traditional African cosmologies, suggests that human existence is spiritually defined and that spirituality must intervene in the struggles of daily life. This overemphasis on spiritual warfare and evil forces can create fear and foster a sense of dependency among followers (Maxey and Ozodo 2017:130). Prophets, in turn, exploit these fears by offering deliverance services and rituals, which often become emotionally and financially burdensome for their followers (Maxey and Ozodo 2017:130). For example, when believers attribute all their misfortunes to spiritual causes, they may

neglect personal responsibility and practical solutions, choosing instead to wait for supernatural interventions.

The most evident consequence of this belief system is the adoption of prophetic practices that encourage spiritual quests and divine intervention in addressing life's uncertainties. Prophetic movements in Africa have gained popularity by tapping into people's curiosity and desire to harness metaphysical powers to improve their destinies. Some prophetic expressions focus on predictive prophecies that promise deliverance from spiritual afflictions and adversities, often overshadowing the foundational authority of the Bible.

In light of African prophetic movements' cultural and spiritual aspects, it is essential to adopt a theological balance. This requires considering scriptural teachings with discernment, addressing spiritual and emotional needs. Doing so fosters spiritual growth through the actual truths of scripture, empowering believers to navigate their challenges with the discernment necessary to distinguish between genuine spiritual guidance and exploitative practices.

Exonerating Prophetic Declarations as Solutions to Life's Realities

The tendency to regard prophetic declarations as ultimate remedies for life's challenges is problematic for African Christianity. Prophets often offer simple solutions to complex issues, claiming instant healing, financial breakthroughs, and success without addressing the underlying causes of the problems or considering the sustainability of these solutions. While appealing in their immediacy, such approaches can lead to profound disillusionment among believers and sometimes trigger a faith crisis.

This reliance on prophetic speech assumes that such declarations are divine revelation, effectively sidelining the authority of God's written word (Geisler 2013:376). It can suggest that prophecies hold equal weight or even greater weight than scripture. The rise of numerous prophets as spiritual authorities further amplifies this notion, as their pronouncements are often treated as direct communications from a higher spiritual realm. Without critical examination or biblical analysis, these prophecies go unquestioned, potentially undermining the authority of scripture in guiding moral behaviour and

decision-making. This reliance fosters dependence on prophetic figures rather than encouraging personal spiritual discernment rooted in the word of God.

Manipulation and Control

In African prophetic ministries, manipulation and control present significant ethical and theological concerns. Some prophets assert authority not only to offer spiritual guidance but also to dictate individual choices and regulate the behaviour of their followers (Jon and James 2012:78). This often infringes on personal autonomy, as believers relinquish their judgement in favour of prophetic directives they believe originate from a divine source. The implications of such control extend beyond spiritual matters, affecting emotional and psychological well-being. Followers may feel trapped and dependent, leading to emotional and psychological abuse within the congregation, where dissenting opinions are suppressed and critical thinking discouraged in favour of blind obedience.

In addition, authoritarian control within prophetic ministries can create divisions within church communities, fostering dissent and eroding the respect and unity needed for collaboration. This hierarchical structure, where prophetic authority supersedes the collective decision-making of the community, can hinder healthy development, limit the diversity of thought, and degrade the quality of dialogue within the congregation.

Charismatic Celebrity Culture

A further deviation from biblical prophetic practice is the rise of charismatic celebrity culture within African prophetic movements, contrasting with the servant leadership model outlined in scripture. Prophets, by virtue of their public claims to divine connection, often amass large followings and media attention. This widespread attention centred on personal charisma and public acclaim can obscure the core biblical values of humility and selflessness exemplified by prophets in scripture. Elevating prophets to celebrity status creates the risk of idolisation, where their words and actions are unconditionally revered, and their authority remains unquestioned. This environment discourages critical engagement and accountability, leading to a new ‘marketing paradigm’ for prophetic teachings (Jon and James 2012:77).

Furthermore, the celebrity culture within prophetic movements can distort faith by prioritising outward displays of success and affirmation over inward spiritual maturity and faithful discipleship. This damages the communal values of mutual respect and accountability, weakening the capacity for accurate, Christ-like leadership, which should be characterised by humility and service. Addressing this issue requires confronting the inherent vices of the charismatic celebrity culture by reaffirming biblical principles of servanthood, humility, and accountability. By rooting prophetic ministry in these values, spiritual practices can be preserved, fostering a disciplined and genuine community rather than a platform for personal fame.

Countering Unhealthy Prophetic Practices in Africa

This section explores polemical approaches and responses that can assist the African church in navigating the complexities of unhealthy prophetic practices. It emphasises the importance of scriptural criteria for discerning prophecy, educating believers on biblical principles, and promoting sound doctrine and theological education. The aim is to equip the African church with the necessary tools to differentiate between true and false prophecy, safeguard the integrity of the Christian faith, and cultivate a community firmly grounded in the timeless truths of scripture.

Scriptural Guidelines for Discernment of Prophecy

The Bible is the primary medium through which God has chosen to guide Christians in faith and practice. As the final authority, the Bible must be the standard by which all prophecy is judged and discerned. It is a unique divine revelation, unparalleled in its capacity to truthfully predict the future, as God alone possesses complete knowledge of all things to come. Taken as a whole, the Bible offers an unmatched coherence and consistency, with its prophecies continually fulfilled. As John M. Frame asserts, 'There is no authority higher than Scripture by which Scripture may be judged' (2015:15). This underscores that the Bible is the ultimate authority in determining the truth, including evaluating the validity of prophetic statements.

Given this, prophetic ministry within the church must never undermine the pre-eminence of God's word. While prophesying for the edification of believers is not inherently a threat to the faith, such prophecies must adhere

to biblical revelation's logical and theological boundaries. Prophecy is a means by which the rational nature of God's word is explained and emphasised. It is a hermeneutical exercise that must support and clarify the biblical text, not introduce new doctrines or revelations. This is why prophecy must be rigorously tested for authenticity. The apostle Paul urged in 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 'But test everything; hold fast what is good' (ESV) meaning that the litmus test for prophecy is its consistency with the truth revealed in scripture.

This 'spectacle of Scripture' offers a hermeneutical framework within which all prophecies must be evaluated by Christians (Erickson 1999:282). Specifically, prophecy in Africa must be examined in such a way that no aspect of it contradicts or is inconsistent with the word of God or with God's plan and revelation as expressed in his word, through his son Jesus Christ, and in the person and nature of the Holy Spirit. All prophecies should be tested against these standards. If a prophecy appears fulfilled but contradicts scripture, it must be rejected accordingly. The word of God, as written, is infallible; it does not err or contradict itself. Any prophecy that does not lead people to Christ or goes against the gospel message must be regarded as coming from lying spirits. Therefore, the Bible remains the unchangeable benchmark for Christian doctrine and practice – any deviation from this benchmark, whether by addition or subtraction, is heresy and manipulation. Many Christians in Africa have fallen prey to misguided prophecies precisely because they have neglected this critical tool for assessing prophecies in light of the inscripturated word of God.

Throughout the history of the church, figures such as St Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, and Martin Luther – to name a few – have eloquently provided clear and decisive answers against claims of direct revelation that bypassed canonical scripture (Ramm 1984:164). They emphasised the inseparable unity of the word and the Spirit, viewing the scriptures as sufficient for all things necessary for salvation, with the Holy Spirit alone illuminating the word of God. As Millard J. Erickson articulates, Christian authority consists of the objective word, scripture, and the subjective word, inner illumination and conviction, enlightened by the Holy Spirit alone (1998:278). However, this dual authority highlights the inherent limitation of prophecy compared to the infallible written word of God. The written scriptures will always occupy the highest place as the definitive norm for faith and practice, a position that need not

assume equality or primacy with prophecy. This was evident in the apostolic witness of Paul and the early disciples of Christ, who identified the written word with the divine utterance.

Therefore, the role of a prophet is to convey the Bible without deviating to extraneous issues, applying its truths to human needs without straying from its core message. Bernard Ramm cites Calvin:

> Scripture is Scripture because it is Scripture! The Church cannot make it something that it isn't, and if it is Scripture, the Church can't add anything to its certainty as Scripture. (Ramm 1984:164–165)

This statement reinforces the supremacy of the Bible over prophetic declarations, establishing it as the ultimate authority in all matters of faith and Christian living. God's revelation through prophecy does not contradict his self-revelation through the Bible. According to Julius D. Twongyeirwe, biblical exposition is the primary ministry or office of prophecy in the church today (2021:102). Thus, only scripture addresses humans' universal, eternal existential questions. Prophetic utterances should explain and confirm scriptural truth, ensuring their particular applications are neither obscure nor contradictory. True prophecy, therefore, is clear and accurate, and its solutions are based on biblical truth – not on aligning with people's desires.

While prophecy in the African context may often lead believers to bypass engagement with God's written word, presenting immediate solutions to existential crises, there should be a deeper engagement with the Bible to safeguard the church against such prophecies. This engagement can align prophetic gifts with the biblical text. Prophets should encourage individuals to read, study, and reflect on the Bible, fostering biblical literacy and, in turn, reducing vulnerability to deception. The criteria for judging prophecy against what is considered canonical are evident in scripture. As the Bible is divinely inspired, it provides a satisfactory framework within which all prophetic revelations must fit. The Bible's perfection and infallibility establish it as the ultimate standard to which all prophecies are held accountable (Geisler 2013:354–355). 2 Timothy 3:16–17 states,

> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

This passage outlines scripture's multifaceted role in equipping believers to discern truth from error.

Consistency with the scriptural canon thus serves as the primary criterion for judging prophecy. Deuteronomy 18:20–22 provides an explicit instruction:

> But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?' – when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

This passage underscores the necessity for prophecy to be confirmed by God's revelation and validated by actual events. It also highlights the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in discernment. John 16:13 states:

> When he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

Similarly, as the Holy Spirit is the supernatural interpreter of prophecy, his interpretation will always adhere to the boundaries of the revealed scriptural text.

Biblically Based Education Regarding Prophecy

Educating believers on the biblical standards of prophecy is crucial for fostering a well-informed Christian community. This education should integrate doctrine and practice, enabling believers to understand and apply prophecy within the

context of the church. The foundation of this educational process is doctrine, which systematically presents the nature, purpose, and structure of prophecy as established in the holy scriptures. A key aspect of this education is making clear distinctions between the roles and functions of Old Testament prophets and New Testament prophetic gifts.

In the Old Testament, prophets served as the primary mediators of God's revelation, speaking on his behalf. Their words carried authoritative weight, as many of their prophecies were later included in scripture, representing the very words of God (Hamon 1999:237). In contrast, New Testament prophecy operates within the framework of the completed canon of scripture. Ephesians 2:20 describes the church as built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. This highlights the foundational role of early church prophecy. Contemporary prophetic messages must align with this understanding and remain subordinate to the closed canon (Agubama 2010:95).

Another vital component is the application of these doctrines. Christians must be taught how to test and evaluate prophetic words against the infallible word of God. As 1 Thessalonians 5:20–21 instructs: 'Do not despise prophecies. Test everything; hold fast what is good'. This guidance encourages believers to practise discernment in relation to prophecy. The testing process should include examining whether a prophecy aligns with scripture, its potential to edify the church and its verifiable accuracy. Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans for their diligence in examining the scriptures daily to verify the accuracy of Paul's words. This approach should serve as the model for today's believers when engaging with prophecy.

The Berean spirit should inspire a sense of curiosity in believers, encouraging them to become diligent students of the word. In such an environment, biblical literacy will be nurtured. Believers should internalise the depths of scripture in their hearts and minds, enabling them to discern true prophecies from false ones. Equipping believers with regular Bible reading, memorising key verses, and understanding the overall redemptive storyline that unifies the Bible is essential. Theological colleges and church seminars should prioritise biblical hermeneutics and systematic exegesis as foundational components of their curricula. This invaluable knowledge will empower believers, especially those

in prophetic ministry, to properly use the necessary tools to interpret scripture (Agubama 2010:95).

A select group of individuals in the church should teach believers the standards for biblical prophecy, with pastors and church leaders primarily entrusted with this responsibility. They are called to provide their congregations with sound doctrine, offering a clear standard by which truth can be distinguished from error (Ndyabahika 2004:202). Ephesians 4:11–12 affirms that Christ gave the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for ministry and build up the body of Christ. Regular preaching and teaching must uphold the authority and sufficiency of scripture, clarify the nature of prophecy, and provide principles for discernment.

Theological educators and scholars also play a critical role in this process. Their academic expertise and commitment to classical theological study form the foundation for equipping believers with a well-rounded understanding of biblical prophecy. Through scholarly work, seminars, and appropriate courses, these scholars are indispensable to the church's efforts to ensure the proper functioning of prophetic ministry. Their academic contributions bridge the gap between theology and practical ministry, helping believers become well-informed and adequately equipped to discern prophetic utterances.

The Holy Spirit serves as the divine interpreter and enlightener of scripture, enabling believers to discern and apply the prophetic word rightly. This divine guidance protects the church from deception and false teachings, ensuring that true prophecy always aligns with the truths revealed in scripture. Consequently, this process should have a corporate focus. It is most effective to test prophetic words within the context of the faith community rather than in isolation. In this collective discernment, the wisdom of all those present is reflected, and the spiritual maturity of the body of Christ serves as a foundation for the careful and tactful examination of prophetic utterances for reliability. As 1 Corinthians 14:29 states, 'Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said'. Using communal discernment practices, prophetic gifts are held accountable, and the risk of mishandling or misinterpreting them through self-uniqueness is minimised.

Sound Doctrine and Theological Education

Promoting theological education is essential for teaching sound doctrine and maintaining the life of the church while accurately reflecting prophecy. The goal of this education is twofold: to preserve orthodoxy and to stimulate intellectual engagement with the church's faith so that it remains strong in truth despite cultural challenges. Jude 1:3 urges believers to 'contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints', emphasising the need to protect the foundational pillars of Christianity from distortion due to heresy or deviant doctrine. The church must be vigilant in safeguarding vital doctrines such as the Trinity, incarnation, atonement, and resurrection – all of which are central to Christian belief. These theological concepts are essential for the church's life and mission (Mbewe 2020:194–196). In line with the Nicene-Chalcedonian creeds, historical and doctrinal affirmations serve as dogmatic benchmarks of orthodoxy, helping the church uphold ideological purity and continuity.

Of all the aspects of theological education, the foremost priority is measuring healthy doctrine. Seminaries and Bible colleges must offer comprehensive curricula that cover biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, and practical ministry. These educational programmes should provide a solid foundation that equips pastors, teachers, and lay professionals with the tools they need to teach, defend, and uphold faith in honesty and truth (Enyinnaya 2011:73–74). 2 Timothy 2:15 encourages believers to

> do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Theological education creates a crucible where well-trained Christian leaders can realistically engage with the challenges of contemporary ministry and defend the church's doctrinal integrity.

Integral to theological education is the harmonious integration of faith and reason. Christianity has always been a faith that welcomes intellectual investigation without becoming sceptical or overly analytical. The philosophical tradition of the church, exemplified by figures such as Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, and Martin Luther, highlights the significance of deep

theological reflection and critical thinking (Abbas 2019b:13–15). As Erickson notes, Christian authority is found both in the objective word, scripture, and the subjective word, inner illumination by the Holy Spirit, affirming that faith and reason are united (1998:278). This perspective ensures that any theological inquiry remains rooted in divine revelation while constructively engaging with human rationality. Additionally, the lives of believers require the promotion of lifelong learning for the ongoing development of the church, both theologically and spiritually. This should not be viewed as a one-time accomplishment but an ongoing process extending beyond traditional schooling (Agubama 2010:95).

Churches can foster lifelong learning environments by offering adult education classes through small groups or by providing access to a wide range of theological resources – books, journals, and online courses – available in a searchable library. This approach encourages continuous exploration and reflection, enabling believers to deepen their understanding of the faith and apply it more effectively in their lives and ministries. Theological learning institutions play a significant role in this lifelong educational journey. These institutions can design curricula to maintain academic rigour while offering opportunities for advanced theological study throughout life, reaching a broad range of believers. For example, online platforms can make theological education more accessible, democratising access to essential resources and equipping lay leaders and congregants to engage deeply with theological ideas – not merely for reference but to wrestle with the material.

In this context, the church must cultivate an intellectual environment that encourages theological inquiry. This means challenging believers to ask difficult questions and seek answers through scripture, church tradition, and reason. Theological education should be dynamic, addressing contemporary issues while remaining grounded in the timeless truths of the Christian faith. This ensures that believers are well-equipped to address the moral, ethical, and spiritual questions of their time with theological depth and pastoral sensitivity. When promoting sound doctrine and theological education, it is essential to acknowledge the role of the Holy Spirit. As John 16:13 states, ‘But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth’. The Holy Spirit enlightens the mind to understand scripture and guides believers in understanding truth. Thus, theological education becomes an intellectual

pursuit and a spiritual journey that leads individuals to know God more deeply and faithfully.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has explored the interconnected relationship between Christian polemic and the quest for prophecy in African churches. The introduction began with a biblical perspective on prophecy, outlining its historical and theological foundations. This was followed by examining unhealthy prophetic practices in Africa, highlighting the harmful consequences of such practices. Effective polemical strategies and responses were then discussed. The review concludes by affirming the sufficiency of God's written word in revealing his will to Christians in Africa. While contemporary prophets in Africa may address the needs of their followers, reliance on prophetic messages at the expense of the Bible is misguided and should be avoided. From this discussion, some key recommendations emerge.

First, African Christians must dedicate quality time to daily Bible reading. To effectively test prophecy, believers must have a deep understanding of scripture. The Bible serves as the ultimate authority, equipping believers with the necessary tools to discern and evaluate prophetic claims. Prophecies must align with biblical truth and not contradict its foundational doctrines.

Second, there needs to be clarity on what is intrinsically Christian and culturally specific. This distinction will prevent African Christians from merging cultural or personal interpretations with biblical texts. It will also ensure that doctrines and prophetic messages are applied in their proper context, maintaining their purity.

Finally, while Christians should remain open to prophecy, they must ensure that prophetic messages align with the established teachings of the church and the broader Christian community. Prophecies must be consistent with the core teachings of the Bible and the historical understanding of the church, grounding the faith community in sound theological and scriptural principles.

While modern prophecy has a place in addressing the needs of believers, it should never replace or override the authority of the Bible. African Christians

must engage in disciplined study of scripture to distinguish truth from falsehood, preserving the integrity of the faith by aligning prophecy with biblical truth. By integrating these polemical strategies, the church can establish a solid framework that will help foster a biblically grounded Christian community, enabling it to respond to unhealthy prophetic practices effectively.

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Power-Purity Pneumatology for African Pentecostalism

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Abstract

Africa once again occupies a strategic place in the history of Christianity as one of its chief centres when the religion is somewhat receding in the West. This development is reminiscent of the pivotal role the continent had earlier played in the formative years of Christianity. Historical records show that places such as Alexandria, Carthage, Hippo and Ethiopia produced prominent Christian theologians of that time. As Christianity today grows in Africa, there is a noticeable increase in the influence of African Pentecostalism that is shaping African Christianity. However, the current growth of African Christianity has yet to translate into the widespread and holistic significance it exerted in the early centuries, as African Christianity still attracts the stereotype of being "a mile wide, but only one inch deep". Therefore, this paper employs historical analysis to present a power-purity pneumatology to reinvigorate African Pentecostalism and, in turn, impact African Christianity generally.

Introduction

Studies have duly recognised that Christianity's centre of gravity has shifted to the global South, with Africa, Asia, Latin, and Oceania as new centres (Oden 2010:10; Daughrity 2013:13). The shift is due to the remarkable growth of Christianity in these new centres, which had smaller Christian populations at the turn of the twentieth century. As Gonzalez (2002:9) puts it, "A hundred years ago, there were less than 10 million Christians in Africa, less than 22

million in Asia, and some 5 million in Oceania; now those numbers have risen to 360 million, 312 million, and 22 million respectively". The trend is expected to continue, with the number of African Christians projected to grow around 2.5 per cent annually, which by 2025 would double the continent's Christian population, reaching almost a billion adherents (Jenkins 2011:2). It is unarguable that African Pentecostalism (a collection of diverse movements that acknowledge the centrality and gifts of the Holy Spirit but also incorporates indigenous elements from African religion and culture [Biri 2013:37] has played a significant role in stimulating the growth of Christianity in Africa.

Integrating African beliefs and rituals has made African Pentecostalism attractive and acceptable to many African Christians across various denominations, including the mission churches which have adopted Pentecostal practices such as loud and rigorous prayer, deliverance, prolonged singing, clapping, prophecy, "seed-sowing", testimonies, and visible participation in public spaces. However, African Pentecostalism also rejects some aspects of the African beliefs and rituals. Sometimes it positions itself as a vanguard to liberate those oppressed by certain beliefs and ritual practices prevalent in traditional religions. As such, there are both continuities and discontinuities in its integration of African beliefs and rituals (Anderson 2020:273).

Judging by the current reality, African Pentecostalism will likely continue to shape African Christianity in the foreseeable future. The growing influence of African Pentecostalism has made it the face of African Christianity. As Togarasei (2024:157) correctly observes, "Pentecostalism seems to be the most influential form of Christianity and responsible for the public expression of Christianity in Africa". Despite its influence on the growth of African Christianity, African Pentecostalism betrays some noticeable weaknesses that require some treatment to reposition it for a more significant impact. It is, therefore, imperative to channel concerted efforts towards strengthening African Pentecostalism by refining its theology, which drives its spirituality and practices. Since Pentecostalism prides itself on being a movement of the Spirit, it is helpful to direct efforts to its theology of the Spirit (pneumatology).

Wariboko and Afolayan (2020:6) mention four approaches to interpreting Pentecostalism: those who interpret Pentecostalism through its most substantial theological perspective (e.g. Amos Young and Frank Macchia); those who read it through its theoretically most accessible point (e.g. Ruth Marshall and Nimi Wariboko); those who interpret it at its contextually most engaged corner (e.g. Matthews Ojo and Allan Anderson); and the newer approach that cuts diagonally through the three other approaches, represented by J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu. This paper falls within the first approach as it draws, on the one hand, from the biblical text, particularly the perspectives on the Holy Spirit found in the writings of Paul and Luke, and, on the other hand, from the African spirituality of power and purity. Paul and Luke are significant because their perspectives form the bulk of pneumatology in the New Testament. Their emphases are connected and complementary rather than mutually exclusive. It must be admitted that Pentecostalism in Africa differs from one region to another. Nevertheless, it is possible to observe some common experiences and practices among Pentecostals across the continent, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Brief History and Growth of African Pentecostalism

Pentecostal studies initially traced the roots of Pentecostalism to the North American event of Azusa Street, Los Angeles, in 1906-1913. However, it has recently been recognised that there were diverse points of origin worldwide, drawing from diverse ecclesial and theological traditions before and after the Azusa Street revival (Lord 2018:225). Recognising the diverse origins of Pentecostalism lends credence to the claim that Africa already had indigenous Pentecostals before western Pentecostal missions came to Africa (Kalu 2008:11-13). Beginning in the early 1900s, several charismatic revivalist leaders in different parts of Africa founded new “churches of the Spirit”, differently called “Spirit,” “Spiritual,” “Zion,” “Apostolic,” “Aladura,” “Roho” and so on, which were more religious in motivation and origin, and seldom shared the overtly political and reactionary stance of the earlier independent churches (Anderson 2015:56).

These charismatic revivalist leaders in different parts of Africa focused on religious and social needs rather than politics. Their churches experienced

manifestations of the Spirit, such as healings, prophecies, and influential preachers, that resonated with African worshipers. These charismatic leaders are sometimes called forerunners or pioneers of African Pentecostalism. William Wade Harris and Sampson Oppong of the Gold Coast (Ghana), Garrick Sokari Braide and Joseph Ayo Babalola of Nigeria, Samuel Mutendi of Zimbabwe, Simon Kimbugu of the Belgian Congo, Alice Lenshina of Zambia, John Chilembwe of Central Africa, and Isaiah Shembe of South Africa belong to this category (Omenyo 2014:133-134).

As noted earlier, there are many diverse groups of churches within African Pentecostalism, and it is pertinent to observe the difficulty in categorising them because their evolution, types, and characteristics vary in different regions. This reality often poses a classification challenge to scholars, resulting in different classifications (Togarasei 2024:151, 157). Attention to periodisation is one way to mitigate the difficulty of categorising churches within African Pentecostalism. Anderson (2015:65-67) identifies different types of African Pentecostalism: African independent "Spirit" churches, classic Pentecostals, older church charismatics, and neo-Pentecostal and neo-charismatic churches. Asproulis and Devenish (2020:89) mention three waves of African Pentecostalism: classic Pentecostalism, African Independent Churches (AICs), and Charismatic movements. Omenyo and Atiemo (2006:55-68) identify the following streams of African Pentecostalism: the African Instituted Churches (AICs) or *Aladura* churches, the classical Pentecostal movements (e.g. Assemblies of God, the Apostolic Faith Mission and others), trans-denominational fellowship (e.g. Full Business Men's Fellowship International, Women Aglow Fellowship International and others), charismatic renewal groups in the mainline churches, independent neo-Pentecostal/charismatic churches and ministries started by local initiatives, and neo-prophetism, the latest form of Pentecostal movements, which is an amalgamation of forms of ministries of the AICs and neo-Pentecostal churches. However, it is pertinent to state that researchers writing on individual churches within African Pentecostalism should pay close attention to how these churches prefer to identify themselves to clarify the classification issue further.

Although the growth and popularity of African Pentecostalism results from several factors, including the African worldview and existential experience, one significant impetus for the rise of African Pentecostalism is the failure of

missionary Christianity to speak to the African soul and its realities because it did not understand African culture. Thus, it may be correct to assert that African Pentecostalism primarily emerged as a response to the failings of missionary Christianity, which often conveyed teachings irrelevant to African customs. Anderson (2001:28-29) explains that the missionaries were not prepared to concede any parallel between African society and biblical faith and thus stifled any African attempts to express Christianity in a way other than missionary Christianity. African charismatic/spirit-movement leaders championed the African expression of Christianity by emphasising the connection between the realities of the Bible and African cultures. As a result, the indigenous approach of incorporating elements from indigenous religions led to the growth of African Pentecostalism and created a unique religious experience reflecting the continent's cultural and spiritual landscape (Kalu 2008:2). While acknowledging that many scholars see the emergence of Spirit-type churches as a reaction, Anderson (2015:65) posits that it is better to construe the expansion of African Pentecostalism as the spread of pertinent biblical messages and African interpretations rather than a hostile response to Western missionary efforts and colonialism.

Reflecting on the current state of Pentecostalism generally will help us appreciate its evolution over the last century. Standard descriptions of Pentecostalism emphasise the experience of the Spirit and spiritual gifts. Initially, Pentecostals held the doctrine of subsequence, that is, the Spirit-baptism of believers is a distinct experience after conversion. However, recently, they no longer hold firmly the doctrine of subsequence. Instead, they emphasise the experience of Spirit-baptism, which may coincide with conversion or come later. Stronstad (2019:3) notes that three distinctives marked classic Pentecostalism: the conviction that the contemporary experience should be identical to that of apostolic Christianity, the separation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit from sanctification, and that tongues-speaking is indisputable evidence or proof of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Stronstad's characteristic traits are present in African Pentecostalism but a detailed observation reveals that the typical features of African Pentecostalism also include an emphasis on the experience of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongue, the use of spiritual gifts, divine/faith healing, deliverance theology, prosperity gospel, a literal hermeneutic, and a "name it and claim it" theology (Sande 2023:n.p.).

Sketching A Power-Purity Pneumatology for African Pentecostalism

Old Testament Background

In sketching a power-purity pneumatology for African Pentecostalism, this paper considers Paul's and Luke's thoughts on the Holy Spirit in the context of the African worldview of power and purity. However, it is instructive to note that the Old Testament provides a background for Paul's and Luke's understandings of the Spirit. Therefore, a brief Old Testament background is necessary. The Old Testament uses symbols, images, metaphors, and stories to describe the Spirit and its activities. The Hebrew term *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma* carry similar meanings of breath, air, wind, or spirit. The Spirit is the life force and the power that enables humans to perform the supernatural (Dunbar 2009:26). The *ruach* also operated as a charismatic power that came upon individuals in the Old Testament (Judg. 14:6; Isa. 6:34) to equip them for mighty works, releasing them from threatening forces, and giving them prophetic visions (Exod. 31:3; Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 14:6; 1 Sam. 16:13; Prov. 8:22-31; Isa. 11:1-8; 32:15-20; 42:1-4; 49:1-6; Ezek. 3:12; 8:3; 11:1, 19; 18:31; 36;36; 37:1-14; Dan. 6:3; Joel 2:28-32; Dunbar 2009:26).

The Spirit's activities in the Old Testament encompass creation, prophecy, and God's presence. It is involved in the creation of the world, giving life to animals and humankind (Gen. 1:2; 2:7; Job 33:4; Pss. 33:6; 104:29-30; Isa. 34:16; Parker 1988:316; Eichrodt 1979:47-48). The Spirit also inspired prophecy, serving as the source of prophetic activity (Numb. 24:2; 2 Sam. 23:2; Isa. 61:1-4; Ezek. 2:2; Mic. 3:8; Turner 1996:6). The Old Testament also highlighted the Spirit's connection to the Messiah as the messianic figure is anointed and empowered by the Spirit of God (Isa 11:1-8; 42:1-4; 49:1-6), and the Spirit heals and restores God's people (Ezek 18:31). In the Old Testament the Spirit is also equated with God's presence, representing his presence among his people. In Isaiah 63:10-14, the author equates God's presence with God's Spirit (Fee 1994:909). The Spirit's activities and presence are significant themes in the Old Testament, laying the foundation for understanding the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

Nevertheless, the Old Testament also promises a new and broader outpouring of the Spirit in the future (Joel 2:28-32). Though powerful and influential, the Spirit's ministry was intermittent in the Old Testament, coming upon selected individuals to empower them for specific purposes. That would change to more comprehensive and continuous empowerment of the Spirit in the future, which would occur with the coming of the Messiah.

The Spirit in Luke

It is common for scholars to identify Luke's primary emphasis on the Spirit as empowering believers with inspired speech (tongues) to witness to Christ vis-à-vis the ethical or renewing function of the Spirit in Paul's writings (Shelton 2000:4-5, 157; Stronstad 2019:123). Johnson (2011:54) says, "Of all the New Testament writings, however, none so thoroughly develops the understanding of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of prophecy as does Luke-Acts." Luke associates the Spirit with tangible effects and ecstatic manifestations, indicating that such manifestations are expected where the Spirit is present. Also, scholars seem to have a fair consensus that Luke uniquely presents the Spirit in Old Testament and Judaistic terms (Kienzler 2015:26; Philip 2005:10). Luke understands the Old Testament perspective and Jewish concepts of God's presence, which empowers God's people to fulfil their divine purpose and carefully presents Jesus as a chief example of that. Thus, the Messiah's empowerment by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom and heal the sick, exorcise the demon-possessed, and raise the dead are signs that the forces of evil are being defeated.

Luke explains that when Jesus ascended heaven, he received the Holy Spirit from the Father and poured it out on his disciples who were waiting in Jerusalem. By the outpouring of the Spirit, the disciples received power and the gifts of the Spirit to boldly proclaim the gospel and perform miracles. With the empowerment of the disciples, evil forces continue to be defeated. Peter's speech on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36, especially v. 33) and his speech at Cornelius' house (Acts 10:38) affirm God's generous empowerment through the Holy Spirit to God's Messiah, Jesus, and to those who believe in him. Mainvile (2013:2, 26) stresses that Luke's pneumatological discourse has its originality in Acts 2:33 and that the significance of its content holds the key to interpreting Luke's pneumatology. Significantly, Luke shows that the empowerment of the disciples, which began on the Day of Pentecost, fulfils the

Old Testament prophecy of Joel (2:28-29), emphasising the Holy Spirit's broader role in the new dispensation occasioned by the Jesus event. In Peter's Pentecost speech (Acts 2:33), Luke presents the Spirit as being released at the insistence of the exalted Jesus. Therefore, the Holy Spirit in Luke is the "life and causal principle, which inaugurated and advanced the people of God" (Binz 2016:39). It is crucial that Luke connected the Spirit with the activities of Jesus when he was on earth and after he ascended (Storm 2014:14). There was nothing meaningful the apostles and the nascent group of believers could do without the Spirit's involvement, direction, and empowerment. The Spirit inspired disciples to speak God's words and proclaim the Christ event that they had witnessed first-hand.

Although the prophetic role of the Spirit is evident in Luke's writings, the ethical (purifying/cleansing) dimension of the Spirit is also present, though implicitly. However, this point has been neglected by many to accentuate the prophetic and miraculous role of the Spirit in Luke, probably to set Luke against Paul and vice-versa. A key contribution of this paper is that while Luke comes off as emphasising the Spirit's prophetic empowerment of the believers for witness through inspired speech and the miraculous, scrutiny reveals that the ethical function of the Spirit is also part of Luke's outlook. It will suffice here to cite two evidences for the purifying role of the Spirit in Luke. The first is from Luke's purpose. Luke states that he was wrote in his gospel about "all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1), which may imply that in his second volume (Acts), Luke writes about what Jesus continues to do through his faithful disciples (Marshall 2008:20).

The Spirit's descent on the disciples empowered them to serve as witnesses to what Jesus had taught, including his resurrection and ascension. The witnessing or proclamation of Jesus by the disciples would require them to prove through their speech and behaviour (lifestyle) how Jesus had lived his holy life, exercised the power of the Spirit to establish the kingdom of God and deliver people from the forces of darkness, and taught people about God's kingdom. Thus, Jesus' statement that the Spirit would empower them to become his witnesses includes enabling them to replicate Jesus' holy living. Interpreters agree that Luke has a special of use the word "martyr" in that he shows that witness concerning Jesus can only be given "if the meaning of the facts is appreciated, so that the witness takes the form of believing, evangelistic

confession", implying that Jesus' witnesses to the fact of his life have lived through them, understood them, and accepted them (Strathmann 1985:567). The second evidence comes from the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Luke's inclusion of the story reveals his understanding of the Spirit cleansing God's people. Since the Spirit's descent on Pentecost Day, he has been the divine presence that dwells among God's people and is the source of their lives and holiness (Kienzler 2015:116).

The Spirit in Paul

Paul is regarded as deserving more than other New Testament writers, the title, "the theologian of the Spirit" because of his prominent use of the term *pneuma*, which far exceeds that of the Old Testament and the rest of the New Testament, and the profound implication the term has to his theology and mission (Philip 2005:1). Although opinions differ among scholars regarding the origins and development of Paul's pneumatology, many accept that Paul's sources include Hellenistic, Jewish, and early Christian traditions. However, Paul's Damascus Road experience transformed all these sources. Philip (2005:25) correctly asserts that Paul's pneumatology begins with his conviction that he was called and commissioned to preach to the Gentiles and that God has given the Spirit to the Gentiles. Paul knew that that revelation could come apart from the Torah. Paul's understanding of the Holy Spirit is broader because he sees the Spirit's influence encompassing various aspects of life, including Spirit Christology, charismatic gifting, illumination, divine revelation, and moral transformation. Also, interpreters often observe that Paul's pneumatological emphasis is on the Spirit's role in the believer's conversion, his status in Christ, and the ethical renewal of the believer in Christ. That means that Paul's main emphasis was that the Spirit is God's presence and effective power in the believer, which controls him to obey God. That is to say, the Spirit actively empowers believers for righteous living (Raben 2013:2, 171). While such an assertion may be correct, it must not be overstated to lose the fact that other emphases or nuances are also present in Paul's pneumatology.

Paul speaks of the indwelling Spirit as the mediator of God's presence and moral character in the believer's life. The arrival of the Spirit in conjunction with the Jesus event and exaltation is evidence of God's renewed presence among his people, the new or restored Israel (Eph. 1:13; Gal. 3:14). As Fee (2000:99) rightly comments, the coming of the Spirit meant that the New

Covenant promises of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where God's Spirit would indwell his people's hearts and cause them to obey, had been fulfilled. Similarly, the coming of the Spirit indicates that Joel's prophecy about the pouring of the Spirit on all God's people (old and young, men and women, slave and free) so they would function as prophets had been fulfilled.

As noted earlier, the ethical emphasis on the Spirit's role in the believer is not the only teaching of Paul's pneumatology. Paul's robust treatment of the Spirit's role includes the miraculous empowerment of believers. We find that Paul's writings reference the Spirit's ethical and prophetic roles as he uses various metaphors to help unpack God's Spirit, which is pervasive in his theology. As such, *pneuma* in Paul's writings does not offer itself to a uniform description, even though his communities were familiar with the Spirit. Thus, "the Spirit is spoken of as the cause or vehicle of the effects of God's saving activity, like joy (1 Thess 1:6), the various charisms (1 Cor 12:3-11), and prayer and song (1 Cor14:2, 13-15)" (Maloney 2014:78). Twelftree (2019:137) usefully explains that Paul often use the words Spirit and power together in the context of the Spirit being responsible for unusual or miraculous activity. He notes that Paul's inclusion of the Spirit, in his expression "Spirit and power" in 1 Corinthians 2:4, rather than simply saying power, draws attention to the divine origin of the miracles. Therefore, it is correct to say that the Spirit in Paul's writing empowers believers for purity and power.

Power and Purity in African Spirituality

Paris (1995:22) explains, "The spirituality of a people refers to the animating and integrative power that constitute the principal frame of meaning for individual and collective experiences". The African concept of spirits includes God, lesser deities, ancestors, and evil spirits. God is the highest spirit-being and creator with absolute will and power over all creation. The concept recognises that the spiritual and the natural are intertwined, a recognition that spirits and spiritual forces do not exist exclusively outside the natural. Thus, for Africans, life, in its entirety, is wrapped up with the spiritual in view. Because the spiritual pervades the material, it leaves the material agencies with little or no control over events (Owusu-Gyamfi 2023:4). Mbiti (2015:42) mentions that Africans believe that there is power in the universe whose ultimate is God. It is

a mystical power because it is hidden and mysterious. Spirits and some human beings have access to this power. Those with this power can sometimes see extraordinary things and perform wonders. This belief in the spirits places on every person the necessity to access and rely on the spiritual for a meaningful and successful life in the material world. It means that the spiritual realm is where power resides, and people will always need to connect to it to draw power to overcome challenges in their daily endeavours. Good spirits give fortunes to the people. People need their power and protection against the malevolent forces of witchcraft and sorcerers. This African concept of the spirits is compatible with the biblical perspective of spirits as both affirm the existence of good and evil spirits having powers to influence happenings in the material world. Both also recognise that God is the supreme Spirit who gives the power to defeat all forces of darkness. The connection between the biblical and African worldviews makes it easy for African Pentecostalism to promote the power of the Holy Spirit in delivering people from demonic oppression, healing from sickness, and giving divine favour and security. The notion within the African concept that power is neutral until one decides how to use it seems to alert every African not to be indifferent to it because some, like witches and sorcerers, may use it negatively (Olupona 2014:52).

The African concept of purity connects closely to the belief in the existence of God, the supreme being and creator of the universe. God is holy, and holiness accounts for his transcendence, which warrants using intermediaries, including divinities and ancestors who also uphold purity and demand the same from worshippers. This belief explains the abundance of strict rules of purity imposed on everyone involved in performing rituals directed to God as one of the most striking aspects of African worship. Undeniably, the traditional African religion abounds with rites of purification and prohibitions regarding the rules of cleanliness (Nkulu-N'sengha 2009:289). Some commentators attempt to distinguish between classic Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals, claiming that the former focuses on holiness and purity while the latter emphasises healing, deliverance, wealth, and prosperity (Nyanni 2020:n.p.). But the current reality blurs any such demarcation to a great extent. It is, therefore, imperative to accentuate both purity and holiness in the work of the Spirit.

Implications of the Power-Purity Pneumatology

This paper's presentation of a power-purity theology has significant implications for beliefs and practices within African Pentecostalism. Thus, this section highlights how the insights of the paper's proposal can influence and contribute to African Pentecostalism. Some selected key areas that the study will impact are discussed below.

Prosperity gospel

Nel (2020:75, 76, 180) has traced the popularity of Africans' prevailing interest in the prosperity gospel to the American prosperity teachers' influence through their creative use of the media to reach their worldwide audience, African worldview and traditional religion, and the desire to prosper in an impoverished postcolonial Africa. However, the conceptualisation of the prosperity gospel and its practice by many of its protagonists seems faulty. The faulty aspects of the theology in theory and practice include cherry-picking verses of Scriptures without holistic consideration of biblical text to satisfy the quest for material wealth, making wealth acquisition the central goal of the Gospel, and using whatever means available to enrich themselves, including preachers extorting members. The prosperity gospel is not declining in Africa because it promises to deliver religious adherents from poverty, sickness and oppression in the face of poor and harsh socioeconomic conditions. It is no exaggeration to say that the prosperity gospel in Africa promotes the extortion of worshippers through various commercialisation methods. The commercialisation of worship plays out in many ways by imbuing spiritual experience with various business venture ideas such as parishioners buying forms at exorbitant prices to gain access to the pastor, selling specialised anointing/healing oil, handkerchiefs, customised factory-made clothes for different age groups. Abimbola (2020:207) notes that Nigerian Pentecostalism "provides the entrepreneurial acknowledgement and theorisation of the profound impact of capital on Nigerian religious imagination". The concerning part of this phenomenon is that mainline churches have imbibed this commercialisation malady.

Nevertheless, some commentators opine that the prosperity gospel is not without its positive impacts. Togarasei (2024:154-155) contends that the

prosperity gospel contributes to poverty alleviation in Africa, gives economic and social relevance to Christianity against early Pentecostalism's lack of social conscience, and serves as a postcolonial challenge to the missionaries who hypocritically preached to Africans that "our home is in heaven" while they, the missionaries, amassed land and other earthly treasures.

Because the idea of prosperity is biblical, the prosperity gospel should not be tossed away; correcting its flaws and purging its unholy desires needs to be done. Here lies the implication of a power-purity theology, which can ensure that prosperity is sought holistically in tandem with the teachings of the Bible. Such a theology will correct the aberration of isolating prosperity as a stand-alone concept from the rest of the canon. This theology can help keep Christians focused on their need for holiness and sanctification, which will dissuade them from greed and corruption. The same Holy Spirit who gives believers the power to speak in tongues and cast out demons also empowers them to cleanse themselves or be cleansed from sinful acts that weigh them down. Also, power-purity pneumatology recognises prosperity in spiritual wealth, which is visible in godly character, because perseverance in suffering on account of righteousness or doing God's will is part of biblical prosperity.

Overemphasis on Individual Experiences

Pentecostalism, generally, including the African brand, is known for its recognition of the believers' experience in appropriating the move and power of God in human affairs. Nel (2020:39) remarks that the reality of God for Africans is a given because they believe God is an integral part of their daily lives. So, African Pentecostals have appropriated beliefs about God regarding the Jesus event bringing regeneration and the promise of eternal life, and other spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues and deliverance from the forces of evil. Nel (2020:39) adds, "In African spirituality, the living God authenticates God's power and presence in signs and wonders, especially healing". It may be correct to assert that experiencing God in these diverse dimensions with some tangible results has made African Pentecostals more comfortable with speech/orality in its various forms (testimony, story, song, preaching, praise, and speaking in unknown tongues) than with definition, concept, thesis system, philosophy and methodology that dominate scholarly enterprises. Nevertheless, such an apparent anti-intellectualism may be mitigated by the claim that Pentecostals do not outrightly discard the rational pursuit of

meaning, but they question the dominance of reason alone as a proper and sufficient instrument for the discernment of truth (Vondey 2012:140).

No doubt, African Pentecostals have robustly harnessed this feature of Pentecostalism since they place considerable attention and emphasis on the believers' experience, which is gained through various activities, including dreams, trances, singing, dance, prophesy, and prayer. As such, African Pentecostalism is regarded as having an embodied theology that combines the word of God and the lived experiences of the believers (Kgatle 2023:142). However, African Pentecostalism's over-dependence on this experiential phenomenon to the detriment of sound biblical precepts creates much confusion and doubt about its many practices. Overemphasis or over-reliance on the experiences of individual believers to show God's workings downplays the need to weigh such experiences against the rule and will of God as revealed in the Scripture. Notably, the desire for holiness in power-purity pneumatology will enhance the willingness to check if individual or collective experiences fit the truth of the Scripture before making an experience a standard belief or faith practice.

"Bogus" miracles and prophecies

One of the critical characteristics of Pentecostals generally is the belief that the miraculous interventions in the Bible have not ceased and are repeatable in the contemporary period. They contend that the decrease in the miraculous results from the "unwillingness of believers to accept their validity and to facilitate their operation" (Warrington 2008:70). However, fake miracles by Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal preachers in Africa, projected on their church-owned televisions and social media platforms, pose a severe challenge to the positive impact and image of Christianity in Africa. Ademiluka (2023:179) avers that the quest for miracles among Nigerian Christians has become a social menace as many have fallen victim to fake miracle workers. Describing the situation in Zimbabwe, Gunda and Machingura (2013:16-17) state how prophets Emmanuel Makandiwa of the United Family International Church and Uebert Angel of the Spirit Embassy respectively would claim to have the spiritual wherewithal to make their members experience miracle money in their pockets and bank accounts and facilitate quick conception and delivery of a baby within three days. Vengeyi (2013:65) expatiates on such strange miracles, including claims of healing HIV/AIDS cancer, causing instant weight

loss of up to 30 kgs, raising the dead, and calling house, identity, and car registration numbers of worshippers during church services.

Such scenarios are not restricted to southern Africa as West African prophets such as the late T. B. Joshua of the Synagogue of All Nations and Chris Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy, both in Nigeria, had set some examples of displaying "miracles" through a visual and aestheticised performance before worshippers, which is televised to a broader audience nationally and beyond. Two decades ago, Oyakhilome's televised miracles tagged "Atmosphere of Miracles" (ATM), projected on the Nigerian Television Authority and other stations, were banned by the National Broadcasting Commission because such miracles were unverified and were damaging to the health of the citizenry. Until the ban, the miracle program was a daily show on about twenty television stations. "The ban did not stop Oyakhilome from keeping his slots on the air, replacing the ATM with Teaching Programme and LoveWorld. The ATM also continued to run twice a week on Ghana's Metro TV and throughout the week on LoveWorld Christian Network, a satellite channel owned by Oyakhilome. It also runs on TBN in South Africa" (Nlobalnews, 2012).

A power-purity pneumatology implies that since the work of the Spirit is to edify believers, expand God's kingdom, and glorify God, seeking to stage miracles is unholy, ungodly, and an attempt to glorify Satan and the human ego, all of which are contrary to the Scripture. The point to stress is that while African Pentecostal preachers and believers should recognise that while the Holy Spirit empowers Christians to perform healing and related miracles when he so wishes, the need to be purity-conscious will restrain preachers from staged or fake miracles that glorify themselves and the kingdom of Satan.

Lack of Formal Theological Education for African Pentecostal Preachers

This paper shows the significance of doing theology to strengthen faith and practices that align with the Bible. The corollary of the study is that African Pentecostal preachers need to embrace sound and relevant theology to help them study Scripture correctly and articulate their perspectives. This path of theological enterprise has already taken root among Western Pentecostals. However, in Africa, from its beginning until now, Pentecostal and charismatic leaders have usually emerged with little or no formal theological training. All they needed was to believe the Bible, declare God's counsel, and see God

practically intervening in the spiritual and social needs of the people to whom they minister. Commenting on the contemporary Nigerian context, Abimbola (2020:202) says, “There are no clear, firm distinctive structures and doctrinal espousers that broadly define what Nigerian Pentecostalism is or not because it is difficult to define what should normatively qualify as Nigerian Pentecostalism”. Asproulis and Devenish’s (2020:88) remark presses the point further that Pentecostalism in Africa, especially southern Africa, lacks theological training, resulting in a lack of literature that expresses African Pentecostal theology and missiology written by Africans except some handful of biographical and hagiographical writings, thereby relying on the thought-processes of outsiders (non-Africans or Africans raised in the West). Many commentators state that an anti-intellectual bias against theological education characterised early Pentecostals. The focus on experience by the Pentecostals is capable of producing “a faith that is anti-intellectual, ignores sound hermeneutical principles for biblical interpretation, and can be overtly emotional” (First 2019:36).

While there has been some significant change among Western Pentecostals in embracing theological analysis and presentation, such cannot be said about African Pentecostalism. It is a common trend that most Pentecostal leaders emerge as pastors of their congregations without prior theological education. In Nigerian, though many neo-Pentecostal pastors (including W. F. Kumuyi of the Deeper Life Bible Church, Enoch Adejare Adeboye of the Redeemed Church of God (RCCG), David Oyedepo of the Living Faith Worldwide, D.K. Olukoya of the Mountain of Fire and Prayer Ministry) have a university education up to a terminal degree, they did not have formal theological education when they started as pastors of their churches. They followed the preaching and practices of some famous American Pentecostal and prosperity preachers they considered mentors. It was a quick fix for these leaders without specialised knowledge of theology. That route also appealed to them because most of the existing mainline or mission churches believed to be anti-spiritual, suppressing the revival of God’s move and power happening through them, and the Scriptures already set an example. Not only that, the mainline churches in Africa at that time, due to the influence of Western theology, were denying African realities such as witchcraft, a position which made Pentecostal and charismatic leaders query the benefit of formal theological training for effective pastoral leadership.

However, the trend seems to be changing as virtually all the mega Pentecostal churches in Nigeria have established Bible colleges to train pastoral and ministerial leadership. Kalu's (2008:25) report refers to this development when he mentions that a master's degree program designed for church pastors at the West African Theological Seminary, Lagos, witnessed many more bishops than the number expected came from Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Kenya. Nevertheless, compared to the mission churches, theological training of Pentecostal and charismatic leaders in Africa has largely remained minimal, done within a short period and focusing on the experiential, not minding whether or not certain practices conform with the teachings and principles of the New Testament for the people of God. The lack of formal theological education for pastors is grim even today.

On the other hand, while pastors in the mission/mainline churches always get formal theological, their assimilation of Western anti-supernatural stance to the Bible, occasioned by overemphasis on rationalism in Western theology, has made their preaching ineffective and validates the suspicion of Pentecostals. Perhaps this is because theological education in the mission theological schools over a considerable time has maintained the contents or curricula bequeathed to them by their missionary-founders centuries earlier. The theological colleges or seminaries have primarily remained as tailored by their Western missionaries and have done little to nothing to review their curricula to reflect African perspectives, which are in tandem with the Bible. Thus, theological education for pastoral leadership continues to suffer and is yet to be fully appreciated by many pastors. Willson (2023) says the global scene is also arresting: 85 per cent of the world's pastors have no formal theological training, yet hundreds of thousands preach every Sunday without adequate resources and training for many worshippers globally.

Conclusion

This study has argued that formulating theology to strengthen African Pentecostalism is a helpful task that scholars should consider seriously because more work needs to be done. That is the way to go now, considering the massive influence of African Pentecostalism on African Christianity. This paper's specific contribution is the proposal of the power-purity pneumatology

derived from Paul and Luke's perspectives and the perspective of power and purity in African spirituality. The power-purity theology stresses that the same Holy Spirit is God's agent of equipping believers for power/prophetic manifestations and holy living as they bear witness to Jesus Christ in their respective communities. Such a theology is biblically sound and contextually relevant, and it can make a total Christian manifest the gifts and fruit of the Spirit in a manner that transforms the individual believer and his community. It is hoped that such a balanced perspective can help African Pentecostalism to be biblically sound and contextually relevant.

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The Preacher as 'Fool for Christ': a Reflection on Prophetic Preaching in African Contexts

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Abstract

What is preaching? How does preaching the gospel relate to risk? And what can we learn from the unconventional image of the pastor or preacher as a risk taker for the sake of the glory of God? This article focuses on the significance of the practice of preaching, especially within a particular unconventional perspective or imagery: that of the preacher as a clown or jester or even as risk taker. The aim of this article is the close reading of Paul's new or strange imagery of the preacher as a 'fool' for Christ (1 Corinthians 4:9–10) and how that continues to generate new ideas and thoughts about preaching in twenty-first-century Africa. On another hand this article is also an attempt to provide a kind of reception study on the preaching legacy and practical passion of one our scholars at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, namely Professor Johan Cilliers. His preaching life and teaching has been closely examined in this study with the particular aim of raising the question of preaching in a more practical, though unconventional, sense, in an African context: Nigeria, which is structured traditionally within a high culture of honour and shame. The idea of the foolishness of preaching or being clownish for the sake of the gospel remains the actual productive pattern of this article. It is presented as a reminder and in appreciation for the life of one of the unknown heroes of faith in Nigeria, a dedicated and sacrificial pastor,

the late Rev. Ibrahim Garba,[1] whose life and memory will continue to challenge us to be faithful to the Lord in the midst of all risks, even of preaching.

Introduction

It has been a long time now that I have been thinking of writing on the politics of preaching. Preaching is God's calling within ecclesial ministry, a spiritual, ethical, and theological exercise (Copeland 2016; Craddock 1985; Cressman 2020; De Klerk and De Wet 2008; Greidanus 1988; Hussey and Demond 2018;

[1] On 17 November 2023, I received news of the passing away of Rev. Ibrahim Garba. He was a dedicated ECWA pastor whom I was privileged to teach at some point at ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro. After a few years his son Solomon Ibrahim also joined us at the seminary as a very humble but dedicated young pastor-in-training. It was a great pleasure to meet and share some good time with Rev. Garba. Through his son Solomon I got to know where they were posted to serve for the sake of preaching the gospel. Metaphorically, we call the area the lion's den of Kaduna State; it was in Birnin Gwari area. For more than two decades the area has been captured by and under the control of brutal bandits. Many pastors who were sent to the place had earlier declined. But Rev. Garba is one of the few who risked their lives and the comfort of their family to go and serve there amidst high banditry for the sake of the gospel. The worship service at his church has been frequently disrupted because of series of attacks from the bandits. Many of his members have been kidnapped, and some even killed. He and his family have put themselves at great risks every day and night to live in that village. One of the high risks was also to go to the farm in search of what to eat. Many farms have been taken over by the bandits. Many young boys have been conscripted into the banditry gang. Weapons were everywhere and life was constantly at risk. In the midst of that, Rev. Ibrahim Garba promised God and his family to still stay there and serve even while many members have left the area because of fear. His stay there yielded a lot of fruit. Many people were blessed by his life and ministry. Close to the end of his life he was kidnapped for some days but later released miraculously unharmed. He was a man of great prayer, simple faith, and sacrifice to the Lord and humanity. He had been battling with some health challenges for years, and this year the Lord decided to call him home and take his glorious rest. His passing was peaceful – that gave me a lot of comfort – even for his immediate family. He risked his life for the sake of the gospel and he was preserved by the Lord until the very end.

Lischer 2001; Long 1989). It is not just about learning how to preach, but actually preaching, and preaching the word of God. Preaching is an act of true responsibility to God and to people regardless of circumstances (Lorenzen 1980; Pieterse and Wepener 2021; Prill 2020; Robinson 2014; Sisk 2007; Travis 2015; Wendland 2000; Wilson 1995). There are so many instances in which the ministry of preaching has been turned into a political act of general public address to the gathered people. Some could not preach because of fear, fear of the congregation about their message, whether it will be accepted or not; some fear the audience more than God; thus they would want to do everything possible to meet with their expectations. Political preaching or political sermons may be differently understood and applied in different places. For example, in South Africa, outstanding church leaders like Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naude, Willie Jonker, and Allan Boesak have been known and celebrated as political preachers with prophetic fervency. Here political preaching is not about politicising the content of the message in order to suit the expectations of the audience. But rather it is a contextually focused preaching that does not spare any section of life of the audience in context (see Stauffer 2015). Political life as key to practical ethics has been the driving force in the history of South Africa and indeed the modern world as a whole. Thus, political preaching as prophetic preaching is necessary and highly expected. On the other hand, in other contexts like Nigeria political preaching is equal to the politicisation of the message. This is the act of pastoral pretences in preaching, done in order to suit the wishes of the audience or the leaders who have invited and appointed the preacher to preach to them. This is more of an ideological sermon, more of those that were preached in South Africa during the apartheid era in order to justify the practices of segregation.[2] The same ideological sermons were preached in the German Reich church in

[2] For more on how the Bible has been used by many apartheid preachers in South Africa for its justification see Cilliers (2006). Like the Israel of biblical history, many apartheid ideologues thought and believed that God was with them. They thought and preached that what they practised as separate development is the will of God naturally. They were not able to see the evil of apartheid for what it truly was. They were blinded by their own ideologies that made them keep thinking and moving on the one-sided path of self-dehumanisation and the dehumanisation of others. Thus any form of segregation and the rejection of human beings and the entire creation of God cannot be the will of God for people. Such ideological practices happen only when people are bent on such self-serving ideologies of disobedience that these unchristian practices happen among them.

order to please and justify the actions of the Nazis under Hitler's regime (Bergen 2000; cf. Künneth, Wilm, and Schemm 1931). Such sermons were later countered by more biblically based, evangelical sermons that called for the truth and the justice of God rather than proud, human lies (Stroud 2013). Many ideological-political sermons are still being preached in different places, for example, in Russia to justify the actions of Putin and his soldiers, or in Muslim-dominated contexts to justify Islamic actions according to their convictions, or in the Middle East to either justify racism or antisemitism, etc. Thus sermons or acts of preaching are not always preaching the word of God for the sake of the glory of God. Preaching actual prophetic sermons is what the heart of preaching is when we speak of preaching the word of God for the people of God (Allen 1998; Bartow 1997; Beamish 2019; Berkley 1992; Brueggemann 1995, 1998). This is when the message comes to the preacher from beyond; thus the preacher is found under the effective authority of the word of God.[3]

There is a lot of concern or worry on the minds of preachers with regard to preaching prophetically from the word of God. Such sermons may be offensive to many people. Thus the fear of such reactions takes hold of the mind and may make them want to leave things as they are. This has been the fear of change; this kind of fear was seen in the apartheid days in South Africa in that older folk of the apartheid era feared the future, so much that they thought of it as a serious sacrilege against that which was their true tradition or what counted for the natural order of things (Cilliers 2015b:383).[4] Thus to preach against apartheid like Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak did was to play the fool, to be a clown in context (Cilliers 2015a; Drury 1967; Hansen 2005; Hermelink and Deeg 2013), to say the impossible and the undesirable. Such preaching

[3] Karl Barth warned against turning the word of God into the word of man (1957). From my understanding of his expositions, the word of God is the actual content of God's true revelation in terms of God's will, self, life, world, and time, while the word of man is the self-made entertaining scheme that is meant to mainly satisfy the wishes of the hearts of the people.

[4] 'While *fear* formed the heuristic experience in stereotypical apartheid sermons, causing the listeners to cling to the past, and while *anticipation* was the fundamental experience evoked by political and eschatological preachers like Desmond Tutu – opening up hope for the future, already celebrated in the present, it would seem that the current experience evoked by many sermons is that of *uncertainty* on the one hand (not knowing what the future holds) and *introversion* on the other (fleeing from political responsibility in the present).' (Cilliers 2015b:383)

was only considered to be wishful thinking, daydreaming, by those who despised the cause of the black people of South Africa.

The culture of honour and shame makes many preachers careful not to preach sermons that may offend or upset the status quo. In other words, preachers are popularly expected to see and leave things as they are, as can be seen in the modern world's culture of rights. This presents a '*tentative*' kind of preaching rather than the actual exposition of the word of God (Cilliers 2015b:381). Nothing in it is certain; nothing is sure; everything depends on other things or something else.[5] The preaching in this category cannot afford the risk of an 'innovative theology' (Cilliers 2015b:381). Innovative theological thinking is what is heard from the sermons of Jesus in the gospels and his apostles in Acts. These are sermons that pushed the boundaries of mere traditions and broke the yoke and walls of human ideologies, mainly in order to see what Barth called the 'Strange New World within the Bible' (MacDonald 2002). It is very good news to note that the Bible is given not to serve as a tool of further human subjugation, as so many readers in the history of biblical interpretations have used it when they read and applied the Bible dangerously.[6] But rather it is meant to be a blessed gift of liberation from all that dehumanises and keeps people from being fully and truly human before God and before one another. The idea of innovative theology is not just to entertain the wishes of the people but rather to help them find an alternate, life-giving way of being that helps them to grow and move forward. Doing this is only risky business. It would require the preacher to learn new vocabularies, by which he may be able to articulate his newfound vision in the presence of God.

[5] 'One [sic] the one hand, preaching has become *more tentative* than before, no longer emanating from the certainty of a fixed and stable "truth". One [sic] the other hand, preachers tend to be very *pragmatic* in their approach, desperately trying not to rock the (sinking) boat too much. Preaching has to an extent taken on the *mode of maintenance*, rather than being an expression of innovative theology.' (Cilliers 2015b:381)

[6] To read the Bible dangerously is to read and interpret it in service to one's ideology, as was done in apartheid South Africa, in America during the eras of segregation, in Germany for antisemitism, etc. For many examples of such dangerous readings of the Bible through the ages and in different contexts see Claassens and Viljoen (2012), Smit (2015), and Punt and Nel (2018).

The idea of preaching the gospel is to bring forth God's word to God's people in all its fullness. It is aimed at providing godly wisdom and direction on life in its simplicity and complexity. It is worthy of note that all true preaching must be prophetic in the sense of it being a message specifically from God to God's people in a particular place and situation. 'Prophetic preaching always hinges on the critical event' (Laubscher 2019:264). The critical event here could be the life of people in context, meaning they must be addressed as from the Lord. They need to hear something true, new, and transforming for the growth and progress of their lives and ministries.

There are some 'spaces of tension' in prophetic preaching (Cilliers 2013). These are actual points of contact from one particular group of people to another. The preacher is a risk taker who dares to stand between the people and God always at liminal spaces, the very spaces of tension, disagreement, and to some extent disillusionment among people (Cilliers 2013). The sermons of Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak during the apartheid period and the sermons of Martin Luther King Jr in the days of America's racial segregation and marginalisation of minorities are examples. Preaching the gospel as God's word to all God's people was risky, sounding foolish and somewhat stupid to many. But those preachers were daring, hopeful, and faithful in taking such risks for the sake of the gospel. The words of the preacher to the poor and needy are always a welcome rhetoric of hope in order to lead them to something new and something liberating and assuring; but for the architects of the status quo the word of God is quite irritating, irrational, inadequate, and even foolish. Now I would like to reflect a bit further on some contributions on the nature of biblical and prophetic preaching and how on some ears they have become only a rhetoric of folly.

A Rhetoric of Folly?

In his contribution on 'reforming preaching' for the *Societas Homileca*, Johan Cilliers and his homiletic colleagues discovered that the essence of preaching is the bringing forth of the *viva vox evangelii* (the living voice of the gospel) (in Hermelink and Deeg 2013; see also Laubscher 2019:269). It is the living voice of the gospel that actually brings forth new meaning, new direction, new hope, and the vision of the new world of God to the horizon of reality, to the people of God living mostly in the darkness and hopelessness of this broken world.

The preacher is a daring personality whose efforts and words may sound actually foolish and unbelievable, yet who is called and pushed by the Spirit of God to speak truth that liberates and light that dispels the darkness that holds people captive for so long.

The gospel is seen by many especially in the modern and the postmodern social culture as 'a rhetoric of folly'; the preachers, in the eyes of the world and even to a complacent church, are nothing but 'preaching fools' (Campbell and Cilliers 2012). It is in this so-called foolishness that the true 'witness of preaching' (Long 1989) is found, heard, accepted, and trusted to bring the expected change that is good enough to transform the life and situations of the people of God.

At the heart of Cilliers' discovery of the meaning and practice of preaching is the actual understanding of the new given spaces of grace that God gives to people through the wisdom (and foolishness) of preaching (Cilliers 2012, 2016). True prophetic preaching revives the people of God to the new faith, hope, and joy of being the children of God and being invited into the presence of God with great joy in order to worship and to feast and gaze at the beauty of God in his holy place.

In order for us to explore the wisdom and foolishness of preaching the gospel we shall give attention now to Johan Cilliers' essay 'Clowning on the Pulpit? Contours of a Comic Vision on Preaching' (2009). For us to speak of anything as 'clowning' on the pulpit in an African context is to take risk. The typical African culture is organised based on the cultural parameters of honour and shame. Honour is the general or public craving of many if not all African people. They do not want to be associated with anything shameful or similar to what displays shame. To be clownish in the pulpit is to be irritating (disgusting) to many in an African context. The preacher who speaks unconventionally, and is looked at by his audience as a fool,[7] is only bearing '[a]n unconventional image of preaching' (Cilliers 2009:189). The foolishness of preaching is not just a deliberate action to entertain or to irritate. It comes from the force of true

[7] The preaching may appear as foolish when he/she preaches with daring tones, innovative thoughts, or unconventional, subversive ideas or principles of life.

spiritual enlightenment; this is what the apostle Paul speaks of when he says to the Corinthians,

> For since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21 NIV)

(see Cilliers 2009:189).

Prophetic preaching that is actually biblical and practical is preaching that upsets the settled notions of people's conventional ideologies and pushes them to a new space of self-discovery and a new encounter with God. Cilliers observed that

> Most preachers operate from the basis of a certain self-understanding of their identity as preachers; they carry with them a picture of what, according to them, preachers ought to be and do – images that profoundly influence the patterns and practices of their ministry. (2009:189)

Preachers who seek to form and maintain a certain self-image against their given image by the act of preaching cannot be faithful to their calling as preachers of the gospel. They may be trying to protect their own image in a certain form of their own wisdom, but in truth that is only a display of their own foolishness in the process. The true image of the preacher comes from the texture and meaning of the message as assigned by the Holy Spirit, regardless of the conventional experiences and expectations of people.

The presence of emptiness or sterility in church or people leads to the display or the discovery of foolishness instead of godly wisdom.

> This image of the church and preaching being a fool or clown seems to come to the fore when the church is vulnerable and without power, when its message seems to have no impact, and its very existence deemed to be ludicrous. (Cilliers 2009:190)

Nevertheless, even in an unconventional imagery of a clown, or a fool, the preacher can still have something new and definite to teach his people.

> The clown has the remarkable ability to connect to people in the borderline experiences of their lives. He teaches them to laugh at, and in, their experiences of liminality, even though it may often seem like no laughing matter at all. (Cilliers 2009:191)

The clown or jester in a court before the king in traditional contexts plays so much, not only to entertain but also in order to instruct. The clown who displays wisdom in foolishness is one who portrays himself as embodying '*the frailty and vulnerability of human life*' (Cilliers 2009:191). We live in a broken world of great vulnerability; we ourselves are always vulnerable and it will be good wisdom to always come to terms with this aspect of our lives. According to Nico Koopman, God also recognises our sense of vulnerability and the vulnerability of the world; God participated in it in order to grant us hope, strength, and renewal (Koopman 2004, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Laubscher 2021; Vosloo 2019).

A clown in court is also an expert in 'disrupting the powers' (Cilliers 2009:192). He points to his listeners the limit of their power. He displays the fragility of the king and calls attention not only to joy and laughter but also to death and tears. 'The clown represents an alternative world-view – often unsettling to the dominant or conventional one' (Cilliers 2009:192). For example,

> The court jester playing before the King implicitly proclaims a message and extends an invitation: that the King should become more of a jester; that he should relativize himself; that he should not take his own power so seriously that it becomes an eternal state of affairs, or worse, a tool to be misused. *The image of the jester suggests reciprocal transference: the King relinquishes his power to the jester, and the jester his (foolish) wisdom to the King.* (Cilliers 2009:192)

> The image of the clown reminds us that we cannot, and indeed dare not, remain silent in the face of the reality and brutality

> of the powers of destruction and death that dominate and enslave us. (Cilliers 2009:194)

As in Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1971: 369; Selby 1999: 240, 245) the Christian is one who stands on the borderline of worlds. He lives in this-worldliness and calls attention to otherworldliness. He calls attention and points his listeners not only to the here and now of the penultimate but also to that which is otherworldly, that which is ultimate. This is also the risky business of the preacher. The preacher speaks of new worlds, new life, new hope, and also of judgment, justice as equality, justice as punishment of the rich and arrogant for their mistreatment of the poor and lowly.

Jesters, clowns, and risk takers are important for their own good as well as for our own good. They provide some relief from the high burden of life when many things turn so hard and even unbearable. Cilliers observed that 'In a world full of pain we need the liberation of laughter' (2009:193). Ironically, laughter can be quite liberating because it gives us the freedom to see the other side of life and to judge for ourselves how foolish and ridiculous human pride and arrogance is in the face of life that is meant to be only joy. Juliana Claassens (2015) has explored the wisdom of laughter in biblical interpretation as key to resistance. This is laughter that defies the finality of the wisdom of the arrogant. This reminds us of the actual resilience of some who turned out to be survivors of Auschwitz. Furthermore, Desmond Tutu was known as a man full of life and laughter. At some point he was presented as having the emotions of children as he could easily laugh and at the same time he could easily cry (Allen 2006; Chivers 2011). The juxtaposition of laughter and crying is not a misplacement of emotional balance but rather the actual creativity that keeps life in its balance as we experience it today.

Whenever the preacher preaches the word of God he speaks a new language. This opens the door to 'the strange new world' of the scripture (Barth 1957:28). There are times when the new language on the lips of the pastor becomes uneasy, subversive, and also uplifting. The preacher speaks from a variety of language textures using various linguistic devices in order to convey

the message.[8] The most amazing thing about preaching is that the preacher in the name and power of God uses ordinary language to communicate the extraordinary and profound things of God. Preaching is not just an ordinary risk taking in life, it is also a self-giving to God in grace. The calling to preach is grace, and the act of preaching itself too is the demonstration of the grace of God, through one's life, to the reality and the world of God.

The act of preaching happens more often than not between power and weakness, even the weakness of God (see 1 Corinthians 1:26–29). Paul spoke of the weakness of God in order to disrupt the strength of the Gentiles; he spoke of the wisdom of God in order to disrupt the wisdom of the Jews. Both Jews and Gentiles needed to hear the new truth of the power of preaching about Jesus the crucified saviour, the saviour who could not save himself but died in weakness so that he could conquer the weakness of life in death, that through it life eternal would be made possible. The preacher of this gospel is only a fool in the eyes of the world that seeks wisdom and power, the world that trades in science and technology, the world that sees only within itself. The preacher may be a fool to those who listen, but also a subversive fool at the same time.

> The image of the preacher as fool opens up vistas of a theology that take the *vulnerability and weakness of God* seriously. (Cilliers 2009:195)[9]

What is the weakness of God? This is no actual weakness as we readily conceive the meaning from the word. The weakness of God is the actual understanding of God from a human point of view. Everything that human beings see and understand from within themselves is nothing but weakness

[8] 'The language structures (and art forms) that are most fitting for this endeavour would be irony, satire, juxtapositions, paradoxes, metaphor, collage, humour, contradictions, opposites, etc. – modes of language that often dance on the head of so-called logic. Through these language tools new worlds can be created. These language structures are, of course, no strangers to the vocabulary of faith – they can also be found in scripture, where the ultimate paradox of God's story and our story are presented as intrinsically intertwined.' (Cilliers 2009:194)

[9] 'In this last phrase lies a striking God image: infinitely vulnerable, but never finally defeated. The Word that is preached is vulnerable and fragile, it relies on flawed speech, and is open to misuse and abuse.' (Cilliers 2009:195)

and foolishness compared to the unfathomable wisdom and strength of God. God's wisdom remains foolish and God's strength remains weakness in human eyes. But what makes all the difference is the actual revelation of God.

The most amazing thing about God displayed in weakness is the new turn of God's being and actions towards his people. 'God sides in solidarity with suffering humanity' (Cilliers 2009:196; see also Fretheim 1984; Moltmann 1973; Caputo 2001). God's act of solidarity with human beings in this world in the person of Jesus Christ reveals the humanity of God in a new light (see Barth 1960). This is the new light of God's infinite and unconditional love. 'While we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8). Christ did not die for the righteous; he died for the sake of the unrighteous, the weak, the outcast and undesirable, that in his love he might bring them back to himself. This is the good news, the content of the gospel for which the preacher is called and expected to risk everything in order to lose nothing.

But the next question for us to ponder is where the prophetic preachers among us today are.

Johan Cilliers: Asking for the Prophetic Voices

'Where have all the prophets gone?' This is the question posed by the American homiletician Leonora Tubbs Tisdale; Johan Cilliers took that question seriously with regards to his South African context (Cilliers 2015b:379; cf. Tisdale 2010). Today, here and now, we are taking it seriously beyond South Africa, into West Africa (and perhaps even beyond). Following the missionary eras of the advent of Christianity in Africa, we have had series of pastors, preachers among whom were prophetic voices. But the question today still rings, 'where have all the prophets gone?' My answer would be in two phases. Firstly, many of the true prophets of old who were raised from within the church and for the sake of the church and the world have died; thus we are not seeing them or hearing them anymore. Secondly, some of the prophets have gone into the world and become one with it for the sake of the things in it. That is why we do not see them or hear them often. And thirdly, some of the prophets are still among us, yet we are too careless and carried away that we do not see them or listen to them as often as we need.

As already mentioned above, prophetic preaching has been central to what we call biblical preaching. It repeats the revealed word of God in all honesty and earnestness.[10] It seeks to revive the people of God to the love and worship of God. It confronts the powers that be, whether in church or the political society, with the true eschatological vision revealed through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.[11] This leads history to its destination and calls attention to the seriousness of life in the presence of God (*coram Deo*).[12]

The act of prophetic preaching blends the horizons of words, creation, and experiences. Cilliers observed that 'Words create worlds; voices form spaces of comfort and grace, but also chaos and darkness' (2015b:368). Cilliers further explains the contextual meaning and power of words with reference to a typical African context, saying

> In Africa words are for instance not primarily meant to be put on paper, but to live in the air as voice, in the spaces between

[10] 'In most of our ecclesiological traditions the notions of "political" and "eschatological" preaching would be combined and described as "prophetical preaching", unfortunately often in a theological unsophisticated [sic] manner.' (Cilliers 2015b:373)

[11] 'People like Tutu, Boesak and Naude believed deeply in the transforming power of the Voice of God, as well as in the important role that preaching as an oral event could play in this regard. They used the Bible as their primary source for articulating an alternative society; and, understanding the importance of community and communal experience in the African context, they made an appeal on society (or: separated societies in South Africa during apartheid) to be transformed in the light of this rhetorically portrayed alternative society. This was in stark contrast to many preachers who wanted to maintain and preserve during the apartheid era, often out of *fear for the risk of change*.' (Cilliers 2015b:374)

[12] Cilliers described what he meant by prophetic preaching in his own time and context in the following words:

> This is followed by a description of different ways in which political and eschatological preaching has been understood within recent times, starting with the reverted eschatology of apartheid sermons, linked to the experience of *fear*; then the hopeful eschatology of Desmond Tutu's sermons, evoking experiences of *anticipation*; and concluding with what could be called the present day vacuum in this regard: preaching that strives to maintain by means of introverted eschatology, contributing to experiences of *uncertainty*. (2015b:367)

> people. It in fact creates these spaces, and is intended to bind community together in what could be called a communal experience. (2015b:368)

Central to the prophetic preaching is the communication of God's voice as revelation to people. 'God's voice is simultaneously God's deed of revelation, God's presence, and God's face being turned towards us' (Cilliers 2015b:370). The revelation of God is communicated through the symbolic language of grace.

> The anthropomorphous expression *the face* (*panim*) expresses the modus of God's revelation strikingly: in this God's entire personality becomes clear and God's inner being is represented. (Cilliers 2015b:370)

> Preaching is the event of God's voice, but perhaps the latter can also be changed around: preaching is about the voicing of God's event. (Cilliers 2015b:370)

This makes the pastor not just a herald but also a witness: one who bears witness to the actions of God in history and for the sake of his people. The spoken word of God is 'alive and active', so also the living and the written word of God (Hebrews 4:12). The word of God is the act of God in speech form. 'This word-deed shapes experience and calls for transformation' (Cilliers 2015b:370).

Preaching is also seen as a surprising event. Cilliers argues that

> Preaching is hard work, but it is also happenstance. This happenstance cannot be controlled or contained; it has its own life, breaking free from constraints. Preaching as an experience of happenstance points towards the unexpected,

> the surprising, the grace of God's face being revealed to us. (2015b:370)[13]

Preaching could also be seen as the risk to hope. The preacher lives by faith and hope and also is pushed to the risk of saying something new or strange, something upsetting, something disturbing to the settled minds of those in power. Yet, the preacher speaks the truth of God in hope that God is glorified and through his (that is, the preacher's) weakness the power of God may be made manifest. Cilliers explains that

> prophetic preachers like Desmond Tutu spoke in ways that relativized, and in doing so, opened up experiences of hope, of anticipation of a *novum* that in fact was celebrated as already being present. (2015b:379)[14]

What remains a serious and disturbing question for Africa and our world today is what kind of preachers we are. And what kind of message do we love and also love sharing out to the world? If it is one of subservient politics, just to maintain the status quo and enjoy ourselves, then we cannot afford the risk of prophetic preaching. And the moment we lose focus on prophetic, visionary, honest, and Spirit-filled sermons, we leave ourselves and our congregations more vulnerable, malnourished, and lost. Johan Cilliers has led an interesting example in his teachings and sermons that one of his students Martin Laubscher celebrates when he gave attention to the 'strange beauty of the Word' (2019).

[13] In my view, happenstance in this context is not the product of chance or luck, but rather it is the actualisation of God's given reality without the actual contribution or input of the person as such, that which comes to us without our adequate knowledge. Any effort comes to us from the events that God may use as circumstances to shape and direct our actions to a particular purpose to the glory of God.

[14] To relativise in this context does not mean to lose the grasp on truth as reality, but rather it means to disrupt the absolute version of ideological truth as happened in the apartheid context of South Africa.

Laubscher on Cilliers' Legacy

Martin Laubscher is one of the students of Johan Cilliers who further presents a close reading of his life and prophetic preaching. Cilliers himself became an amazing embodiment of the virtues of preaching. These are the pastoral traits that illumine his life and give force and direction to his witness. Cilliers was one who believed in prophetic action that displays truth in humility.

> Not only will it become clear that he is constantly embodying a prophetic presence in South African theology without necessarily using or claiming this label for his work, but also transcending the prophetic by moving beyond the mere concept to point and reveal the actual theological truth which is at stake in a given matter. (Laubscher 2019:261)[15]

The African context is always, or often, the context of action and Cilliers is a man of both the word and action. His actions are not less critical than the words of his mouth, there we find and hear good correspondences of true life, true hope, and true calling from the word of God as he shares and lives in and through his simple life. This sacrificial and simple life we also see in the life of the late Rev. Ibrahim Garba who was a preacher willing to risk everything for the sake of the gospel.

Another important contribution from the works of Cilliers on preaching is the idea of the blend of four voices. The preacher in Cilliers' view is not a loner, but rather one who speaks from one end to another, and one through whom God speaks his own voice to his people. This is how we see the four specific voices of 'God, biblical text, congregation, and preacher' (Laubscher 2019:269) blend into one single voice that gives a particular message to a particular people at a

[15] 'Again, the remote use of the prophetic here in the negative assumes and implies a great unsaid homiletical and prophetic insight, namely that true preaching is actually and inevitably supposed to be prophetic speech. He does not coin nor emphasize prophetic preaching per se, because it is not as if he does not mean, assume nor imply this when he sensitises us for what he believes preaching to be in its core. Again, the mere fact that he rarely uses the concept here does not mean it is marginal or somewhere isolated in his thought, but rather so central and integral that it is not even necessary to state the obvious.' (Laubscher 2019:263)

particular time.[16] The sequence of the arrangement of the voiced agents can be reordered as Bible, listeners, preacher, and God. But to me it would be more reasonable to follow the order of revelatory communication in that we start with God, through the Bible and preacher, then to the listeners. This means God always initiates, guides, and gives the word through the Bible and the preacher to the listeners or the congregation. But then the preacher is not away from the listeners but is also an active participant with them. In other words, when the preacher preaches the word he at the same time also listens to the word that he preaches as an instruction also for him coming from God.

It is interesting to take a close look also at 'the setting of the preacher's voice' (Laubscher 2019:269).[17] The idea of 'setting' in this context is not just about a certain background, but rather the actual texture, that which makes the voice of the preacher truly a preacher's voice. It is that which moves the words of the preacher from a distant mundaneness to a status of being sacred and special for the glory of God. This is the extraordinary function of the preacher as the preacher of the word of God. It is important to think of other textures, or settings, beyond just that of the preacher's voice. A lot about the preacher needs its proper setting for the act of preaching to be something truly new, a sacred and definite service unto God before men and women, and the service of self or of men and women in the name of God. Paul warns that anyone who focuses on listening to mere people rather than listening to God is only seeking for the approval of people; such a person cannot be the servant of God (Galatians 1:10). The apostle himself cautioned not only his hearers but his very self as well against the pitfall of self-service or the service of people in the name of God. The other areas of new orientation or new settings for the preaching of the word of God include the setting for the preacher as a person, to be aware of the seriousness of the task given to him by God and the urgency with which to deliver it to God's people. There is need also for the setting of life. This is the adjustment and orientation of life to be that which is solely given to God for the sake of God's own service. This is when God is given the self to use for the glory of God alone. There is also need for the setting of the eyes. Like Job in Job 31:1, the preacher must have pure eyes that see and delight in what is good, true, and holy. The eye is also a means of receiving and

[16]See Cilliers (2015b:367), quoted in footnote 12 above.
[17] See Cilliers (2015b:367), quoted in footnote 12 above.

giving information. There are instances when we preach by what we see, and how we see it; this is preaching with the eyes as well as the self. There is also need for the adjustment and setting of the heart. The heart of the preacher is the foundation of the development of life into the mind for the sake of concrete action. The heart can be the metaphor of the mind or desire of the person. This is meant to be set on what is good, true, and godly in order that the preacher may be truly inspired to be the actual mouthpiece of God. Lastly regarding the aspect of the setting of life is the setting of the preacher's mouth. This is a metaphor for speech action. What comes out of the preacher's mouth is deeply important for the sake of the actual delivery of the message of the Lord instead of its counterfeit. The urgent need and call is for the preacher to be actually set or cultured in ways that make him ready and effective for the service of God through the act of preaching the word.

Preaching the word is a risky activity because it does not always meet our human expectations. It always takes us by surprise. It always turns us around and at times even away from that which is truly meant to build the body of Christ. When as preachers we allow personal ideas or practices to take over, we more often than not jeopardise the sanctity of our calling and tasks as preachers of the word. This is the actual crisis of being that erupts from within and disrupts that which is also without.

> The real and actual theological secret-or-crisis concerning the preaching event is often related to where this differentiation leads to separation and isolation, and not rather to intrinsic being-in-relatedness. (Laubscher 2019:270)

Nevertheless, the preacher's self-giving to God to be a useful instrument for the sake of building the body of Christ against all odds remains 'the strange beauty of serving the Word' (Laubscher 2019:283).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the act of preaching as risk for the sake of the gospel is urgently needed today. Preaching as risk could be seen from the above discussion as prophetic preaching. It focuses on declaring the word of God against all odds. It calls for true freedom of life and courage; these call for good progress

beyond fear, fear of ridicule, fear of rejection, fear of being seen and classified as fools, etc. This kind of fear has a way of paralysing us and keeping us away from the right advancement for the sake of the kingdom of God. Fear in this context may be manifested in many ways, for example as the fear of death in taking risk for the sake of the kingdom of God, as fear of losing popularity and income (i.e. money) especially in the case of prosperity preachers, and as the fear of cultural or ideological resistance that may even lead to persecution and shame. Fear may be manifested as another kind of love, love for self, tradition, and ideology. This is the fear that hinders changes that are meant to reorganise the context of life towards its freedom and fruitfulness. According to Cilliers this kind of fear was the paralysing issue that resisted the change needed in South Africa from apartheid to a free society. He explains that,

> We have, for instance, experienced fear in the past – fear for losing what is known, fear for change. We seem to be experiencing fear again – fear for the future, fear born out of uncertainty. (Cilliers 2015b:383)

Nevertheless, against the odds of fear and uncertainty, there have been voices on the horizon, serious voices for good and for ill. But most definitely the new creative voices of freedom of light are those worth hearing and listening to now more than ever. Pointing to those controversial periods and moments in history, Cilliers (2015b:383) admitted that 'We have heard voices that created worlds of darkness, and we have heard voices that created worlds of light'.

> We need preachers who subvert the status quo, who rock the systemic boat, who rattle the cages in which we have become so comfortable. We need preachers who point towards, and embody, the biblical alternative, that is, who understand something of the subversive character of biblical texts. (Cilliers 2009:193)

This is the strength of the word of God in the midst of human weakness. The coming of Jesus Christ and his demonstration of love on the cross has revolutionised our view and understanding of God. Jürgen Moltmann (1973), in Christ, saw a crucified God. This is not the God of monstrous strength and orders, but rather the new revelation of God who identified with our

weaknesses and brokenness. The new imagery given at the cross is not that of the strength and almightiness of God but rather the self-giving emptiness and weakness of God.

> He is a vulnerable, broken God. Preaching about this God might indeed seem foolish to many, might sound like silly stuttering. But this stuttering is all about the wisdom and power of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-30). (Cilliers 2009:196)

It is in this vocation, for the glory of God, '[w]e have become *fools for the sake of Christ*…' (1 Corinthians 4:9-10, as quoted in Cilliers 2009:190).

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The Tentmaking Ministry of Apostle Paul and its Replication in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria

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Abstract

Insufficient remuneration is given to gospel ministers in many Nigerian churches. Some churches may not even pay their ministers regularly. Undoubtedly, many churches have fallen short of their financial support commitments to their clergy. However, Apostle Paul renounced his claim to receive financial assistance from the church and chose to work with his hands to protect the gospel's integrity lest the gospel be hindered. This paper, therefore, addresses the tentmaking ministry of Apostle Paul and its replication in the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria. The paper adopted the historical-critical exegetical method to explain the chosen biblical texts and the ethnographic method to elicit data from respondents in the RCCG, Oyo Province 9, Oyo State, Nigeria. The study reveals that many RCCG pastors adopted the tentmaking method of Apostle Paul, labouring diligently to expand the church of Christ without taking remuneration from the church after the order of Apostle Paul.

Introduction

Ministers of the gospel in some contemporary Nigerian churches receive inadequate salaries. Not all churches give their ministers sufficient pay, and some do not even pay regularly. Many churches, undoubtedly, have not provided their ministers with the necessary financial support. When

considering the necessities for himself and his family's subsistence, a full-time minister's monthly wage is insufficient (Boyo 1994). Many Nigerian churches have been impacted by many issues resulting from this phenomenon such as financial scandals concerning many gospel ministers, the splitting of churches, and a lack of integrity in many ministers, just to mention a few.

Wiersbe (2007:490) asserts that, from the early church era to the present, a misguided view of money has had a detrimental impact on the gospel. Overemphasis on money by many ministers through the receipt of improper gifts and emoluments from the hearers of the gospel has tended to water down the message of the gospel in recent times, which has led to some forms of hindrance to the gospel, but Apostle Paul disassociated himself from such by repudiating his claim to the church's financial assistance 'lest the gospel be hindered' (1 Cor. 9:12, KJV throughout). The majority of preachers and missionaries may appear to the unconverted to be merely engaged in so-called religious rackets designed to defraud innocent people of their money. So, people who use religion as an instrument to manipulate and take advantage of others are undoubtedly widespread in the contemporary world (1 Tim. 6:3-16). However, by maintaining his financial independence and the integrity of the gospel, and by offering the gospel 'free of charge' (1 Cor. 9:18) based on his labours in the church as a tentmaker, Paul was able to reach many people for Christ (Barton 1993:897). So, Paul worked to provide for his necessities. The same hands that were working for God to spread the gospel were equally working to provide for his necessities so that he would not covet any man's silver or gold, nor be a burden to the church.

Besides, this is an age when those who are expected to support the ministers are even expecting to be supported by the ministers themselves. Therefore, to avoid ministers of the gospel living at the mercy of the church, this study focuses on a 'tent-making ministry' (Witherington 2008). It advocates an approach for ministers of the gospel, who – with this approach – are encouraged to have other sources of income besides the church and thus not depend on the church for their total welfare, since members of the church may be limited in totally providing for all the needs of ministers of the gospel. However, some critical questions need to be asked. Why did Paul need to engage in tentmaking ministry to support himself instead of relying on financial support from the churches he planted? Did God direct Paul to adopt the

tentmaking style of ministry? To what extent can ministers not do God's work on a full-time basis and yet fulfil God's call upon their lives? Can a tentmaking ministry make a minister deviate from the call of God upon his life, or make him less effective for the kingdom of God? Besides, how can this study help the ministers to be financially independent and not be a burden to the church? Can Paul's tentmaking ministry in the first century have relevance for twenty-first-century ministers of the gospel? How has the tentmaking ministry strategy helped believers in any way to fulfil God's call upon their lives and also to expand the frontier of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) within Nigeria and abroad? These questions form the basis for this study and scholarly examination, to gain a holistic understanding of the tentmaking ministry of Apostle Paul and its replication in the RCCG.

Methodology

The paper adopted the historical-critical exegetical method to explain the chosen biblical texts, while a contextual approach was applied to analyse how the paradigms of the tentmaking ministry of Apostle Paul are understood and appropriated in the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Ukpong (2001:151) affirms that the contextual approach is

> a hermeneutic that involves engagement in the practical issues of society with the social, cultural, political, economic and religious realities of the interpretative community as operational parameters.

A descriptive research design was adopted in this study to portray accurately the tentmaking ministry of Apostle Paul and its replication in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Oyo Province 9, Nigeria. Observations of the study were described and discussed objectively. A purposive sampling technique was also used in this study. This necessitated the deliberate selection of RCCG ministers from Oyo Province 9, Oyo State, Nigeria. Simple random sampling was also used to select randomly ten interview respondents (pastors) across three zonal headquarters out of eighteen within Oyo Province 9, because the study could not capture all the ministers in those places.

Concept of Tentmaking Ministers

According to Siemens (1992:246-247), tentmaking ministers are mission-oriented believers who, like Paul, earn their living through secular jobs and use their free time for cross-cultural ministry at work. She goes on to say that a tentmaker might increase his/her pay through donations, and a missionary might work a second job to increase his/her income from donors or to get more exposure to unbelievers. Therefore, tentmakers are full-time ministers of the gospel despite their secular jobs. Their secular jobs only serve as avenues to spread the gospel of Christ as they interact with many people from different walks of life. Siemens' opinion is remarkable, for it exposes the life of a good tentmaking minister; however, ministers of the gospel engaging in tentmaking ministry is a voluntary act of sacrifice, not compulsion. Paul willingly chose to be a tentmaking minister, not because he did not have a right to welfare from the churches to whom he ministered but just not to be a burden to the church of God, hence the focus of this study.

McKnight (2010) defines a tentmaking minister as a leader or pastor who is both pastoring a church and working at another job. He cites the case of Paul who laboured 'night and day' to meet his own needs in order not to burden the church. With a similar perspective, Barclay (1981:135-136) describes Paul as a tentmaking minister owing to the nature of his former life as a Jewish rabbi, for every rabbi in Judaism is required to have a trade, refrain from accepting payment for sermons and teaching, and earn a living by working with his hands. He argues further that Jews glorified labour and loved it; hence they believed that 'He who does not teach his son a trade teaches him robbery' (Barclay 1981:136). Thus, the rabbis were always aware of what it was like to be a working-class person and never withdrew themselves from society as teachers. In this regard, Barclay (1981:135-136) describes every minister who is both teaching and preaching the word of God as a rabbi and yet doing a secular job as a tentmaking minister. He concludes that this helps Paul to always boast about the fact that he was not depending on any man for his sustenance. In the words of Winter (2002:1-2), tentmaking missionaries do not only use tentmaking as just a means to be self-supported but also as a creative strategy to enter foreign countries for missionary work. He argues further that tentmaking for Paul was a strategic plan for him to enter various cities and regions to preach the gospel to both common and influential people. Winter

concludes by saying that many of the early missionaries after the Reformation were tent-making missionaries themselves.

Whitlock, Arnold, and Ellis (2004:41) point out that an individual called to the ministry whose primary source of income comes from sources other than the church is known as a tentmaking pastor. Citing Paul as a prime example from the New Testament, they rename a minister who makes a living from other sources as a 'bi-vocational minister.' This research subscribes to these scholarly views on the meaning of tentmaking. However, a tentmaking minister may not repudiate his right of support from the church if he is being compensated by the church for his work, for the workman is worthy of his wages; but when it is not convenient for the church to support him fully for his welfare, to avoid being a burden to the church, tentmaking should be the option.

Jewish and Hellenistic Backgrounds to Paul's Tentmaking Ministry

If Paul was influenced by two worlds in which he lived – the Greco-Roman and the Jewish worlds – then, since culture and religion are interwoven, Paul's tentmaking ministry needs to be evaluated via the cultural backgrounds that might have influenced it. His Jewish and Hellenistic backgrounds, among others, have to be examined and clearly understood to gain a holistic understanding of his tentmaking ministry. In Jewish society, there was a rule that all rabbis must learn a trade so that they would be in touch with the ordinary life of the people they taught (Hargreaves 1990:170). According to Marshall (1980:293), rabbis were expected to carry out their legal and religious duties without charging for them; therefore, it became necessary for them to have additional sources of revenue. Besides, in ancient Jewish culture, Jewish parents were obligated to ensure that their sons learned a trade so that, in the event of adversity, they would not be dependent on others but would be able to provide for their basic needs through the learned trade. This tradition may have influenced Paul's choice to renounce financial support from the Corinthian church.

According to Atowoju (2004:47), this reveals the rationale behind Paul's tentmaking and Jesus Christ's carpentry. In addition, because Jews were

against indolence, Paul, along with Aquila and Priscilla, learned how to make leather from the hair and skin of goats, a process known as 'cilicium' which is used to make sandals, tents, and carpets. Therefore, Paul supported himself and his team members by working as a tentmaker during his mission across the Mediterranean world, refusing to be a burden to any church. No wonder he was bold to say to the Corinthians thus: 'We labour working with our own hands' (1 Cor. 4:12); 'for I seek not what is yours but you' (2 Cor. 12:14). Besides, Paul was aware of the rabbinic tradition that it was improper for a scribe or rabbi to get paid for their instruction; hence, many of them also pursued other careers in addition to studying and imparting the law. Rabbi Gamaliel III comments on this fact thus:

> An excellent thing is the study of Torah combined with some secular occupation, for the labour by them both puts sin out of one's mind. All the study of Torah which is not combined with work will ultimately be futile and lead to sin. (Quoted in Bruce 1981:367-368)

From the above views, it is observed that Paul must have learned the trade of tentmaking from his youth as part of his Jewish education, which later influenced his decision to be financially independent in the work of ministry and not to be a burden to the church of God while he carried out his mission passionately.

The city of Tarsus was known to be one of the largest trade centres and a rich city on the Mediterranean coast. The city attracted many traders from all over the Roman Empire (Bruce 1981:234). However, merchants from Tarsus were renowned for their passion for their trade. So, Paul who grew up in this famous city probably inherited the craft of tentmaking from his father and later became highly skilled in it as a young man. This skill of tentmaking, therefore, provided him immediate credibility and employment wherever he went to preach the gospel, and it became a major financial support for him during his missionary career (Atowoju 2004:47). Paul refused to conform to the cultural norms of his days in the Hellenistic world which disparaged manual labour as demeaning. Tidball (1993:884) opines that Paul probably imitated the Cynics, who, instead of viewing manual labour as demeaning, adopted it as an ideal way of life and as how a teacher could model his philosophy to his disciples.

No wonder Paul admonishes the church of Thessalonica to imitate him by working with their own hands and not being lazy (2 Thess. 3:7-9).

Diessmann (quoted in Hock 1998:4-5) refers to Paul as 'Paul the tent-maker who worked at his trade for wages which were the economic basis of his existence'. They argue further that Paul was a man of noble birth who came from a wealthy family. However, choosing to work as a tentmaker seems inconsistent with his family status. The reason for his choice could be traceable to the rabbinic tradition of combining the study of the law with learning a trade for 'the Jew who intended to devote himself to the service of the law learnt a trade for the sake of his independence' (Coutsoumpos 2015:69).

This view is supported by Garland (2003:417) who rightly observes that Paul identified with persons from lower social classes because of his sense of purpose and support system despite having a background that placed him on par with members of the upper classes. He chose to be financially self-supporting through his trade of tentmaking while preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. According to Blomberg (1994:173), this was intended to preserve the integrity of the gospel in the world then lest he should be mistaken for one of those Greek philosophers or religious teachers who went about to exploit people in various ways through their teaching profession. Many of those philosophers refused to work at a trade because it was a demeaning source of support for people of their category in that society, for it denotes choosing the lower status of a common labourer (Fee 1987:399), but Paul ignored the shame of working as a common labourer because he wanted to be financially independent of the church. Though, as an apostle, he had the right to receive financial support from the church, he chose not to use that advantage for the sake of the gospel's integrity.

In addition, the conversion experience of Paul gave him an unusual zeal that made him see the necessity to endure any condition for the sake of Christ's gospel. He said, 'Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel' (1 Cor. 9:16). Apparently, his trade gave him a significant opportunity to preach the gospel in the marketplace for free and in the churches that he planted, so he became an independent influence on all institutions or groups that could have supported him monetarily (1 Cor. 9:18). He also preached the gospel while he was in prison (Phil. 1:12), while sailing, and when shipwrecked (Acts 27:23-26).

So, it may be concluded that Paul's use of his trade to support church ministry was intentional and expedient because he was influenced by his passion to spread the gospel of Christ at all costs. His farewell statement in Acts 20:22-24 lends credence to this fact.

Besides, when Jesus was sending out the disciples on a mission trip in Matthew 10:8, he said: 'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons: freely you have received, freely give'. The words of Jesus to his disciples: 'Freely you have received, freely give,' (NKJV) which implies not to take pay for preaching the gospel, might have also influenced Paul's decision to preach the gospel 'free of charge' and to relinquish his undeniable right that the progress of the gospel might not be hindered. Jesus did not want his disciples to be a burden to the recipients of their message. This instruction of Jesus may imply tentmaking, that is, working to make a living and thus being able to support themselves (Jones 1999:183). Barclay (1975:367-368) posited that a rabbi was required by law to impart his knowledge freely and without compensation. It was against the law for the rabbi to accept payment for imparting the law that Moses had freely chosen to learn from God. It is also stated that a rabbi could only take payment under one condition: that the rabbi teach a child. This is because raising a child is a parent's responsibility, and no one else should be expected to put in the time or effort to teach a child. However, higher education has to be provided without charge.

However, it is pertinent to note that tentmaking ministry was Paul's missionary policy and practice to be financially independent (1 Cor. 9:12, 15, 18), not the early church tradition. Paul pointed out that some other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas enjoyed financial support from the Corinthians' church (1 Cor. 9:5). The early apostles adopted the practice of accepting gifts and hospitality from the community to which they preached. This raised a question in the mind of the Corinthians when Paul refused financial support and they probably asked:

> If it is the apostles' right to get their living by preaching the gospel, why did Paul refuse to accept support for preaching unless he considered himself inferior? (Harris 1994:693)

So, not all the apostles engaged in tentmaking ministry but only Paul and Barnabas.

Overview of Paul's Tentmaking Ministry in Acts 18:1-3 and 1 Thessalonians 2:9-10

Paul's tentmaking ministry is evident in all three of his missionary journeys. Although Paul makes no mention of tentmaking during his first missionary voyage (Acts 13-14), he does mention it in 1 Corinthians when he discusses his rights as an apostle: 'Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?' (1 Cor. 9:6). This implies that, when Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary tour, Paul laboured to support himself. Siemens (1999:737) posited that Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in the Galatian-Phrygian region and on the island of Cyprus during their first missionary journey. According to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 9:6, they were already financially independent at the time and carried on with this practice until they split up into two different groups.

Acts and the Pauline epistles both provide proof of Paul's tentmaking endeavours during his second missionary tour. He made references to his manual labour at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:9), at Corinth (Acts 18:3; 1 Cor. 4:12) and also at Ephesus (Acts 19:11-12, 20:34). Therefore, history attests to it that the cited passages refer to the second and third missionary journeys of Apostle Paul. Hence, it is evident that Paul adopted the policy of self-sustenance by working with his trade during all his missionary journeys (Hock 2007:26). According to Hock (1998:5), Paul was using his trade as a means to attract new friends in any city he went to.

Acts 18:1-3

> Μετὰ ταῦτα χωρισθεὶς ἐκ τῶν Ἀθηνῶν ἦλθεν εἰς Κόρινθον.
>
> καὶ εὑρών τινα Ἰουδαῖον ὀνόματι Ἀκύλαν, Ποντικὸν τῷ γένει, προσφάτως ἐληλυθότα ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας καὶ Πρίσκιλλαν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ διὰ τὸ διατεταχέναι

> Κλαύδιον χωρίζεσθαι πάντας τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἀπὸ τῆς Ῥώμης, προσῆλθεν αὐτοῖς,
>
> καὶ διὰ τὸ ὁμότεχνον εἶναι ἔμενεν παρ' αὐτοῖς καὶ ἠργάζετο, ἦσαν γὰρ σκηνοποιοὶ τῇ τέχνῃ (SBLGNT).
>
> And after these things having departed from Athens, he came to Corinth.
>
> And having found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who recently came from Italy and Priscilla, his wife because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome, he came to them;
>
> and because they do the same trade he stayed with them and he was working, for they were tent-makers by craft. (Acts 18:1-3)

The phrase 'And after these things having departed from Athens, he came to Corinth' ('Μετὰ ταῦτα χωρισθεὶς ἐκ τῶν Ἀθηνῶν ἦλθεν εἰς Κόρινθον') points to Paul's missionary itinerary leading him from Athens to Corinth, having completed his work in the former place. His Athenian ministry was short-lived; he did not spend a long time there. In Athens, Paul had encounters with Greek philosophers and he was able to appeal to their intelligence and thus reveal the truth of God's word to them. Hence, he gained some converts there (Richards 2004:790). On getting to Corinth, he met with a Christian couple, Aquila and Priscila. *Κόρινθον* (Corinth) was placed strategically to the west and south of the short isthmus that connects the Peloponnesus to the northern portion of the continent. Being a city that developed into a distinct senatorial province and a global city renowned for business, manufacturing, opulence, and immorality, it was a natural crossroads for land and sea travel and was among the Roman Empire's largest and most important commercial centres. As the primary route between Rome and its eastern provinces, Corinth attracted traders from all across the Roman Empire at the time Apostle Paul arrived there for his missionary work. As a result, a large number of Corinthian citizens were so affluent that their ostentation and wealth became emblematic of the city (Coutsoumpos 2015:35-37).

Verse two of Acts 18 says, 'καὶ εὑρών τινα Ἰουδαῖον ὀνόματι Ἀκύλαν' or 'And having found a certain Jew named Aquila'. This implies that, at Corinth, Paul met with a couple named Aquila and Priscilla who were tentmakers/leatherworkers who had just arrived from Rome. According to Bruce (1980:390), it appears that Luke and Paul often bring Priscilla's name first before her husband's rather than vice versa (see verses 18 and 26); hence, many scholars inferred that she might be of higher rank than her husband. Luke makes a similar introduction in Acts 5:1 of 'a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira'. According to Acts 16:19, Paul stayed in Corinth for one and a half years with Aquila and Priscilla, who were tentmakers. As Witherington (2012:36-37) rightly asserts, Priscilla was a renowned lady from Rome and Aquila her spouse was a native of Pontus. Before they met with Paul at Corinth, they had been followers of Jesus while living in Rome. They joined Paul as tentmakers upon their arrival in Corinth. Emperor Claudius must have expelled the couple from Rome due to the dispute in synagogues and the Jewish community over the identity of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Witherington (2012:538) notes that the New Testament constantly mentions this couple together, and Priscilla's name usually appears first (see Acts 18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19). According to Suetonius, the ancient historian, as cited by Kurz, the incident was connected to an internal Jewish conflict over a particular 'Chrestus' – possibly a mispronunciation of the Latin name for Christ *Chrestus* (Suetonius refers to *impulsore Chresto*) – and thus led to the expulsion of the Jews (Kurz 2013:357). Paul spent several months working with this couple while he was at Corinth, where he spent one and a half years. He later makes reference to his tentmaking which helps him to support himself financially in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:12).

However, Paul shared the same trade and faith with Aquila and Priscilla; hence, they were compatible. The Bible says:

> and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tent-makers. (Acts 18:3)

Aquila and Priscilla were likely prosperous and operated a sizable tentmaking or, more broadly, leatherworking business. Their homes were big enough to accommodate the neighbourhood churches (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19). Hence,

they were capable of partnering with Paul in their tentmaking business (Dunn 1996:86). Marshall (1980:293) noted that Luke most likely would have mentioned the couple's conversion if there had been signs that they were not Christians before meeting with Paul. The phrase *καὶ ἠργάζετο* ('and he was working') echoes Luke's opinion that Paul was always tentmaking to support himself financially so that he could be a good example and set himself apart from religious and philosophical instructors who sought personal gain and charged for their instruction (Kurz 2013:356). This is in obedience to rabbinic tradition that religious instructions should be free. Bruce (1980:391) cites Hillel who said, 'He who makes a worldly use of the crown of the Torah shall waste away'. In addition, 'ἦσαν γὰρ σκηνοποιοὶ τῇ τέχνῃ' ('for they were tent-makers by craft') points to their occupation being tentmaking. Johnson (1992:322) posits that in the Hellenistic culture groups and clubs founded on common occupations were prominent. Paul's friendship with this couple served as an illustration of this; since then, they had grown close and were a vital component of Paul's team even in the ministry. The term 'tent-maker' could more broadly apply to a 'leather-worker', which appears to be the case here. Tents were produced in Paul's home province from goat's hair cloth, known as *cilicium*, or else out of leather (Marshall 1980:293). Luke identifies them as *skenopoioí* which means 'tentmakers', but it could include a range of leatherworking (Johnson 1992:322).

Bromiley (1985:1044) points out that the word *skenopois* is a combination of two Greek words *skene* and *poieo*. It seems to imply 'tentmaker', and, as tents are sometimes constructed of leather, it might also indicate 'leather-worker'. However, it refers to pitching a tent generally. Polhill (1992:483) asserts that some interpretations have proposed that Paul might not have worked with leather at all but rather with *cilicium*, a fabric made from weaved goat's hair that was frequently used to make tents. Given the origins of *cilicium* and its name, Paul most likely learned the craft in Cilicia, the province of his birth. However, as Kurz (2013:356) posited, Paul may have constructed tents during the week, or even at night (see 1 Thess. 2:9), but he visited the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day to convince Greeks and Jews alike of the truth of the gospel of Christ. In this way, he distinguished himself from religious hucksters and Greek philosophers who were charging people for their teachings.

In Acts 20:33-35, Paul gave his example of manual labour as a ministry model to encourage the Ephesian elders not to be a financial burden to the church or focus on monetary gains in their ministerial work but to be a blessing to the church instead by working with their hands (Peterson 2009:572-573). He meant to admonish the Ephesian elders to do ministry with their minds on helping the weak and the needy without any expectation of financial or material reward. Kruger (2020:32) asserts that

> Paul is telling them that in all things, including his self-support, he is showing them that believers should work hard in order to be in a position to help the weak and follow Jesus' command to give.

Peterson (2009:572) lends credence to this view by saying that Paul's intention in this passage

> is to warn leaders of the dangers inherent in their position and to commend his solution to the problem of greed.

By his statement, 'I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing', Paul's perspective on wealth and belongings demonstrated the impact of Jesus' teachings (see Luke 12:13-34, 16:1-15). Therefore, it is very clear from these views that Paul chose to support his missionary enterprise through manual labour to use his example to teach the Ephesian church leaders to use their leadership position to help others. However, the reasons given to other church leaders in Corinth and Thessalonica differ (Kruger 2020:36).

This attitude, however, distinguished Apostle Paul from traveling philosophers and religious quacks who profited from their teachings during the Greco-Roman era (Peterson 2009:572-573). Therefore, as Kruger (2020:163) rightly asserted,

> If biblical tent-making is going to be rightly practiced, then the minister may not accept payment, in any form, from the church where tent-making is being utilized. Tent-making must be practiced utilizing complete self-support.

1 Thessalonians 2:9-10

> Μνημονεύετε γάρ, ἀδελφοί, τὸν κόπον ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν μόχθον, νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἐργαζόμενοι πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐπιβαρῆσαί τινα ὑμῶν ἐκηρύξαμεν εἰς ὑμᾶς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ.
>
> ὑμεῖς μάρτυρες καὶ ὁ θεός, ὡς ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως καὶ ἀμέμπτως ὑμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐγενήθημεν (SBLGNT)
>
> For you remember brothers our labour and toil, working night and day, in order not to burden any one of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.
>
> You are witnesses, and God also, how holily and righteously and blamelessly we were toward you believers. (1 Thess. 2:9-10)

Paul asks the Thessalonian Christians to remember his toil and hardship. Paul could have claimed his rights as an apostle and requested the church support him (1 Thess. 2:6), but, instead, he sacrificially laboured with his own hands to minister to the church. The two nouns, *κόπος* and *μόχθος*, have a similar range of meanings. The first might point to the fatigue of manual labour while the latter points to the hardship involved. While one could focus on the first as often describing missionary activity (1 Thess. 3:5), several considerations point to the terms as a formula for the fatigue and hardship of labour (Richard 1995:84). Bromiley (1985:453) points out that, in secular Greek, *κόπος* implies 'beating', 'weariness', or 'exertion' from physical labour which may result in fatigue or stress. He adds that the word also describes Paul's strenuous labour in 1 Corinthians 4:12, in which he engaged to finance his ministry and, since it was done voluntarily, which he counted as part of his kingdom service for Christ (Bromiley 1985:453). Thayer (1974:419) opines that *μόχθος* means 'hard and difficult labour', 'toil', 'travail', 'hardship', or 'distress' (see 2 Cor. 11:27; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8). However, these two words were used by Paul to explain the kind of toil and hardship he went through by working with his own hands to support himself in Thessalonica. Hence, it is understood that combining preaching with such a strenuous kind of labour might have been stressful for him.

The expression 'night and day' (*nuktós kaí heméras*) is identical in form and function to its usage in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, namely used in the genitive to express 'time within which' and hyperbolically stresses the endless, exhausting hours devoted to one's task (Richard 1995:84-85). Weima (2014:220) posits that Paul describes himself and his fellow missionaries as working nights and days. His letters contain several instances of the word pair 'night and day', which are two nouns (1 Thess. 3:10). However, Wallace (1996:124) asserts that Paul is not suggesting here that he and his colleagues were working twenty-four-hour shifts among the Thessalonians, but that they laboured both in daytime and nighttime. He adds that the stress of the words here is not on the duration but on the kind of time in which they worked. Wallace (1996:124-125) further argues that the phrase 'in order not to burden any one of you' in verse 9 shows Paul's reason for the long hours of work apart from his proclamation of the gospel. This is also emphasised in 1 Corinthians 9:12. He would not want his hearers to see him as one of those itinerant teachers who go about with greed collecting money for teaching people (Weima 2014:223). The construction *πρὸς τὸ μὴ* with the infinitive gives credence to this fact.

And when he says, 'while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God', Paul employed the verb *kerysso* ('announce' or 'proclaim') as a synonym for 'declaring or speaking the gospel', which suggests a general meaning for the term as describing the apostolic mission or work of preaching (see Rom. 10:14-15; 1 Cor. 15:11). Richard (1995:102-103) argues that the tandem construction of verse 9 regarding working and preaching can be interpreted as suggesting that Paul was preaching while working, which we call 'tentmaking'. Besides, the word *ἐργαζόμενοι* implies not only the financial independence of Paul and his colleagues but also their desire to give their labour as a way of sharing their lives (verse 8) and to present the gospel without selfish gain or apostolic ulterior motive. This agrees with his last words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:34 – 'You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions'.

Paul and his colleagues fearlessly preached the gospel and freely and generously shared their time and efforts with their converts without being a burden to them, and the Thessalonian Christians were witnesses to what Paul had said. Paul affirms thus: 'how holily, righteously and blamelessly we were toward you believers' (1 Thess. 2:10), or 'ὡς ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως καὶ ἀμέμπτως

ὑμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐγενήθημεν'. At first the *ὡς* ('how') statement describes the apostolic mission by the use of three unusual adverbs: *ὁσίως* ('holily', 'devoutly'), *δικαίως* ('righteously', 'uprightly'), and *ἀμέμπτως* ('blamelessly'). The first, *ὁσίως*, occurs only here in Pauline usage; the second, *δικαίως*, in its adverbial form, appears one other time in his letters (1 Cor. 15:3); and the third, *ἀμέμπτως*, is slightly more frequent in his writings (adverb: 1 Thess. 2:10, 5:23; adjective: 1 Thess. 3:13; Phil. 2:15) which summarises his conduct vis-à-vis God and the Thessalonian Christians (Richard 1995:102-103). Bromiley (1985:734) asserts that *ὁσίως* refers to deeds that are viewed as 'sacred', 'lawful', and 'dutiful', which are right from the perspective of ethical behaviour and faith, regardless of whether they are founded in heavenly precept, ordinary law, longstanding custom, or inward character. Hence, Paul presents his manner of labour and conduct as a model for the new converts to emulate.

Paul's Reasons for Tentmaking Ministry

The fact that Paul's self-supporting apostleship is for him a matter of deeply held conviction is clear not only from the exemplary significance he makes of it (2 Thess. 3:7-10) and the rigour with which he defends it (2 Cor. 11:7-15, 12:13-16; see also 1 Cor. 9:1-18) but also from the simple fact that he chose this way for himself. The reasons for this way of life and why he did not make use of a right to church support, which he acknowledges he could claim (2 Thess. 3:9; 1 Cor. 9:4-17), may have been due to several factors. The main motivation for Paul was financial independence. Bruce, as cited by Steffen and Barnett (2002), asserts that Paul's repeated proclamations in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:9:12, 15, 18) and his last words to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:33-34) that he refused to take financial support from the church but instead worked with his hands to support himself and his team members financially affirm that it was a voluntary decision, as against some people's opinion that he was making tents only when he had no money in his hand. Byun (2023:88) also supports this opinion thus: 'Paul's general missionary policy was that he maintained financial independence'.

In addition, Bruce, as cited by Steffen and Barnett (2002), clearly stated thus:

> Paul scrupulously maintained this tradition as a Christian preacher, partly as a matter of principle, partly by way of

> example to his converts, and partly to avoid giving his critics any opportunity to say that his motives were mercenary.

In addition, Ogereau (2014:4) argues that Paul's choice to build tents appears to have been motivated by his adherence to the orthodox Jewish principle that states that a rabbi who has not inherited the wealth of his family must support himself by trade if he must teach the Torah because it is considered improper for a rabbi to receive payment for their services. In a similar view, Byun (2023:88) observes that Jewish instructors would teach the Torah while earning a living through a trade, a practice that dates back to the time of Jesus. He argues further that Paul's financial strategies were comparable to those of Cynic philosophers, who frequently worked hard with their own hands to maintain their financial independence.

Steffen and Barnett (2002) further asserted that Paul combined tentmaking with ministry to be able to identify with the unsaved people to whom he was sent to minister the gospel so that he could 'become all things to all people'. Similarly, Zuck (1998:22) asserts that Paul's self-employment and his refusal to depend on the church for his financial support was to help him preach the gospel at no cost. Paul wished to steer clear of anything that would impede the gospel's advancement. He said:

> we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel. (1 Cor. 9:12)

Bromiley (1985:453) argues that the fundamental notion conveyed by the Greek word *enkope*, meaning 'obstacle', is 'blocking the way'. Paul perceived that he could become a barrier to the gospel if he exercised his right to support, appearing as though he was working for his gain, or if he scared off the underprivileged. His top priority, therefore, was to ensure that the gospel was not hindered by his conduct.

Hock (2007:25-26) asserts that Paul may have eventually used tentmaking as a method of support throughout his missionary journeys because it appears to be a mobile enterprise. He, therefore, relied mostly on this trade to support himself while on his missionary travels, staying in different places (see Acts

18:3, 19:11-12, 20:34; 1 Cor. 4:12). On the contrary, Kruger (2020:161) argues that tentmaking was a deliberate decision made by Paul, but he applied the tentmaking 'method selectively based on the missiological and evangelistic context'. However, this was not because the churches could not support him financially for he had argued that ministers of the gospel have the right to support from the church (1 Cor. 9:3-14); he intended to explain his 'free of charge ministry' to believers (Hock 2007:31).

Replication of Tentmaking Ministry in RCCG

Although the authority of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) strongly believes in the teaching of the Bible on ministers' right to welfare, as argued by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:3-15, they equally subscribe to the Pauline strategy of tentmaking ministry to enhance the rapid expansion of the church and to enable many believers to fulfil God's purposes upon their lives. Besides, it is to enable the church to reach the unreached souls and win them for Christ. However, it is not all ministers in the Redeemed Christian Church of God who are being paid by the church. Some ministers are working for the church, shepherding the flock of God and planting churches, yet they are not receiving any salary from the church. These ministers are called 'tent-makers' (or part-timers). They are fully recognised by the church authority as ministers who have the call of God upon their lives and faithful team members of the General Overseer, just like Aquila and Priscilla to Apostle Paul. They are 'lay ministers' who give their spiritual and financial support to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and expand the frontiers of RCCG. These preachers have contributed to the full realisation of the Redeemed Christian Church of God's mission by offering their hands, hearts, and resources to the work of God.

The vision of RCCG is to spread like wildfire by planting the parishes of the church in every street within a five-minute walk distance and to have the members of this church in every family in the world. So, to accomplish this vision, the church employs more tentmaking ministers who have the call of God upon their lives and who have been part and parcel of the church, having gone through a series of biblical training organised by the church to equip them spiritually and to help in fulfilling this vision. Many of the respondents asserted that about 65-70% of the ministers (pastors) in the Redeemed Christian Church of God are tentmaking ministers. However, like Paul, the main motivation of

these tentmaking ministers goes beyond financial or material gain but is the gospel. They insisted not on their rights to financial support from the church and refused to be renumerated monthly by the church because their motivation was not money but service. These tentmaking ministers have different professions where they earn their living, from which they spend their money on the work of God in the church. Hence, they help reduce the administrative costs of the church (Ajayi 2024). Just like Paul, they are not a burden to the church of God. Even some church members look up to them for financial assistance (Ajayi 2024). They wanted to maintain financial independence. This idea of independence is highly valued in today's society, where many men of God are financial hucksters, always reaching out to potential churchgoers for donations. By not burdening the churches with their needs, they could fulfil their pastoral care responsibilities without compromising their ministry through the demand for their welfare (Francis 1998:48).

According to Pastor Olukayode Oyeniyi (2024), aged 53, their main motivation is to fulfil the call of God upon their lives. He adds that he sees the church work as the main assignment God gave to him and that he only does secular work to earn a living like Paul. This view is also supported by Pastor Olufemi Adebowale (2024), aged 54, among other people. He argued that working for God is a calling, and one is only using one's talent for the Lord. However, being a tentmaker does not affect one's effectiveness in the work of God. These tentmaking ministers help in planting more parishes and spreading the church of God every year through the annual church evangelistic programme tagged 'Let's Go A-fishing', which comes up every Easter and Christmas period and mainly focuses on planting more churches in the Redeemed Christian Church of God. However, only those tentmaking ministers whose workplaces are outside the town where their parishes are situated are not always on the ground for mid-week services, but they make themselves available for Sunday services and some other major services of the church. According to them, one can hardly see the difference between the work of a full-time minister and a tentmaking minister in the church. Both of them are effective, productive, and fruitful in the work of the kingdom.

Pastor Olufemi Adebowale (2024) asserted that one did not have to be paid for the work of God before one could be effective in it. He said that it is all

about the fulfilment of God's purpose in one's life. This agrees with Paul's motivation for preaching the gospel free of charge. Paul says: 'For necessity is laid upon me. Woe unto me if I do not preach the gospel' (1 Cor. 9:16). Like Paul, these gospel ministers believe that sharing the gospel brings rewards with which the exercise of other rights and privileges is not comparable. So, they are passionate about preaching the gospel 'free of charge'. However, this suggests that, whether they are supported by the church or not, they must preach the gospel, for it is a divine commission given unto them to carry out. In addition, any of these tentmaking ministers can rise to the level of Special Assistant to the General Overseer, which is a rank very close to the rank of Assistant General Overseer. This is to show that they are well recognised and utilised by the church (Ogunsola 2024).

Recommendations and Conclusion

Paul wanted to preach the gospel 'free of charge' to be able to live out the message that everyone is entitled to God's grace via Christ. However, as for the unimpeded sharing of the gospel, this study advocates that gospel ministers should seek financial independence for their welfare and withdraw from total dependence on the church, like Paul, just for the sake of personal integrity as ministers of God and the integrity of the gospel that they preach. People who believe that serving 'full-time' will increase their effectiveness ought to consider Paul's 'part-time' ministry which was highly productive for the kingdom of God. Paul worked to provide for his welfare lest he became a burden to the church.

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The Contribution of the Study of the Near-Death Experience to the Christian Concept of Resurrection

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Abstract

The near-death experience (NDE) is argued to be strictly a feeling that the percipient regards as a reality, yet some say it is strictly a brain malfunction that allows visions of various images to be seen and stored in human memory. Percipients of the NDE have reported a feeling of separation from their physical bodies. They claim that there is a spiritual body in them that rises above, leaving their physical bodies behind during their near-death experiences. Christians have a fundamental belief that Jesus was resurrected from death with a physical body that was also spiritual or supra in nature, and they also believe that those who died in Christ shall be resurrected, but with what kind of body shall they be resurrected? The NDE is a pre-death experience while resurrection is a post-death experience. However, both experiences suggest the emanation of a unique or supra being from the body and, while resurrection encourages a reunification of the body and soul, the NDE encourages a separation between the body and the soul. The question regarding the nature of the resurrection body is the focus of this research. The researchers argue that the study of the NDE can contribute to elucidating the nature of the resurrection body. This research is literary and comparative in approach because the views of various authors are evaluated in the search to establish

the connection between the resurrection body and the NDE supra body.

Introduction

Resurrection is generally a term that suggests a revival or a resuscitation of the body and the soul after physical death (see Agai 2024a:269-270). This definition connects with the view propagated by Bronner according to which resurrection involves the rising of the dead from their graves in an expected future life. She added that the word *resurrection* might have originated from the Latin word *resurrectus* which means to 'rise again' in connection with the rising of the body and the soul from death (Bronner 2002:2). There are two variables involved in the definition of resurrection and these are the body and the soul. Hick (1985:275) noted that the body created post-resurrection is celestial or spiritual. An individual's spiritual body or *soma pneumatikon* is expected to have similar personality-features as before he or she died (Agai 2024a:273).

There is another concept that is referred to as 'resuscitation' that is sometimes incorrectly used interchangeably with resurrection. For example, a number of people regarded the restoration of the life of Lazarus by Jesus and that of the widow's son by Elijah as 'resurrection' (Agai 2024a:261–262). This, in connection with resurrection, can be contested because while the *dead* were recorded to have been restored to life as demonstrated in the Bible, there is no record that they had a celestial body after their restoration. The creation of a new celestial body is vital in the definition of the Christian perspective on resurrection (Agai 2024a:270–271). Yet, it is important to note that what connects resurrection with the cited stories of Lazarus and Elijah is the view that the body and the soul were likely reconnected. Adewoye (2024) also emphasised the importance of the body in defining resurrection.

Another author, Katherine Sonderegger, agreed that resurrection and resuscitation are two separate things. She said that an individual does not die again after resurrection and those who are resuscitated would have to die again before they could be resurrected: 'resurrection is when death is no longer in front of us, but behind us' (Sonderegger 2013). The concepts of

resurrection and resuscitation make it possible to connect this study with modern developments in near-death experience research. The near-death experience (NDE) suggests a form of restoration to life of people who claimed to have died but were resuscitated. The people who experienced the near-death in most cases might have gone through a life-threatening situation that resulted in their physical incapacitation. Their mental strengths might have been active during their experiences as their minds recorded stories they told others after their restoration (Muller 2021).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the resurrection of the dead is fundamental to the Christian faith, to the point that the apostle Paul explained that, without resurrection, the Christian faith would have been but vanity '[a]nd if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain' (1 Corinthians 15:14, NIV). This and other comments highlight the importance of the resurrection of the dead to the Christian faith. But can the study of the NDE or resuscitation contribute to the study of the resurrection of the dead? How can the dead rise with a body that is either physical or spiritual? This subject was also debated in the past by, for example, Platonist philosophy, which regarded the human body as evil and thus questioned its possible resurrection (Strauss 2014:1–2); likewise, the Samaritans, Sadducees, Essenes, Pharisees, and others also debated the subject (Agai 2015b; Cervantes 2016).

This research is relevant because it raises a debate on the need to study the modern concept of the NDE in connection with the resurrection of the dead. The idea is to attempt to inform Christians on the contribution of modern science, particularly regarding the NDE, to the study of the resurrection of the dead. The researchers enquired about the 'being' or the 'component' or the 'body' that rises from the dead and is connected to resurrection. The researchers further attempted to establish some connection between the 'ethereal being' or 'soul' that rises from death at resurrection with the 'being' or 'supra being' that rises from or dominates the human mind or thinking faculty during an NDE. The researchers are aware that there exist some differences between the NDE and resurrection but their interests pertained to the contribution of the NDE to the study of resurrection. It thus becomes pertinent to look into the debates regarding the perceptions of the human body in connection with both resurrection and the NDE.

The Perception of the Human Body

There is a need to understand some theological and scientific debates regarding the perception of the human body and its connection with resurrection. This is important because it shows that the study of the resurrection is not outdated research. Agai has noted previously that the resurrection concept is still relevant in modern society as people question the whereabouts of their deceased loved ones (2017:2–5). It is also important to note that religious perceptions of the resurrection of the dead have contributed to the scientific study of the relationship between the soul and the body. Modern developments in parapsychology, in which extra-sensory perceptions like telepathy, hypnosis, etc. are studied, are contributing to the academic convergence and divergence of scientists and religious scholars. The brain-body or mind-body relation is vital to the study of the debates about how the resurrection of the body from death can take place (Agai 2024b:2–3). Scholars have, over the years, challenged the view according to which human souls are separate from their bodies; this is vital because there are Christians who think that the body is separate from the soul while others believe that the body and soul are a single entity.

There is a traditional view according to which humans are divided into body and soul. In other words, the soul is likely bound to be resurrected and is thus immortal while the body is mortal. Joshua Mugg and James T. Turner referred to the concept of the separation of the body from the soul as *dualism* or *constitutionalism* and they argued that previous scholars who supported this view had mistaken the true meaning of the concepts, the reason being that God had to resurrect bodies. They favoured *animalism*, which necessitates that God resurrect bodies for human existence (Mugg and Turner 2017:121–122). In other words, the body is needed to contain the soul. This view is also backed by Adewoye (2024) who argued persuasively that Jesus' incarnation, death, and ascension with a human body suggest the relevance of the human body in matters that pertain to resurrection.

The traditional view regarding the separation of the body from the soul in the afterlife might have been influenced by Platonian and other Greek philosophical thoughts, which regarded as sacred the non-material world

(Cooper 2009:34). It may be recalled that Plato believed that the best or the ultimate reality for existence pertained to unseen things or *ideas*; likewise, Greek philosophical thought promoted the view that matter is evil and God might not have created out of matter (Agai 2017:30–50). Bible believers are of the view that the body is one of God's creations, created out of matter (Genesis 1–2). But, according to John W. Cooper, some modern theologians have rejected the existence of humans as dualistic beings. Cooper emphasised that:

> Modern theologians have advocated more monistic views of human nature and repudiated dualism as residual Greek philosophy that is incompatible with holistic Hebrew thought. (2009:34)

To them, the human body is just a single component that cannot be and is not separated.

However, disagreements among Christians over perceptions of the separation of the body from the soul could be explained by the notion that Christians do not interpret doctrine and scholarship the same way (Cooper 2009:34). One of the theologies that reigned during the medieval period is the view according to which a disembodied soul necessarily required a body that had to be conjoined in the resurrection (Mugg and Turner 2017:124). This type of perception might have promoted the idea of the separation of the body from the soul. Cooper said that an exegetical and historical study of scripture did not suggest that the body is separable from the soul; instead, the body and soul are a single entity with varied functions. He noted that biblical words that are used to denote humans suggest humans are single beings and not divided into body and soul:

> Genesis 2:7 states that God made Adam as a soul or living being (*nephesh chayah*), forming him from the dust of the ground and giving him the breath of life (*neshamah*). A human does not *have* a soul but *is* a soul, a single being consisting of formed earth and breath/spirit (*neshamah*, a synonym of *ruach*). In philosophical terms, a human being is

> one substance, entity, or thing constituted of two distinct ingredients or components. (Cooper 2009:36)

If the body cannot be separated from the soul, does this suggest that the death of the body means the death of the soul? The bodies that experienced near-death have not been certified brain dead but are, in most cases, completely inactive. Why are the people who experienced near-death able to compose and explain their experiences accurately? What is that entity that is assumed to have left the body to experience and explain their experiences? One implication to note is that the monistic view propagated by Cooper, Mugg, and Turner suggests that the experiences of people who went through near-death are not proof that the body can be separated from the soul.

If the resurrection of Jesus is to be taken as a historical fact, it thus suggests the oneness of the body and soul because Jesus was resurrected with both a physical body and a spiritual body. It is difficult to understand how this is possible. Paul also described the resurrection body as spiritual (1 Corinthians 15). The view of most modern theologians like Cooper is that the body is a single entity with varied features, including a dualistic existence that can be experienced at death and resurrection. Cooper surmised that 'although human life is holistic, some kind of dualism is actualized at death' (2009:36). It is also important to note that while resurrection encourages a cojoining of the body and soul, the NDE emphasises the separation of the body from the soul or mind. It is the soul that is believed to journey to the worlds of the dead, allegedly leaving the physical body behind. Understanding this background can serve as a guide in the debate regarding the alleged separation between the body and the soul in connection with either resurrection or the study of the NDE.

The Problem of the Resurrection Body

The biblical concepts regarding the resurrection of the dead are important for Christians, primarily the resurrection of Jesus because he was resurrected with a body that was both physical, because it was seen and felt, and celestial, because it ascended. There seems to be an increase in debates over whether Jesus was a historical person (a normal human being with a physical body like

any other person) or a pseudo-being (a supernatural person) or a person who never truly existed. Some scholars are of the view that, even if Jesus existed, his resurrection might not have been a reality but a psychological manipulation transferred as historical knowledge from generation to generation, which made people believe that he truly died and was resurrected (Craffert 2011:4–6).

On this debate, Atkinson pointed out that this kind of study of resurrection from a psycho-anthropological perspective might have started in the 1880s (2011:1). Such study shows that Jesus might not have died and resurrected; instead, his disciples and followers had visions of him in addition to what they heard about him. The view is that ideas regarding the reality of Jesus' resurrection are psychological phenomena generated through brain activity in the form of repeated electrical stimulation of the visual and auditory cortexes, which makes the individual regard a vision as reality (Atkinson 2011:9). Craffert said '[p]ost-resurrection experiences of Jesus were visionary experiences reserved for specific individuals and does[sic] not require a physical body' (1999:116).

Atkinson said that Jesus' followers' view on resurrection as a historical fact originated as a result of their fear of the unknown and as a search for comfort from their sufferings, and, as a result, they created hope for themselves about resurrection and in particular the resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, those who doubted the resurrection of Jesus and regarded it as a psychological misapprehension thought that Paul only had a vision of Christ, yet he claimed to have seen him physically. Luke attempted to confirm whether Jesus was resurrected by offering him food to eat, indicating that he might have doubted whether Christ truly resurrected, while Thomas sought for a proof because he doubted also (Atkinson 2011:1–10).

Pieter Craffert of the Department of Ancient and Biblical Studies at the University of South Africa noted that the cultural surroundings of Jesus' disciples, the writers of the gospels, the early church, and Jesus' other followers might have made them believe Jesus' resurrection was a historical event. In other words, the reality of Jesus' resurrection as a historical event

could be attributed to a functioning of the culture-brain nexus (Craffert 2011:3). Craffert added:

> The neuroanthropological suggestion is that it never was about a physical event in time-space that could be seen objectively but about a culturally approved experience that constituted consensual reality for those involved […] it will be suggested that the historian's choice is not between fact or fiction but how to deal with the historicity of cultural realities. (Craffert 2011:2–3)

Despite the debate on whether Jesus' resurrection was a reality or not, Apostle Paul and other gospel writers created the views according to which Jesus was resurrected as a spiritual being. In the gospels, the Jesus who was resurrected had both physical and spiritual characteristics. He was seen by many after his resurrection; he ate and communicated with others; yet he mysteriously appeared and reappeared in various places and, most importantly, he ascended to heaven. These features are both physical and spiritual. The resurrection body of Jesus can hardly be classified or categorised as just one state of being. Using other descriptions of Jesus' resurrection body and Paul's view of the resurrection body, this research attempted to create a connection between the resurrection body and the near-death experience.

The Resurrection Body and the NDE Supra Body

The Features of the Resurrection Body

Roger B. Cook, a lecturer at the Open University, Milton Keynes, England, taught that Christ's teachings and activities post-resurrection were mainly generated by the state of coma he experienced, not by death and resurrection (Cook 1992:193–198). This research investigates the nature of the resurrection body of Christ and is also about Paul's definition of the resurrection body in relation to the near-death experience. It is important to note that one of the views propagated in the New Testament is that Jesus Christ was resurrected with a physical yet spiritual body (Heslop 2024).

According to Paul, the resurrection body of Christ shares similarities with the kind of body that Christians will have in the resurrection life: '[w]ho shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body' (Philippians 3:21, KJV; see Perman 2006:1–2). Elsewhere, he writes, 'we shall all be changed' (1 Corinthians 15:51, KJV). According to some New Testament passages, the resurrection body of Jesus walked through walls (John 20:19) and Jesus' resurrection body will not die again (Kreeft 2000:15). The apostle Paul also described the resurrection body as that which is imperishable, powerful, heavenly, immortal, and supra natural (1 Corinthians 15:40–53).

However, it is difficult to comprehend logically or scientifically the specific nature of the resurrection body. In the postmodern world, it is pertinent to raise concerns about how a dead body can become a new body through resurrection (Cervantes 2016:15). If Paul were to be around at this time, the Corinthians would have raised the same question they did then: 'But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"' (1 Corinthians 15:35, NIV).

Scholars have provided several definitions regarding the nature of the resurrection body. Yet there is no single, universally acceptable view regarding the specific nature of the resurrection body. Kreeft (2000:15) said that the resurrection body is a continuation of the former body but in a changed form, whereby the resurrection body is a *super* pre-death body. Badham noted that the major difference between the resurrection and pre-resurrection body is the continuity of the personality of the individual (1976:85). Hick (1985:278) said that the resurrection body is strictly a celestial body; he referred to it as *soma pneumatikon.* Apostle Paul described the resurrection body as a mystery (1 Corinthians 15:51).

The NDE and What It Is Not

Raymond Moody, a philosopher-psychiatrist, invented the compound name 'Near-Death Experience' (1977:200–203). He interviewed 150 people who experienced near death. He believed that the near-death experience is not evidence for a life after death; instead, he taught that his sampled percipients only came *close to death* in an experience he referred to as the 'near-death' (Moody 1977:121). In addition, it is important to note that the NDE is not

scientifically regarded as proof for resurrection beliefs (Agai 2024b:2). Percipients of the NDE have often reported seeing themselves as having a spiritual body or a celestial body or a kind of supra body that is different from their physical bodies. Kingsley Kinya and Agai (2023:8) noted that those who experience the NDE do see themselves as having a body that is not natural but superhuman, possessing unique abilities to operate supernaturally.

The study of the near-death experience, and particularly that which pertains to the alleged *rising* of a new body during the experience, can contribute to the Christian study of the resurrection body; this is so because both the resurrection and the NDE supra body are seemingly celestial (see Greyson 2006:408). It is important to note that during the NDE, percipients do claim to have developed a new or supra body that leaves behind the physical body. Michael Potts defined *autoscopic NDE* as a feeling that involves the separation of the physical body from the ethereal body; it is

> a sense of separation from the body and may include seeing one's physical body, as a well as seeing and hearing one's resuscitation. (Potts 2002:233–234)

There is no evidence that during the NDE the physical body is separated from the ethereal or spiritual body. The idea of the separation is basically a feeling believed by the percipient that his or her body is left behind. An experience is shared regarding some of the features experienced during the near-death:

> Swift as an arrow, I fly through a dark tunnel. I'm engulfed by an overwhelming feeling of peace and bliss. I feel intensely satisfied, happy, calm, and peaceful. I hear wonderful music. I see beautiful colors and gorgeous flowers in all colors of the rainbow in a large meadow. At the far end is a beautiful, clear, warm light. This is where I must go. I see a figure in a light garment. This figure is waiting for me and reaches out her hand. It feels like a warm and loving welcome. Hand in hand, we move toward the beautiful and warm light. Then she lets go of my hand and

> turns around. I feel something pulling me back. (Magis Center 2023)[1]

Although the coherences in most cases of the NDE are universally similar, the background of the one who experiences the NDE determines the nature of the similarities or differences of the experiences. Some of the coherences experienced by NDE percipients include the vision being of light, the life review or life history or reminiscence period, the tunnel or narrow path experience, a feeling of peace and satisfaction, the hearing of strange sounds, the feeling of being out of the body, the presence of a border or a limit that allows entrance into another realm, a form rising into heaven, the experience of a supernatural rescue, the process of coming back into the physical body, the experience of being reluctant to return to the physical body, meeting others or meeting spiritual beings, cities of light or awesomeness, and a realm of bewildered spirits (Greyson 2006:395).

Raymond Moody added other coherent experiences that include a negative NDE and sometimes a positive NDE that included a deeper appreciation of life, less fear of death, a corroboration of out-of-body experiences, and sadness in discussing their experiences (1977:164–200). Other major coherences in the NDE are a resistance to return to earth, a surrender to a supreme being or supreme beings, and an experience of transcendence (Greyson and Khanna 2014:44). The feeling of separation of the physical body from the spiritual body or supra body is vital in this study, and this creates a need to compare the supra body with the resurrection body.

Similarities and Differences between the NDE Supra Body and the Resurrection Body

There are similarities and differences between the NDE supra body and the resurrection body. Both the NDE supra body and the resurrection body carry a personality continuity for the individual. That means the personality of the one who experiences near-death is carried alongside the NDE in an assumed afterlife experience. In the study of the resurrection body, that of Jesus, those who knew him were able to identify his personality (Badham 1976:85). When

[1] Originally from Pim van Lommel's book *Consciousness Beyond Life* (2010).

Jesus was resurrected, he knew whom he was. His disciples and others who knew him were able to identify him even though some doubted him (Luke 24:42, 1 Corinthians 15:5–6). In a similar manner, the percipients of the NDE do not become different people during their near-death experiences; instead, they continue with their personalities which emanate from their pre- to their post-NDE bodies. The NDE supra bodies had supernatural abilities to operate beyond the force of gravity, beyond time, and beyond distance. They could penetrate through ceilings, walls, and can travel long distances within a short period of time (Ma'Su'mian 1996:126). Christ's resurrection body showed similar features by passing through walls and by ascending up into the sky (John 20:19, Acts 1:9–11; Kreeft 2000:15).

In addition, both the NDE supra body and the resurrection body have a very high and more sensitive awareness of their being, their activities, and their environments. Their memories and level of environmental awareness are higher than those of ordinary human beings (Hampe 1979:65). Likely, both the resurrection body and the NDE supra body could not excrete urine or faeces or sweat or any other unwanted biochemical content. There is little or no record that the NDE supra body could eat normal food that other humans can eat. The resurrection body of Christ, in particular, ate food, but Paul's emphasis on the resurrection body is strictly spiritual, which would likely dissociate the resurrection body from eating and defecating. Paul referred to the resurrection body as incorruptible, powerful, heavenly, imperishable, and immortal (1 Corinthians 15:40–44).

More so, the resurrection body is not a separation between the physical body and the spiritual body. While there is a seeming separation of function in the body at death, the body and spirit are conjoined at resurrection. The NDE supra body is allegedly returned to the physical body after the near-death experience. But there are instances wherein NDE percipients may not return to their normal state of life to narrate the stories of their experiences because they have died. In other words, they spoke about their experiences during those experiences and passed away afterward (Greyson 2006:394). In the resurrection, there is no return to physical life, unlike most cases that pertain to the NDE, where the percipients return to normalcy to narrate their experiences (Sonderegger 2013).

The near-death experience is a universal phenomenon happening daily in different parts of the world. While resuscitation also happens daily in various parts of the world, resurrection as the formation of a new celestial body is hardly heard about. Most Christians believe that they have to wait for a particular day when all the dead will rise with their spiritual bodies in a resurrection life, unlike the NDE which happens daily. The resurrection body and the NDE supra body both possess features that are not fully coherent with the biological systems of humans and this makes both realities unique and relevant for study (Facco, Agrillo, and Greyson 2015:88). The general characteristics of all living things are nutrition, respiration, movement, reproduction, growth, irritability, and death (Kadhila 2010:3). The NDE supra body and the resurrection body are not clearly connected to the characteristics of living things, except as regards death; NDE percipients are still expected to die, unlike the resurrected.

Implications for African Society

The African community has high regard for the human body being resurrected in the afterlife. The Yoruba people of Nigeria for example arranged extravagant burial rituals for their deceased, with careful handling of the deceased body. They honoured the deceased body with a continual offering of food and water to the dead. They did this with a view to keep the deceased resurrected because, without the deceased body being catered for by the living, the deceased might cease to exist in the otherworld or cease to become an ancestor or cease to be resurrected or be thrown into a life of turmoil in the afterlife. The ancient Egyptians mummified and preserved the dead with a view that the deceased visited his or her mummified body to maintain a state of resurrection (Agai 2015a:1–7; see also Agai 2024b:1–5).

For the Christian community, while the New Testament emphasises faith in Christ alone as the only and major criterion for resurrection (Agai 2015b:1–3), the preservation of and catering for the deceased body by the living is not clearly condemned. Adewoye (2024) emphasised that Jesus' incarnation and ascension with a physical body suggest that the body is important in connection with death and resurrection, yet he deemphasised any view according to which the physical body would be resurrected. The near-death

experience encourages a view according to which only the spirit or soul shall possibly rise after the death of the physical body, while resurrection on the other hand encourages the view that the body and soul shall be united. However, the body that shall unite with the soul must be celestial, unlike the physical body humans have today. The study of the NDE is relevant in this case because it promotes the view that there is an ethereal or supra body in humans that will likely rise in the resurrection life. Furthermore, Zigarelli (2024) mentioned further relevance of the NDE to the study of the resurrection body. The NDE supports the notion that a supernatural realm exists, that supreme beings exist, that life review is a reality, that humans might live after death, and much more (Zigarelli 2024). Since the NDE is universal and likely understudied in Africa, this research promotes the need to begin to conduct further study on the subject.

Conclusion

The NDE is a phenomenon that is under study. No one has ever seen an NDE supra body except for the percipients who have allegedly experienced the NDE. With regard to resurrection, a person had to die before he or she could be resurrected, but during NDE the one who experiences it can be resuscitated so that he or she can narrate his or her experiences. It is also pertinent to reiterate that the NDE and the resurrection body are two separate realities. Paul's reliance on the analogy of Jesus' resurrection to expound the resurrection of other believers did not provide adequate information to describe the resurrection body. Similarly, the NDE supra body did not provide complete information about the biblical description of the resurrection body. However, the general study of the NDE and the NDE supra body in particular can provide some information regarding the nature of the resurrection body and particularly on the supra-uniqueness of the resurrection and the NDE supra body. This research, aimed at comparing the resurrection body with the NDE supra body, suggested that there are similarities and differences between both bodies. What is vital is the view that the NDE supra body adds to or gives knowledge regarding the nature of the resurrection body.

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The Theology of Music in African Spiritualities: a Post-COVID-19 Lens to Psalm 121 through *Jerusalema*

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Abstract

This paper examines the theology of music within African spiritualities through a post-Covid-19 perspective, centring on Psalm 121 in dialogue with the song *Jerusalema* by Master KG featuring Nomcebo. Music, as a theological tool, offers transformative possibilities for encountering God during times of emptiness and despair. In particular, *Jerusalema* emerged as a global anthem of hope during the Covid-19 pandemic, symbolising resilience and life affirmation. By dancing to its beat across cultures, people worldwide experienced joy amidst suffering. This study proposes that the theology of music has the power to renew spiritualities, creating space for experiencing God in both absence and fullness. It also highlights how African music more broadly, fosters ongoing conversations on sustaining hope through spiritual practices. Through a post-pandemic hermeneutical lens, this paper puts the biblical song of ascent in Psalm 121 in dialogue with *Jerusalema* to offer a prophetic vision of renewed hope and flourishing in pain and suffering.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has left a profound impact on global societies, especially in Africa. A report by The World Bank Group (2024) shows that "poorer countries are contending with a deeper, longer-lasting crisis that has increased global poverty and is reversing recent trends of shrinking

inequality." Many African countries are still contenting with the impact of Covid-19 in terms of gender relations, socio-economic impacts, mental and physical health, and spiritual well-being (Amable, 2022:18). Covid-19 disrupted the livelihood of many Africa families exacerbating the level of gender-based violence and poverty. D. Juma (2022:205) notes how many African countries will struggle with the impact of Covid-19 for a very long time.

Covid-19 is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It first emerged in late 2019 and spread globally, leading to widespread illness and death. Symptoms include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, with severe cases causing pneumonia and, in some cases, death. Ways of preventing Covid-19 include wearing masks to reduce transmission, social distancing to limit contact between individuals, hand washing, sanitising to kill the virus on hands, vaccination to build immunity and reduce severity of illness, and quarantine of those exposed to or infected with the virus (Luthra 2021). In many African countries, preventive measures such as lockdowns, curfews, and movement restrictions severely disrupted economic activities, especially in the informal sector. According to Kassegn & Endris (2021:1), during the outbreak of Covid-19 the "East Africa region in particular faced an unprecedented triple socio-economic threat caused by the combined effects of Covid-19 pandemic, the upsurge of desert locusts, and severe floods." Many lost jobs and income sources, particularly in tourism, agriculture, and small businesses. School closures also affected education, and limited access to healthcare worsened existing inequalities, straining many African families.

At the unprecedented time of isolation, suffering, and uncertainty, many people turned to music as a source of comfort and hope. During the early days of Covid-19, widespread misinformation and the severity of the pandemic led to profound desperation. With cases of Covid-19 and fatalities caused by it mounting rapidly worldwide, especially in countries like Italy and Iran, African nations also took swift action, following World Health Organisation (WHO) guidance to manage the crisis. In 11 March 2020, the WHO (2021:3) requested that "all countries to adopt a 'Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society' approach built around a comprehensive strategy to prevent infections, save lives, and minimise the impact". Amidst this anxiety, Master KG's *Jerusalema*, featuring Nomcebo, resonated across Africa, inviting people from diverse languages and cultures to join in its unifying rhythm. Although many did not

understand the lyrics, the beat of the song alone inspired dance and rekindled a sense of shared humanity. Africa's rich spiritual heritage has long been expressed through music and dance. African spiritualities naturally find their voice in storytelling and song as a way of transmitting wisdom. F. Juma (2022:1-2) notes that, even though "the oral tradition is a global phenomenon,""songs and music formed an integral part of the African oral tradition, which caused the two to be interrelated." Throughout history, African-descended communities have turned to music to reimagine spirituality, perceive God, and interpret the world.

In African spiritualities music has always played a pivotal role, acting as a conduit for divine connection and communal healing. It offers a means to express both celebration and lament. In African spiritualities music provides a bridge between earthly suffering and spiritual transcendence. As Classen (2021:3) observes, "music may require translation and interpretation since the categories of musical aesthetics differ from culture or social group to the next," yet "music by itself is easily appreciated and understood across all linguistic, social, ethnic, and historical boundaries".

This paper explores the theology of music within African spiritualities by placing Psalm 121 in dialogue with *Jerusalema*. Psalm 121 is a biblical text that speaks of divine protection, ascent, and trust in God's care. Using a post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens, this paper aims to examine how music serves as an artistic expression and as a powerful theological tool that helps people encounter God in moments of emptiness and uncertainty. The main aim of engaging Psalm 121 with the cultural and theological resonances of *Jerusalema* is to propose that music has the power to renew spiritual practices and offer a prophetic hope in the face of suffering. *Jerusalema's* global reach, particularly during a time of crisis, reveals the potential of African music to foster spiritual renewal and inspire resilience.

According to Chukwunonso, Nosike, Odey & Chike (2024:19), "music and dance are integral to African Christian worship and are often used to convey theological themes, narrate the Christian story, and facilitate communal participation in worship." In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the theology of music opens up new possibilities for rethinking divine presence and absence, encouraging believers to look toward the future with hope and

anticipation. Framing music and African spiritualities within the Covid-19 context establishes Psalm 121 and *Jerusalema* as key resources for theological reflection. In this way one sees the power of music in African spiritualities and the transformative role of music in times of despair.

A post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens to Psalms 121 through *Jerusalema*

A post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens is a framework for interpreting texts, events, or cultural expressions by taking into account the unique challenges, experiences, and reflections that emerged from the global Covid-19 pandemic. This lens recognises the profound impact the pandemic had on societies, particularly in relation to themes of loss, isolation, suffering, and the search for hope. When applied to theological reflections, such a lens highlights how individuals and communities sought meaning, resilience, and divine presence in the midst of a crisis that disrupted normal life on a global scale. A post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens is a perspective of reading the Bible that aims at enabling readers the opportunity to put God at the centre while interpreting music and the songs sung during pain and grieve in a theological way.

A post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens to Psalm 121 through *Jerusalema* utilises trauma theory as a constructive strand for reflecting on a situation of despair and speechlessness. In providing a brief overview of the history of trauma studies, Groenewald (2018:88) acknowledges that "trauma has been common practice in several fields, which has since only a few years ago, been used by biblical scholars as an important tool to interpret biblical texts." Rambo (2010:3) states, "Trauma is suffering that remains because in the aftermath of trauma, death and life no longer stand in opposition, instead death haunts life." Because the impact of Covid-19 remains with us, a post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens to Psalm 121 through *Jerusalema* utilises trauma theory to show ways in which God's people around the world were able to come to terms with what was happening as a collective whole in community and in solidarity with each other. Ilo (2012:48) states, "Every true religion must make people feel at home with themselves and connected to others spiritually and temporally." Theology, arising from people's lived experiences, also informs the creation of music, which never occurs in isolation. Similarly, a post-Covid-19 interpretation of *Jerusalema* reflects on the experience of finding God's

presence during the pandemic, offering people renewed spirituality amid their struggles with the long lasting impacts Covid-19.

In the context of Psalm 121, a post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens invites us to revisit the biblical text with fresh eyes, mindful of the heightened sense of vulnerability and uncertainty that defined the pandemic era. Psalm 121, traditionally seen as a song of ascent expressing trust in God's protection and guidance, takes on new dimensions when viewed through the pandemic's realities. Ancient Israelite pilgrims journeying to Jerusalem, particularly during major festivals, traditionally sang Psalm 121, part of a collection of Psalms knowns as the "Songs of Ascent" (Pss. 120-134). The "ascent" refers to the physical and spiritual journey up to the temple on Mount Zion, a place believed to be uniquely close to God's presence (Dowley, 2023:37). Psalm 121, expressing deep trust in God's protection, would have offered reassurance during a trek that involved many risks, including steep terrain, harsh weather, and potential threats from robbers or wild animals.

Adamo & Olusegun (2022:1) observe that "Psalm 121 is generally popular in practice yet scholars still have problems concerning the place of origin and the unity of the text since the text does not mention a particular place of origin." According to Adamo & Olusegun,(2022:1), "there are also some questions about the unity of the text and their literary-critical problems, especially in verses 4 and 7." Nevertheless, of relevance to this discussion is the fact that Psalm 121 is historically understood as a prayer or blessing that emphasises God's watchfulness. Verses 2-3 say, "My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He who watches over you will not slumber" (NIV, here and throughout). Psalm 121 highlights themes of security, with imagery suggesting that God is a vigilant, constant guardian who provides relief from harm and discomfort (verses 5-8). When viewed through the lens of the Covid-19 pandemic, Psalm 121 resonates with new significance, as globally people seek assurance in the face of an invisible threat affecting their lives. This song of ascent can therefore be reinterpreted as a source of comfort and resilience to affirm God's unwavering presence and care amid the unpredictability and trials of the pandemic.

For those who faced sickness, death, and anxiety during the crisis, the psalm's assurance "I lift up my eyes to the hills from where will my help come?" (verse

1) echoes a deep yearning for divine intervention and comfort in moments of distress. The psalm's theme of protection—"The Lord will keep you from all evil" (verse 7) offers an opportunity for conversations about how people reconcile faith with widespread suffering. This perspective creates a challenge and an invitation to deepen theological understandings of God's presence in hardship.

Thomaskutty (2021:1) notes, that "the Covid-19 pandemic situation persuades a reader of the fourth gospel to interpret the Scripture in new light." In the same spirit, applying a post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens to Psalm 121 endeavours to show Africa the presence of God even in the midst of despair, thus affording her a renewed sense of spirituality after the impact of Covid-19. It allows for one in an African setting to remain spiritually connected to God while processing trauma from a safe distance. Through a post-Covid-19 lens, Psalm 121 is re-interpreted through *Jerusalema* to offer post-Covid-19 African readership an opportunity to identify how God speaks to the sorrows of life thereby allowing life to flourish again. In times of pain and suffering, some people have learned that the only path to happiness on this earth is submitting humbly before God, to realise that God looks at our entire lives and never allows anything to happen in our life that is not ultimately for our good (Smith, 2015:157).

Thus, a post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens to Psalm 121 through *Jerusalema* is arguably a hermeneutics of contemplative silence in the midst of pain and despair during pandemics (Petersen, 2021:171). The song *Jerusalema*, which became an anthem of hope during the pandemic, can be interpreted as a cultural and spiritual response to the global crisis. With its upbeat rhythm and spiritual lyrics, the song speaks to the longing for a place of safety and divine belonging, themes that resonated deeply with those seeking solace in uncertain times. Through a post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens, *Jerusalema* is also not merely a song of celebration; it becomes a form of embodied theology, a space where people could find hope and could dance and rejoice even in the midst of profound sorrow and loss. Thompson, Nutor & Johnson (2021:9) points out that "music plays an integral role in the culture of many Africans, while song lyrics during Covid-19 helped to identify Covid-19 as a global social crisis calling the attention of people to the importance of prevention." It is from this perspective that one sees how a post-Covid-19

hermeneutical lens encourages a dialogue between Psalm 121 and *Jerusalema*, allowing the biblical text and the contemporary song to speak to each other in ways that reveal new insights about faith, resilience, and communal joy in the face of adversity. Both texts point toward divine assurance, but when viewed together through a post-pandemic lens, they highlight the evolving ways people experience and express spirituality during crises. *Jerusalema*, with its African roots, calls attention to the communal and celebratory aspects of spiritual resilience, while Psalm 121 reminds us of the ancient and enduring promises of divine care.

***The Song* Jerusalema *and the Psalm 121 Alongside Each Other*:**

English translation of *Jerusalema* (Master KG)	**Psalm 121 - A song of ascents**
*Jerusalem, my home, Save me! Join me, Don't leave me here! x2 *My place is not here, My kingdom is not here, Save me, Come with me! *Save, save, save me, Do not leave me here! Save me, save me, save me, Do not leave me here! *My place is not here, My kingdom is not here, Save me, Come with *Save, save, save me, Do not leave me here! Save me, save me, save me, Do not leave me here!	[1] I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? [2] My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. [3] He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber; [4] indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. [5] The Lord watches over you— the Lord is your shade at your right hand; [6] the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. [7] The Lord will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life; [8] the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

The Background of the Song *Jerusalema*

The song *Jerusalema* by South African DJ Master KG and vocalist Nomcebo became a global sensation following its release in late 2019, resonating deeply with listeners for its blend of upbeat disco-house rhythms and gospel-inspired lyrics. Rooted in Christian spirituality, the song invokes Jerusalem as a symbolic, sacred home. As the song's popularity soared during the Covid-19 pandemic, it inspired the #JerusalemaDanceChallenge, uniting fans worldwide in shared hope and resilience amid lockdowns. A remix by Nigerian artist Burna Boy added Afrobeat elements, highlighting African unity and propelling the song to top charts across Europe (Rufaro 2020). By winning Song of the Year at the African Entertainment Awards in the USA, *Jerusalema* underscored its impact as an uplifting anthem during global hardship.

Jerusalema invokes themes of divine restoration and hope, resonating with the biblical narrative of Nehemiah who, upon learning about the broken walls of Jerusalem, prayed and developed a plan to restore the city's glory:

> Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. (Neh. 2:17-18)

In this passage, Nehemiah rallies the people of Jerusalem to rebuild the city's walls, symbolising both physical restoration and spiritual renewal. His call to action and his reference to God's grace underscore a collective hope in divine intervention, similar to how *Jerusalema* reflects themes of restoration and the divine promise of a hopeful future. Although the song predates the Covid-19 pandemic and postdates Nehemiah, it found a new meaning for audiences under lockdown, reminiscent of Nehemiah's vision for Jerusalem as a place of peace and restoration. Theologically, *Jerusalema* echoes the promise of abundant life found in John 10:10, transforming it into a modern "song of ascent" as people worldwide found solace and spiritual hope through it. In this context, *Jerusalema* became a symbolic expression of hope, inspiring resilience

and unity in the face of uncertainty and inviting listeners to envision restoration in the midst of global disruption.

The song *Jerusalema* resonates powerfully in a world grappling with the aftermath of lockdowns, offering a form of musical theology that speaks deeply to individual and communal pain. According to Claassens (2017:611), "new understandings of God emerge within communities under duress, offering hope amid despair." *Jerusalema* encapsulates this concept, a teaching from Africa to the world of a renewed way of faith by inspiring fresh expressions of spirituality.

Amid the spiritual derailment experienced by many during the Covid-19 pandemic, *Jerusalema* emerged as a source of renewed hope, revitalising the African spirit and sharing the energy of African spirituality with the world. At a time when many felt abandoned, *Jerusalema* became, as Shoki (2020) describes it, "a divine gift a reminder that God remains watchful and faithful," echoing the reassurance of Psalm 121, which affirms that v 3-4 affirming that God "will not let your foot slip," for "he who watches over you will neither slumber nor sleep" (verses 3-4).

The Covid-19 crisis, which disrupted traditional African mourning rites, left many families praying for God's presence and deliverance from despair (Daniels, 2012:4). When viewed alongside Psalm 121, *Jerusalema* emerges as a song of ascent, theologically grounded and scripturally aligned, drawing people in pain closer to God. Music thus becomes a unique spiritual language that unites the faithful with God in ways only understood by the heart and spirit (Gombrich, 2008:89). As James 4:8 suggests, in times of struggle, drawing near to God leads to God drawing near in return.

Ultimately, the post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens opens up possibilities for rethinking how spiritual practices, such as music and prayer, can shape theological reflections on suffering, hope, and recovery. It suggests that the global crisis of Covid-19 has reshaped the way we encounter God, emphasising that even in moments of profound absence where many felt isolated or abandoned there is room for renewed spiritual depth and communal flourishing. By examining Psalm 121 and *Jerusalema* through this lens, this paper explores how scripture and music can offer prophetic visions

of hope, enabling believers to reclaim a sense of divine presence in the aftermath of global disruption.

Music and Theology in African Spiritualities

African spiritualities refer to the diverse, dynamic, and deeply rooted belief systems, practices, and worldviews shaped by the religious traditions, cultural values, and communal experiences of African peoples. For Chiorazzi (2015), "African spirituality simply acknowledges that beliefs and practices touch on and inform every facet of human life." An understanding of life as interconnected and holistic characterises African spiritualities, where the material and spiritual realms are seen as intricately woven together. Central to African spiritualities is the belief in the active presence of the divine in everyday life, manifest through ancestors, nature, and communal relationships (Chiorazzi 2015). This is a collective rather than the individual aspect, with a focus on communal well-being, harmony with the natural environment, and a balance between the spiritual and physical worlds. In African societies, spirituality weaves into African religious identity, prompting the question of who Africans believe God to be in times of illness and healing. The African sense of spirituality finds its fullest expression in communal worship, with people gathering in large numbers at churches, mosques, temples, and shrines (Ilo, 2012:48). A spiritual African feels a sense of belonging when in the company of others, seeking to fill the void of spiritual emptiness that surfaces especially during moments of pain and sorrow.

When Covid-19 spread across Africa, this collective faith was put to the test. As restrictions on gatherings tightened, many religious leaders feared the loss of followers and funding, while citizens found themselves unable to gather to seek God's intervention. Expressing her concern, Betty Ochan, leader of the opposition in Uganda's national assembly, stated, "The devil is taking dominance. If people do not worship God together, they are spiritually derailed" (Muhumuza, 2020).

In African spiritualities, music plays a profound role as a medium for expressing and experiencing the divine. Ayorinde & Ajose (2022:12) argue that, "while music is linked with spirituality, music does not solely facilitate spirituality by itself. Instead, spirituality in music can be understood through the social life

and experience of music bearers, instruments and musicians." Music is a theological tool that bridges the gap between the seen and unseen, the present and the ancestral. In Africa spiritualities, music is rooted in rituals, ceremonies, worship, and everyday communal life, functioning as a vehicle for communicating with the spiritual realm, invoking divine presence, and facilitating communal solidarity. Whether in traditional religious settings or contemporary African Christian practices, music is a vital expression of faith and a means through which to mediate spiritual experiences. In African spiritualities, music carries theological significance that goes beyond doctrinal expressions to embody the lived experiences of faith (Ayorinde & Ajose, 2022:6).

Theology in this perspective becomes a theological act, engaging the whole person in terms of body, mind, and spirit in the encounter with the divine. This understanding of music as theology is deeply rooted in African cosmology, where sound, rhythm, and movement are channels for divine communication and human response. Through song, drumming, and dance, communities articulate their relationship with God, the ancestors, and the spiritual forces that govern life. According to Chanan (1999:47), "the musical language is a function of the real space in which the music is generated."

In African Christian contexts, believers often read the Bible in ways that allow them to embody its characters, reinterpreting the stories to reflect their own lived experiences. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this transformative approach extended to the songs and theologies that emerged, capturing emotions, ideas, and perspectives rooted in an African worldview of pain and suffering. These songs, composed and sung in alignment with God's will, offered hope and reshaped the ways in which African Christians expressed their spirituality.

Wright (2003:47) argues that "the theology of music is an outward expression of an inner spiritual dimension within each person, a way of giving honour and respect to something which is of value and worth." Amidst a world overwhelmed by confusion, pain, and despair, African Christian communities used music to comfort those in distress, communicating hope. Through this theology of music, individuals could experience God's presence even in songs sung in unfamiliar languages. The spirit of God stirred God's people to dance

with hope, inspiring visions of a renewed Jerusalem even within African landscapes.

The theology of music presents music as vibrant lived theology that empowers African Christians, renewing their spirit, mind, and soul in ways distinct from those without such hope. Biblically grounded music can indeed relieve mental suffering and foster hope amidst adversity. Gouk (2020:88) suggests that "one of the most important functions of 'music' is as a vehicle for altering spiritual states beyond the visible realm." In this light, Psalm 121 interpreted through the song *Jerusalema*, become a beacon of hope during pandemics, reflecting African roots and offering a profound space for theological reflection. This theology of music teaches that embracing both life's highs and lows means recognising hope and opportunities amid despair. Psalm 121, with its reminder that "help" comes solely from Yahweh, the creator of heaven and earth, resonates with the message of *Jerusalema*, echoing an enduring, divine strength in the face of trials. In African Christian theology, music bridges traditional African religious expressions with Christian faith. Hymns, choruses, and spiritual songs infuse with African rhythms and melodies, making them resonate with local cultural contexts. Many African Christians for example, interpret Psalms like Psalms 121 as songs of both lament and praise, much like the traditional songs that express communal joys, sorrows, and petitions to the divine (Adamo & Olusegun, 2022:2-4). Music, therefore, provides a theological framework through which people can grapple with existential questions, express hope, and affirm life even in times of suffering.

The role of Music in African spiritualities, particularly in times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, further exemplifies its theological potency. During the pandemic, songs like *Jerusalema* by Master KG featuring Nomcebo captured the collective consciousness of people across Africa and beyond, offering a moment of spiritual ascension in a time of uncertainty. *Jerusalema* became more than a song. It was a theological response to the global crisis a message of resilience, hope, and the human longing for divine intervention. Music and theology in African spiritualities is one of the very valuable non-traditional sources of African theology in contextual and intercultural theology. According to Adam & Boafo (2022:280), "African Christian Theology focuses highly on two domains, the Christian message in the gospel and the culture of African Christians." Through this lens, African spiritualities recognise that music is a

vital component of how theology is lived, experienced, and expressed. This way, music in African spiritualities renews hope, restore balance, and create spaces for spiritual encounters that reaffirm life in its fullness.

Implications for Future Theological Reflections and Spiritual Practices

The exploration of music as a theological vehicle in African spiritualities has profound implications for future theological reflections and spiritual practices. Theology is the study of the nature of God and religious belief. Badham (1996:101) defines theology as a "literally thinking about God." Musical theology therefore refers to hymns and songs with rich, meaningful text that speaks to who God is and what we believe. Moody (2021:4) observes "that music itself can be theology naturally depends on the way one defines theology."

In a post-Covid-19 context, where songs like *Jerusalema* resonated deeply, the role of music in conveying resilience, communal hope, and divine connection is evident. A discussion by The Metro Records (2024) on sacred resilience as a spiritual legacy from Africa to black America's streets observed: "Cultural expressions like storytelling, music, and dance connect individuals through shared experiences of faith, resilience, and hope." This experience suggests that theology in African contexts can and should embrace music as a worship tool and an interpretive lens through which individuals and communities encounter God and express their spirituality in times of joy and crisis.

As a pilgrimage of faith, Psalm 121 and the song *Jerusalema* enable those in pain to travel through pain spiritually into a future that is full of hope. In Psalm 121, the psalmist is yet to reach the appointed place of worshiping God. Yet, through hope in the sustainer of life, the psalmist lifts their eyes towards a mountain that seems distant. While the mountains are far, the psalmist has the assurance that God is not far. Thus, in the theology of music it is possible to see how singers are able to understand that God's people do not need to be out of trouble or void of pain to trust in God and to worship God through songs of praise (Parrish & Parrish 2011:129). In the theology of music, God's people learn how to envision that they are under God's protective care with the assurance that God is watching over all on the journey through pain. Moving

forward, theological discourse could benefit from a closer integration of musicology and theology, recognising musical expressions as central to understanding how faith is lived, experienced, and practiced.

Incorporating music as a focal point in African spiritual practices also challenges traditional boundaries between sacred and secular spaces. Songs like *Jerusalema*, which transcended religious settings and gained international appeal, indicate that African spiritualities engage the divine in all aspects of life. This challenges theologians to consider spirituality as woven through daily life, where the sacred is encountered in culturally significant spaces and moments that speak to shared human experiences. Africa is notoriously religious. However, the impact of Covid-19 exposed how unprepared the very religious setting was to handle mental health, domestic violence, gender-based violence, sexual violence, socio-economic struggles, and the anxiety of those who lost hope and were struggling with the reality of what to eat, to drink, and to wear (Munyao, Muutuki, Musembi & Kaunga 2022).

In the song, *Jerusalema* God's people were able to sing their anxieties to God as they envisioned the beautiful city of Jerusalem where there is no sorrow, pain and death as in Psalm 121. Thus, the connection between Psalm 121 and the song *Jerusalema* significantly informs the concept of envisioning hope in pain. In this way, music enables God's people to come to terms with the reality of God's ways. "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,' says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). While God's ways are hidden from human beings, Psalm 121, a song of ascent, seen through *Jerusalema* reassures God's people that God has everything under control at a time when life may be completely destabilised and threatened. It is from this perspective that one sees how the theology of music can display a renewal of spiritualities regardless of time and space (Begbie, 2000:26).

Theological reflections should therefore prioritise an inclusive view of spirituality, one that acknowledges how popular culture and local art forms serve as contemporary expressions of ancient spiritual truths. The theology of music has a unique capacity to renew spiritualities, transcending time and space through the shared human experience of sound and worship. In fact, for

Harmon (2016:50), “the theology of music is an embodiment of the mystery we celebrate and a liturgical theology.” That is why Psalm 121, an ancient song of ascent historically chanted by pilgrims, remains a powerful source of solace and strength for people today. Its melodic recitation or singing serves as a bridge between ancient Israelite worship and contemporary faith practices, helping believers connect deeply with their faith and find resilience in challenging times. Similarly, the modern African song *Jerusalema*, originally sung in *isiZulu*, became a global anthem of hope and community, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. The song, despite its specific cultural and linguistic roots, resonated universally, transcending geographic and linguistic boundaries to become a form of prayer and a unifying symbol of resilience across diverse faith communities. Through such songs, the theology of music brings a renewed sense of spirituality to individuals and communities, reminding them that faith and hope are both timeless and borderless.

Finally, future theological reflections should explore the power of music to foster healing and community restoration, especially in a world marked by crises. The Covid-19 pandemic revealed the potential of music to provide solace, unity, and hope, making it a valuable medium for addressing collective trauma and promoting emotional resilience. An interpretation of Psalm 121 through the lens of *Jerusalema* builds upon the progress in exploring biblical texts through intertextuality readings. Intertextuality shapes the meaning of a text through another text by a deliberate composition or by the audience’s perception of links between related works (Kaźmierczak, 2019:12-15). For Plank (1997:152) intertextuality “calls for a reader to pay attention to the way any given text may comment upon, appropriate, and in effect rewrite another text.” By analysing Psalm 121 alongside *Jerusalema*, one sees how music that resonates with people’s emotions in times of pain, grief, and despair can offer deeper insight. Kim (2022:238) asserts that “the gist of intertextuality is concerned with how different entities, such as the author, the borrowed text, the new text, and its reader, which have different social, cultural, and textual contexts, dialogue to produce meaning.” Although Psalm 121, a song of ascent, and *Jerusalema* emerge from different contexts, times, and spaces, they speak meaningfully to a world still dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Together, they demonstrate how musical theology allows richly meaningful songs to address individual and communal pain, offering spiritual resonance in times of collective struggle. By engaging music as a central element in spiritual

practices, faith communities can create worship experiences that are responsive to current realities, integrating themes of lament, hope, and joy that resonate with the lived experiences of people. In African spiritual contexts, this approach not only deepens theological engagement but also affirms the role of music as an enduring channel through which faith adapts to and transforms the challenges of the modern world.

Conclusion

The theology of music in African spiritualities, especially viewed through the post-Covid-19 experience of songs like *Jerusalema* and texts like Psalm 121, underscores three key aspects that have significant implications for future theological engagement. First, music in African contexts functions as a lived theology, seamlessly blending culture and spirituality in ways that foster resilience, hope, and communal identity. This dynamic relationship between faith and music suggests that African theology must continue to embrace musical expressions as essential for meaningful faith experiences. Second, the blending of sacred and secular music underscores a vital theological shift where spirituality transcends religious confines, allowing God to be encountered in the rhythms of everyday life. This inclusive approach invites African theologians to recognise and elevate the cultural forms that shape spiritual understanding. Finally, the healing and unifying power of music, especially in times of crisis, calls for a theology that is actively responsive to current realities, using music to address collective challenges, foster communal support, and affirm life's fullness. This way, one envisions a profound capacity for music to embody African spiritualities, providing a resilient and inclusive framework for theological reflection and practice in an ever-evolving world.

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Review

Shaw, Mark & Wanjirau M Gitau, *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A History of African Christianity* (Revised and Updated). Langham Global Library, Carlisle, 2020. ISBN: 9781783688111, x, 368 pp.

Review by Dr Ryan Faber[1]

Since its publication in 1996, Mark Shaw's *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity* has served well as a textbook for courses in African church history. The revised and updated version, co-authored by Wanjiru Gitau, will continue to do so. Shaw and Gitau provide a concise, yet comprehensive, account of a very broad topic. They survey nearly two millennia of history across a continent that is by no means monolithic.

As Shaw and Gitau rightly note, Africa is rapidly becoming a leader in global Christianity. Many expect that, by 2060, Africa will have a larger Christian population than any other continent. Non-African Christians do well to pay attention to African Christianity and its history. There are lessons to be learned here. Unfortunately, the revised and updated edition omits, rather than updates, the first edition's final chapter, 'Lessons from the Africa Story'.

Shaw and Gitau locate their work within the emerging field of World Christianity. They argue that 'a key concept of World Christianity is translatability' (9). The kingdom of God is 'a recurring and translatable core [in] the African story' (11). Just as 'no single church or individual or movement [can] capture the whole Christ' (17), so no period in African church history bears complete witness to the fullness of God's kingdom. The ancient period bears witness to 'the providential and theocratic rule of God' (14). In the

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missionary period, the kingdom was primarily understood as 'the redemptive rule of Christ' (15). The post-colonial period prioritises the kingdom as 'the promotion of justice' (15).

These three periods roughly correspond with the first, third, and fourth sections of the book. The first section tells the story of Christianity in ancient Africa: in Egypt, North Africa, Ethiopia, and Nubia. The Nubian and Ethiopian stories return in the second section, which describes a 'clash of kingdoms' in Africa, especially Islam and African traditional religion (ATR), during the medieval period. The history of the church in Nubia and Ethiopia (and Egypt) 'dispel[s] the myth that African Christianity disappeared by the end of the middle ages' (91), though the church in Nubia did indeed disappear by the end of that period.

On the contrary, Christianity is 'deeply rooted in the African past' (83). Alexandria (Egypt) and Carthage (North Africa) were important centres in the ancient church. Each was home to leading theologians who made significant contributions to the development of Christian theology. The monastic tradition owes much to Egyptian desert fathers and mothers. Contra the prevailing theme of the period, the kingdom as theocratic rule, the latter 'witness to the kingdom as an inner spiritual experience' (41).

The second section of the book, medieval African Christianity (600–1700), includes a discussion of Islam and ATR. Shaw and Gitau argue that this period 'served to prepare the continent for the coming kingdom of Christ' (84). Both Islam and ATR share 'a longing for the kingdom of God' (101). Shaw and Gitau suggest that the concepts of kinship and kingship, especially the priestly role of the sacred king, in ATR were preparatory for the Christian gospel. Does this, in part, explain 'the dramatic spiritual turn in Africa' (2)?

The book's third and fourth sections discuss the missionary movement in Africa. Contra Shaw and Gitau's suggestion that their World Christianity approach overcomes the pitfalls of other methods, including missionary historiography, their history seems to employ that method. This part of their story focuses almost exclusively on the missionaries. The history of African Christianity is undoubtedly 'one of the most remarkable stories of church growth in the annals of church history' (239). Much of the credit, however, is

due to African evangelists. Shaw and Gitau acknowledge that 'most African societies first received the gospel from fellow Africans' (253), but their history does not tell those stories.

The book's final two chapters address post-colonial African Christianity. The first discusses the rise of African indigenous (or independent) churches (AIC). AICs are an important factor in African Christianity. Their inclusion reflects Shaw and Gitau's commitment to ecumenical historiography, just as their account of missionary Christianity included both Protestant and Catholic missions. However, Shaw and Gitau seem to fall into the pitfall of that methodology – it 'tends to be too uncritical of the kinds of Christianity it surveys' (8). They articulate well the kingdom visions that motivated the histories they recount, but do not evaluate those visions. For example, they fail to criticise the kingdom vision that inspired Afrikaner nationalism and supported apartheid.

One wishes that the book's final chapter on Christianity in post-independence Africa had been more thoroughly updated, especially its presentation of African Christian theology. The text remains largely unchanged from the 1996 edition. For example, in its discussion of black theology, the text still observes, 'whether this theology can survive the collapse of apartheid remains to be seen' (324). Surely now, thirty years since the collapse of apartheid, such an evaluation is possible.

Shaw and Gitau contend that 'millions of Africans still struggle with what it means to be both African and Christian' (2). They write about the apparent 'foreignness of Christianity in Africa' (2), even as they contend that Christianity is 'deeply rooted in the African past' (83), 'deeply rooted in African history and culture' (104). Yet their final chapter is silent on theological developments since publication of the first edition, such as the movement to recover the ancient African roots of Christianity. Shaw and Gitau say nothing about the decolonisation project, an important effort for 'the church becoming incarnate in the life of Africa', which they contend is 'the heart of the Christian story in Africa' (4).

The Kingdom of God in Africa remains a helpful introduction to the history of Christianity in Africa, even if, lacking updates that adequately account for

developments in African Christianity in the last thirty years, it remains largely a thirty-year-old text.

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