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African Theological Journal for Church and Society (ATJCS) is a scholarly journal publishing in any applicable theological discipline, focussing on the church and its role in societies within the African context. The Journal was launched in 2020 by NetACT (Network for African Congregational Theology), a network of a significant number and a variety of theological institutions in Africa (https://www.netact.org.za), in partnership with Christian Literature Fund (https://clf.co.za) and Hugenote College (https://www.hugenote.com).

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The policy of ATJCS is laid down by an editorial board.

The scope/core focus of ATJCS is to promote high quality scholarship in the fields of theology relevant or applicable to church and society in the African context. ATJCS publishes original research and literature studies in within the relevant focus areas. The intended readership of ATJCS is theological scholars (researchers), students, ministers and persons interested in the particular field.

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In this issue

ATJCS is published by the Network for African Congregational Theology in conjunction with the Christian Literature Fund and Hugenote College.

Introduction

The large number of articles submitted for publication in ATJCS is a clear indication of the need for such an online theological journal publishing research outcomes on matters pertaining to church and society in the African context. The scope of themes covered in the articles submitted is indeed wide; it varies from pure empirical research, academic reflections, practical engagements and public theology, but it also covers the whole range of theological and related disciplines such as education, philosophy or ethics. All the articles are written from a Christian perspective, and take the role of the church within African societies very seriously. The journal therefore renders invaluable service to reflection on specifically the church's role, but also the role of Christians in in general, within African societies.

It is also gratifying to observe that a wide variety of scholars and students from many different countries, denominations and theological institutions are making contributions. This is enriching the theological discourse across many different boundaries.

The September 2021 is the third edition since the inception of this journal. It contains a variety of titles, but noticeable is the focus on children, youth, Christian education and faith formation. The articles also engage with important challenges faced in the African context, such as poverty, Covid 19, the proper reading of biblical texts, cultural issues, etc. There are also two reviews on important newly released books included.

We trust that this young publication will soon be well-established and its credible contribution to theology, church and society in Africa widely recognised.

We gratefully acknowledge the contribution by the Editorial Board:

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A kernel literal analysis of God's revealed name in Exodus 3:14

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Abstract

There have been various exegetical and hermeneutical interpretations to the meaning of the *Ehyeh asher ehyeh* in Exodus 3:14 yet there has not been a consensus on the matter. Scholars have been grappling with the root word and exact meaning of the revealed name. The writer examined various scholarly perspectives to the name. It was discovered that a setting aside of the word-for-word translation without consideration of the form, grammar and structure resulted in a subtle translation and interpretation that depended more on presuppositions and commitments of the translators than on methodology. The writer through a kernel analysis attempted a re-reading of the Masoretic Text rendition of Exodus 3:14 which gives a clearer insight and understanding of God's revelation to man. "I will be who I will be" reveals God's sovereignty at all times and a call to depend on God.

Introduction

Names are an important reflection of a person's character, nature and identity. They may be conferred based on occurrences before and during pregnancy, and after birth, religious feelings, the status of the family, circumstantial events or wishful projections or expectations over the child. So we can have insight from a human point of view, God's enigmatic answer to Moses' question about his name—*Ehyeh asher ehyeh (Exodus 3:14).* It is therefore imperative to have a perceived holistic and comprehensive reading of the

expression of God to Moses when he asked God for His name. God in His response to Moses spoke in enigmatic words, for which countless efforts have been made to present the translations and the meaning of these words. “Some due to the inability to properly interpret it have concluded that the words really have no meanings. There has been no consensus as to the meaning of these enigmatic words” (Cronin 2017:1).

God’s enigmatic answer to Moses’s question about his name—*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*, is usually translated “I am who I am” (Exod. 3:14). This has provoked philological analysis for centuries, often coupled with high philosophical and theological reflection; yet little attention has been paid to the narrative relevance of God’s self-designation in the context of the book of Exodus. Although, Douglas K Stuart, William Albright, Michael Grisanti, Victor Hamilton and others have translated Exodus 3:14 and agreed on at least one point, which is that the Hebrew word *ehyeh*, which appears three times in this verse and is the cause of all the confusion that attends upon it, derives from the verb root *hayah* meaning ‘to be’. This single point of agreement is also where the consensus all but ends.

The attention to the syntactic, semantic, rhetorical, and narrative aspects of God’s name in itself and within its immediate context reveals a lot about the nature and attributes of God. Furthermore, the tracking of the revealed name evokes suspense, curiosity, and surprise dynamics in the book of Exodus as a whole. The fine and multiplied dynamism of God’s self-naming phrase, it is shown, turns the Exodus narrative into the embodiment of God’s name and the crucible of God’s narrative identity. Stafford when writing concerning the text reiterates that: “There are good reasons, however, for rejecting the LXX’s rendering as an accurate representation of the Semitic thought conveyed by ‘*ehyeh* ‘*asher* ‘*ehyeh* in Exodus 3:14, which thought is in the NWT expressed as “I shall prove to be what I shall prove to be.” The translation found in many other English versions assumes a present meaning for *ehyeh asher ehyeh* that is not well-founded” (Stafford 2012:15).

Spence and Excel (2011:57) opined that “the Septuagint explains rather than translates but it is otherwise unobjectionable”. For instance, the Septuagint translates *ehyeh asher ehyeh* of Exodus 3:14a into Greek as *ego eimi ho on*, which translates into English as “*I am the one who is*”, and it translates the

absolute *ehyeh* of 3:14b as "*ho on*", "*the one who is*". This earliest of all translations of the Hebrew thus associates the revelation of Exodus 3:14 with the concept of absolute existence. It is especially noteworthy by virtue of being, to this day, one of the very few translations to interpret *eyheh asher ehyeh* as God's Self-identification to Moses. It is also the first of many to recognise the absolute *ehyeh* as the Divine name in the verse. However, the Septuagint translation of the verse cannot be an exact rendering of the Hebrew because neither the form of words nor the actual words of the Greek translation allow for that possibility. The imperfect state Masoretic rendition of the four enigmatic words rendered as "I AM THAT I AM" could be re-read as "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE" as it is in the verb Qal imperfect form of *hayah*.

The effects of these on the exegesis and hermeneutics of those words constitute exegetical, hermeneutical and theological inadequacy about God's sovereignty. Therefore, the problem which this contribution will address is the contributory and correctional impact that re-reading of the Masoretic text of *eyheh asher ehyeh* will have on its interpretation and theological application.

Exodus 3:1-14: Perspective to various interpretations

The reason for diverse translation and interpretations stem from the fact that most scholars from the Septuagint, *ego eimi ho on,* I am the one who is, emphasise Yahweh as the only existing one. But this translation does not correspond to the Hebrew rendition. It merely explains rather than translate. Albright and Freedman contend that a causative form underlies the *hayah* form of the verb, but this is also a conjecture. The verb is in the qal stem and not the hiphil stem.

According to Dul, Exodus 3 was setting up the salvation event of the whole Old Testament; the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian specifically Pharaoh. Israel had no means of escape from their bondage to the Egyptians. He opines that "God's deliverance of Israel through Moses was the foundation for the nation of Israel knowledge of who God was and is, and for their faith and trust in Him" (2013:2). The passage expresses redemption and the salvation plan of God for the Israelites which He plans to achieve through Moses. As noted by Cole (1973:20-21), the name contained in this passage "...sums up itself all past revelation (for YHWH is still the 'God of the fathers', even if under a new

name), and it also lies at the very heart of their new experience of redemption and salvation." God is seen as commissioning Moses to go and deliver His people from the bondage, He, however, promises Moses who according to Cole has learnt to distrust himself thoroughly that he will incur the wrath of God, His presence and that the task will be accomplished by Him.

Cole (1973:227) asserts that God answers Moses' doubt when He answers his question concerning 'What he will call His name when his people ask him', however Cole opinions that the answer given by God was a play on YHWH, God's name, interpreting it as "... I will only be understood by my subsequent acts and words of revelation. This statement fits the biblical pattern of Israelite history. Cole's perspective is that of God giving an assurance of divine intervention. This figure expresses "certain nuances of indeterminateness, totality, emphasis or intensity" (Grisanti 1997:1025). Cate (1979:28-33) opines concerning this passage that "God initiated the experience, He reveals Himself to us, and it was a personal experience to Moses. God's warning to Moses never to draw near is an indication that sinners cannot approach Him." Cate further argues concerning Moses's question that "He was not asking hypothetical questions, rather He was voicing what he expected to be the natural reaction of his people. And needs something more than "Who" but "What" and opines that the given answer by God is full of meaning so that no human expression could ever sum it all up. God is consistent, can be relied upon and has unchanging nature."

Zetzsche (2013:1) while explaining the slippery nature of words and the difficulty in pinning down its meaning notes concerning Exodus 3:14 "That's all the more true for words that describe someone as mysterious as God. When Moses asked God to tell him his name, to reveal his identity, God told Moses what he needed to know: *ehyeh asher ehyeh* or "I Will Be What I Will Be" (Ex. 3:14)." He further iterates that "...as it turns out, this divine revelation in human language is insufficient, as the translation by Jewish translator Robert Alter illustrates. Alter notes that "rivers of ink have since flowed in theological reflection and philosophical analysis of this name," which could also be translated as the more familiar "I Am That I Am," "I Am He Who Endures," and many other possibilities. With this view, Zetzsche and Alter canvassed for formal or dynamic equivalence translation and in other cases a translation that resonates with a modern interpreter.

Cronin notes that the church fathers and medieval scholars identified the *ehyeh* of 3:14b as the Divine name that expresses the most fundamental essence of God, an essence that they identified as "subsistent being itself". He reiterates further by quoting Ott that "the Partristic writers and schoolmen (Scholastics) accept the name of the divine Essence given in Ex.3:14, and regard Absolute Being as that concept by which we state the essence of God most fundamentally".

Cronin further states that the works of Jerome, Augustine and Aquinas are among the early and medieval Christian contributions to the verse that are very important. He states that they saw it as an allusion to God's absolute and eternal being. Augustine and Aquinas however identified the *ehyeh* of 3:14b as a divine name using Septuagint and Vulgate respectively.

Cronin also proceeded to state the interpretation of the verse as offered by Brevard Childs. He offers a substantial and useful commentary on the call of Moses in the course of which he settles on an interpretation that appears to be a somewhat elaborated synthesis of the positions of others before him. He suggests that the *ehyeh* of 3:14b and *ehyeh asher ehyeh* of 3:14a are statements of God's unspecified intentions for Moses and Israel respectively, and thus settles on a generally temporal interpretation of the verse. More specifically he suggests that the *ehyeh* of 3:14 is a wordplay on the divine name YHWH and that *ehyeh asher ehyeh* of 3:14a is "*paradoxically both an answer and a refusal to answer*" on God's part and that God is here announcing "*that His intentions will be revealed in His future acts, which He now refuses to explain*". However, Cronin had an issue with the interpretation given by Childs because according to him, it does not fully fit the occasion at hand. He proceeds to states the idea given by Noth as he notes the following about Noth's work.

More interesting is Noth, who identifies the *ehyeh* of 3:14b as a divine name, and even suggests that it "unmistakably hints at the name Yahweh in so far as an Israelite ear could immediately understand the transition from *ehyeh* to Yahweh merely as a transition from the first to the third person, so that the name Yahweh would be understood to mean 'He is'".

He however notes that Noth's interpretation approximates those of Recanati, Rashbam, and Ibn Ezra who are Jewish scholars.

Pannell (2006:351-353) whose work on this passage especially verse 14 opines that either one or both of *ehyeh* is a cohortative and if that is the case "We have a divine resolution or emphatic wish-intention, perhaps as a result of an inward deliberation, in which God places stress on his own being" He stresses further that the emphasis is not on creation, action, or the like, per se; rather, it is an issue of self-determination or control over his own being, and further opines that another way of expressing this idea might be "No one controls me but me!"

Beitzel (1980:5-20) explaining this verse opines that "What kind of a God are you?" Moses queries, to which the Lord responds in kind, "I will be what I will be." And interpreted it to mean "God is affirming that in His essential character He will not be the product of human thought or manipulation, unlike the Egyptian deities with which the children of Israel would have been eminently familiar." This statement corroborates the interpretation offered by Pannell that no one can control God but rather He chooses what and who He wishes to be. Wenstrom (2011:20) corroborates this idea when he opines that "Yahweh is sovereignly independent of all creation and His presence signifies the fulfilment of the covenant." Radmacher, Allen and House (2004:41), in an attempt to interpret the meaning of the verse opines that "the one who spoke to Moses declared Himself to be the Eternal one – the uncaused and independent, and thus they see the I AM in the Absolute Sense.

The verse is also seen to have referred to as God's name and it is a name that expresses the truth that God has always existed and will always exist (Adeyemo 2006:91). However, Sacks sees in God's revelation to Moses an indication of His evolving nature, a reference to the future tense. He is unknowable beforehand. Even though God keeps His promises, reflecting His faithfulness, He is not predictable: He awaits us in the future (Sacks 2009:1).

Pink (1981:44) in his work, Gleanings from Exodus, argues that there is a depth concerning this verse which no finite mind can fathom. He opines that "I am that I am" announced that the great God is self-existent, beside whom there is none else. Without beginning, without end, "from everlasting to everlasting"

He is God. He is always the same, eternally changeless. Roosma (2009:15-17) however sees this verse as a verse that reveals God's relationship with humans which are the crown of his creation. The verse speaks of God's ever presence with people. Martin (2012:1) following the translation offered by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig also approves of this interpretation stressing that the "Being" of God is seen in being there with and for His people. Stafford (2012:8) considering the interpretation given by Gianoti who sees the verse as being futuristic opines that this verse can be seen as a promise of God to Israelites by saying that "God will become the solution to the need of the Israelites."

One thing is evident from the foregoing, that most of these translations and interpretations have set aside the formal dynamic equivalence theory of translation, which advocates a word-for-word or literal translation that attempts to transmit the message of one language in another language taking care not to alter the structure and form of the original language. They have tampered with the translation so that they could respond to the message within the context of their culture or Israelite history. The resulting translation seems to depend more on the presuppositions and commitments of the translators than it does on what methodology or theory they followed. Scholars are interpreting from a sense in which they are attempting to grasp the existential nature of God or his actions over space and time. Scholars must have over-stretched the theological significance of the root *hayah* to account for the diverse opinions.

A kernel literary analysis of Exodus 3:14

The text for this study is located in the book of Exodus, the second book of the Pentateuch of the Old Testament in the Christian Bible (Hill& Walton 2000:63). The book of Exodus is also the second book of the Jewish Hebrew Bible "*Tanak*", where it is called *weelleh shemoth* "And these are the names" and are usually shortened to *Shemoth*, "Names" (Hill& Walton, 81). The English title of the book *Exodus* "A going out" is gotten from the Septuagint and the Latin's Vulgate (Walvoord& Zuck 2000); this title captures the dominant theme of the book, 'a departure' or 'a going out', Exodus 19:1.

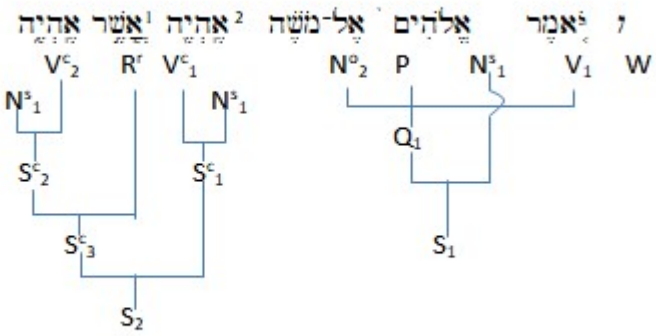
Exodus continues with Genesis's account. Clyde Francisco declares that the fact that book begins with a conjunction 'And' implies a strong link with the

first book of the Torah which continues a preceding narrative. Dillard and Longman III added that the opening phrase in the book restates a phrase in Genesis 46:8 in which both passages name the sons of Israel who migrated to Egypt during Joseph's era (Francisco 1977:75). Even though Exodus continues the story of Genesis, there is, however, a large space of time between the two books. The ending of Genesis features a small extended (Jacob's) family doing well in Egypt, however, at the dawn of Exodus the people have escalated to a large group living under malicious oppression (Longman III & Dillard 2007:63).

There are two main purposes for writing the book of Exodus: historical and theological. Historically, the book narrates the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from the tyranny of Pharaoh in Egypt, their transit to Mount Sinai and their nurture into nationhood. Theologically, it expresses the constitution of Israel; Cate (1987:149) suggests two focal points of the constitution. Firstly, "God's redemption of Israel as a result of His free choice of them to be His people, and secondly His uniting Himself to them through the covenant at Sinai". It highlights how God through love fulfil his age-long promise to Abraham by multiplying his descendant into a nation and renewing the covenant of grace on a national basis (Francisco, 76).

Kernel's literary analysis of Exodus 3:14

Verse 14a:



And God said unto Moses, I will be who I will be

Step 1:

(a) The elided object of the first verb V_1 (*He said*) is restored as N^s_1, which is understood from the context to be "God."
(b) The subject of the elided copulative verb V^c_1 and V^c_2 (*I* will be) was elided and is restored as N^s_1; context reveals that its referent is "I, God will be"

From (b) above, verse 14a will be

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶֽ[אֱלֹהִים] הְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶֽ[אֱלֹהִים] הְיֶה

And He said God unto Moses, I [*God will be*] who I [*God will be*]

The dependent relationship before deletion takes place; the second shows the final result after deletion. Brackets enclose the redundant constituent that gets deleted.

(c) Relative pronoun R^r signals the fact that subject of the copulative verb V^c_1 has a modifying verbal phrase (*I will be*)

Step 2:

(a) Nouns N_1 (God) and N_2 have no modifiers and stand alone as an independent constituent.
(b) The verb V has been granted first position prominence because of the Waw consecutive idiom, thus splitting the predicate.

Step 3:

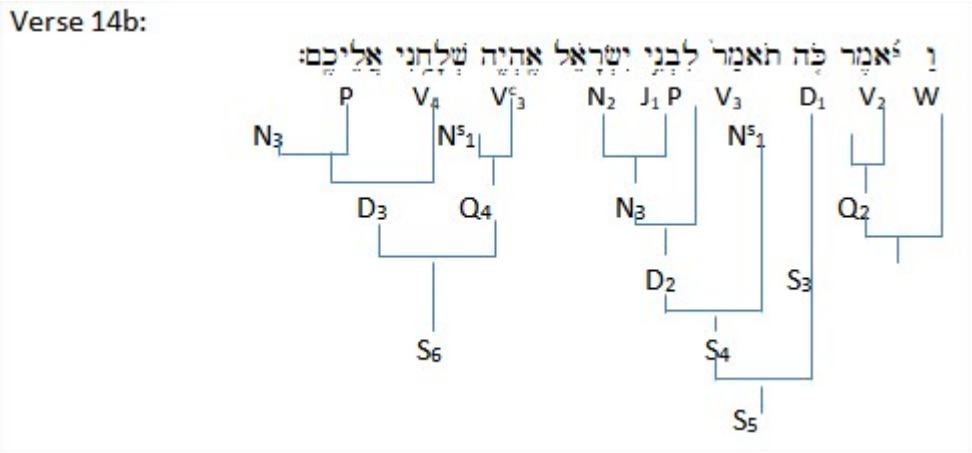
(a) Noun phrase Ns_1 is the subject because it has grammatical concord with the verb; it follows the verb which has been granted first position prominence, is determinate, and the only candidate.
(b) Noun N^o_2 (Moses) is the genitive object of verb V (*he* said) by means of preposition P (to/unto), declaring the recipient of the speech and forming the predicate Q (said to Moses).
(c) The pronoun of the elided copulative verb of the sentence V^c_1 is restored then formed S^c_1

(d) The pronoun of the elided copulative verb of the sentence V^c_2 is restored then formed S^c_2

Step 4:

(a) Subject noun phrase N^s_1 and predicate Q form sentence S_1.
(b) The sentence S^c_2 and the R^r formed S^c_3 (Relative Clause)
(c) The pronoun of the elided copulative verb of the sentence V^c_2 is restored then formed S^c_2
(d) The pronoun of the elided copulative verb of the sentence V^c_2 is restored then formed S^c_2

Verse 14b:



Step 1:

(a) The elided object of the first verb V_2 (*He said*) is restored as noun phase N^s_1, which is understood from the context to be "God."
(b) The subject of the elided copulative verb V^c_3 (*I* will be) was elided and is restored as N^s_1; context reveals that its referent is "I, God will be"

Step 2:

(a) Noun N2 (Sons) modifies construct noun J1 (Sons), forming genitive noun phrase N3 of menu

(b) Noun phrase N3 is governed by preposition P, forming temporal adverbial phrase D2, specifying who the words were spoken to

Step 3:

(a) Noun N3 (Sons of Israel) is the genitive object of verb V_3 (*he* said) by means of preposition P_2 (to), declaring the recipient of the speech and forming the predicate Q_3 (said to Sons of Israel).
(b) The pronoun of the elided copulative verb of the sentence V^c_2 is restored then formed Q_4

Step 4:

(a) Subject noun phrase N^s_1 and predicate Q form sentence S_1.
(b) Adverb phrase D1 is an adjunct modifying sentence S2, specifying when the event of S5 happened.

Re-reading of the Masoretic text rendition of Exodus 3:14

In Exodus 3:14 the Masoretic word אֶהְיֶה is in the future tense which indicates a continuation of God's immanence. As stated by Robert Ellis (2006:222) in his book titled *Learning to Read Biblical Hebrew: An introductory Grammar,* under the connotation of verb tenses submits that,

> … the perfect and imperfect tenses of the indicated verb do not convey the temporary ideas of past, present, or future in the way that English tenses do. Instead the Hebrew perfect typically indicates a completed action or state, while the imperfect usually indicates an incomplete action or state.

He further iterates that, "the perfect implies the perspectives of an outsider, viewing an event or state as a unity or whole from beginning to end, while the imperfect implies the perspectives of an insider, viewing an event or state as something that is unfolding." Also, James Price (2006:126-131), stated that the Imperfect aspect (specified by the imperfect conjugation) expresses incomplete action, state or relationship. The incomplete action may be due to various uncertainties (future time, non – indicative moods). Semantic content

determines how the imperfect aspect is to be interpreted and translated with respect to their various senses. An imperfect aspect could be timeless incomplete action, past time incomplete action, present time incomplete action or future time incomplete action.

Hence, from the above submissions, אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, (*eyheh asher ehyeh)* Exodus 3:14 which is commonly interpreted as I AM that I AM, the אֶהְיֶה in verse 14 can be alternatively rendered as I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE, using the Formal Equivalence translation approach. This approach is applied by the writer in the view that it will ensure that the grammar, form and structure of the source language are retained rather than being altered.

Application of the re-reading

The implication of the re-reading of the biblical texts is to appreciate the spiritual insights that depend upon the words, and textual variants do not 'affect' or 'alter' or 'modify' doctrine. The only objective and justification of textual re-reading are that its emended text should give access to clearer insight and deeper faith. The text re-read does not imperil belief in God but it can and does contribute to the understanding of God as to His revelation and relation to man. Hence, the primary implication of this study for application is to understand that man is responsible for the way God reveals Himself to human beings. God who is awesome, trustworthy, infinite and self-existent, who has pre-existed will reveal himself to man as man has thought of him. In this text, he simply told Moses "The way you see me is who I will be. I will be who you say I am, whatever you say I am to you is what I am." As such God was saying to the extent to which you can conceive me is who I am to you.

From the text, only Yahweh uses the '*I will'* statement. This statement reveals the strength of God. Moses's *I am* statements, on the other hand, are expressions of his weakness. It is because of Moses' statements of weakness that Yahweh's *I will* statements are meaningful. The people's future depends upon their confidence in Yahweh's future.

The passage also suggests divine vulnerability, divine power, divine faithfulness, and divine presence. In making known his name, God makes known his resources which are available to all. Christians today may gain great

courage from God's self-revelation to Moses in the wilderness. We can take comfort that when He calls us to action, He is not sending us by ourselves. Rather, He Himself will go with us and give us the ability to carry out our work. We can rest in the knowledge that our success does not depend on who we are, nor will it be hindered by our past or the obstacles ahead. Instead, we may know that our success is directly linked to our connection with the all-powerful, all-consuming self-existing One.

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Even the donkey and the ox know (Isaiah 1:2-3): An appeal to the significance of natural law in biblical interpretation

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Abstract

This article analyses Isaiah 1:2-3 from the perspective of natural law. It argues that natural law, as a theological-ethical concept, is introduced in Isaiah 1:2-3. As such it theorises that natural law can be incorporated as a hermeneutical lens for the theological-ethical interpretation of some Old Testament texts without jeopardising the integrity of theological discourse. This hermeneutical lens, I will argue, is significant for some interpretive communities in Africa. The Tangale ethnic group's traditional beliefs and practices are used as a point of departure for the discourse to argue that moral and ethical values informed by these traditional beliefs are reflections of natural law. Thus, showing heuristic potentials thereof in understanding some of the theology and ethics of the Old Testament.

Introduction

Appropriating biblical text in Africa just like any other reader of the biblical text involves several variables. For instance, in reaction to some past Western missionaries' denigration and demonisation of African culture and religion, some scholars such as the renowned African scholar John Mbiti, consider African culture and tradition as *praeparatio evangelica* (Mbiti 1978:311). Mbiti explains that African religion prepares the ground for the acceptance of the Christian faith. It provided the vocabulary upon which Christian faith was planted and continues to flourish. This reactionary assertion has critical issues worth considering. For example, from an ethical point of view, it leads to

reflection on the issue of so-called natural law, an ethical presupposition that claims that moral duty can be learned from nature and that it is then reflected in cultural norms, values, and practices.[1]

Further questions flow from this assertion, such as, what informs the African Christian ethical and moral values? From the point of view of dogmatic theology, the assertion leads to the reflection on natural revelation and natural theology.[2] Does natural law, via African culture and tradition, constitute the revelation of God and can it be relied upon for moral guidance? Furthermore, what constitutes moral values? In other words, are moral values only those constituted and coded in the covenant laws revealed in the Bible through the ancient Israel community? Can African cultures and traditions be a reflection or repository of natural law?

This article considers the culture and traditions of the Tangale[3] people of Gombe State, Nigeria, from the perspective of natural law. The article proposes that understanding African cultures/traditions from the dimension of natural law might have a heuristic advantage towards a theological-ethical interpretation of the Old Testament in a manner that will be relevant for interpretative communities in Africa and how it may happen. Therefore, the article analyses Isaiah 1:2-3 from the perspective of natural law. It also discusses some Tangale worldviews – a constituent of culture – and how it resonates with the concept of natural law. It then shows the relevance of these

[1] Nature may be defined as (1) "the phenomena of the physical world collectively including plants, animals, and the landscape, as opposed to humans or human creation…" or (2) "the basic or inherent features, qualities, or character of a person or thing…" (Soanes & Stevenson 2008).

[2] Due to limited space, the aspect of natural *theology* cannot be addressed in detail here. In simplest terms, however, and for the sake of clarity, natural theology may be understood to refer to the presupposition that God is knowable through nature. From the perspective of dogmatic theology, natural theology falls under the concept of general revelation. For more on natural theology see Barr, 1993:1ff. 1999:12ff, 167ff.

[3] Tangale is an ethnic group found in the southern part of Gombe state of Nigeria. It is believed that the Tangale people migrated from Yemen through what is now Borno State (*cf.* Maina, 2013:311; 2014:5; Tadi, 2013:4).

worldviews for a biblical hermeneutic. I shall start with a brief explanation of the concept of natural law.

Natural law

First, it is worth noting that the goal of this article is not to outline what is natural or unnatural, for that is not what natural law is meant to do. Natural law does not seek to explain what ethical principles can be derived from nature. Rather, it is the assumption that there are universal laws that apply to all, and this is linked with the design of God as the creator.[4] Natural law seeks to affirm that humanity, universally, knows a body of morally binding laws that shape a common pattern of moral and social behaviour without reference to transcendent revelation[5]. Natural law focuses on general rules of conduct that are embedded in human nature and can be accessed rationally (Kassa 2014:10ff).[6]

Natural law is a controversial concept. The idea has been associated with moral distortions and has been used in some circles to justify opposing courses of moral behaviour (*cf*. Nash 2000:229). It shows that the application or the understanding of natural law is based upon human interpretation – in South Africa, it was often heard with regard to the "laws of creation" that supported the idea of the separateness of races.

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[4] One may ask why is "design of God" evoked here. Well, as opposed to the assumptions of some protestants who though that natural law is somewhat deistic, natural law, according to St Thomas Aquinas is "rational creature's participation of the eternal law" (*Summa Theologica*, QQ 91: [A2]). It does not evoke God's name but it is not independent of God's design. According to Murphy (2019:np), God created humanity to act freely according to principles of reason—God's rational plan by which all creation is ordered.

[5] By "transcendent revelation" this refers to Gods special revelation of his law. Aquinas (*Summa Theologica:* QQ94 [A2]) uses "eternal law" or "divine law" to refer to this law received through special revelation.

[6] Central to this argument is the question of epistemology—how we know things and how we are able to know the things we do? Natural law argues that all humans possess common knowledge by virtue of their being. We shall argue below how Isaiah appeals to whole order of life instead of cultic or legal treaty.

Again, it is assumed that natural law is a source of ethics that seeks to establish an autonomous moral standard. Specifically, the Protestant churches are suspicious of the natural law tradition as somewhat deistic.[7] "They see it [natural law] pushing God off into a realm where he may be the remote origin of moral obligation, but is not present in his creation as the one who teaches human beings how they should live" (Barton 2002:59; see also Nash 2000:229).

Akin to the above misapprehension, therefore, this article holds that (c*f.* Aquinas, Summa Theologica: QQ91-94 [A2]):

i. Natural law differs from statute law, from eternal law [supernaturally revealed law], and even from so-called laws of nature, but it is a participation in the eternal law according to its own mode – the knowledge of certain general principles.
ii. Natural law suggests that moral law is objective, idealistic, and non-existential.
iii. Natural law affirms that all human beings share a set of ethical norms and imperatives that they commonly perceive without dependence on supernatural disclosure and illumination.

Natural law does not push God into a realm of being a remote origin of moral obligation. The Bible, which is God's revealed law recognises the existence of natural law. For example, prophetic literature seems to be the most revelatory, the most dependent on the direct word of the Lord, hence one would least expect any form of natural law in them (see Barr, 1999:475). It is argued below that Isaiah appeals to the natural faculty of reasoning of the Israelite in his indictment, not the written code in the *Torah.*[8] Thus, natural law as a theological-ethical concept is introduced in Isaiah 1:2-3. Similarly, the Tangale

[7] These suspiciousness relate to how the concept transformed into natural theology. Kassa (2014:1) notes that "Natural theology and natural law are two distinct concepts, but are closely related. […] natural theology relates to the attempt to establish some sort of theistic claim through the observation of nature, while natural law deals with the quest to derive or ground some moral norms and ethical principles in nature. Simply put, natural law asks the question whether human morality can be informed by nature, while natural theology asks whether God is knowable through nature […].

[8] For the relationship between the Isaiah appeal to nature in his indictment and written code, see the next section.

traditional religious laws guiding their daily lives, I would argue, is a reflection of the natural law principles. In the section below, Isaiah 1:2-3 is analysed, using natural law as the interpretive lens. Following this, the culture and beliefs of the Tangale people are discussed, showing their resonance with natural law. Its heuristic potential for the interpretation of the Old Testament is further highlighted.

Natural law in Isaiah 1:2-3? A Close Reading

A 'Close Reading' is a form of criticism that focuses on the text itself. It focuses on a close examination of the literary features of a text without necessarily neglecting the diachronic dimension of the text (*cf.* Lawrie 2005:72ff).[9] A 'Close Reading' is also an approach to a biblical text that involves careful observation, as if with a magnifying glass, of the details of the text.

2a	שִׁמְעוּ שָׁמַיִם וְהַאֲזִינִי אֶרֶץ	Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth!
2a'	כִּי יְהוָה דִּבֵּר	For the LORD has spoken:
2b	בָּנִים גִּדַּלְתִּי וְרוֹמַמְתִּי	I reared children and brought them up,
2b'	וְהֵם פָּשְׁעוּ בִי	but they rebelled against me.

[9] Isaiah is one of the most complex books in the Old Testament. Numerous background and introductory issues remain unresolved (see Barton, 2003:9; Collins, 2004:307) and it is beyond the scope of the article to discuss these issues. However, I shall make some remarks on background matters then proceed to investigate the pericope. It is argued that the book of Isaiah is a composite document and that the inclusios between chapter 1 and 66 show evidences of a redactional unity. This redactional unity is considered a deliberate theological unity (*cf.* Blenkinsopp, 2000:82; Brueggemann 1998:5; Collins 2004:308f; Schmid, 2009:568; Williamson 1995:211). The composite nature of the text also makes the task of dating the pericope complex as there is no clear evidence of the time of composition. Some scholars (Oswalt, 1986:84f) argue for eight Century BCE while others suggest a postexilic period (*cf.* Schmid 2009:568; Sweeney 1988:22, 123; Williamson 2006:10). This article prefers to take the post exilic period as the possible date of the composition. The article concurs with Gerstenberger (2002:314) that "The theologians of the exilic and post-exilic community drew on many sources [('P' and 'non-P' sources)] for their revision of old traditions".

3a	יָדַע שׁוֹר קֹנֵהוּ	The ox knows his master,
3a’	וַחֲמוֹר אֵבוּס בְּעָלָיו	the donkey his owner’s manger,
3b	יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַע	but Israel does not know,
3b’	עַמִּי לֹא הִתְבּוֹנָן:	my people do not understand.

Table 1:Isaiah 1: 2-3 (RSV and Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia)

The first observable literary characteristic of this text (Table 1 above*)* is that it is poetry. [10] Blenkinsopp (2000:79) rightly describes Isaiah’s poetry as parallelism patterned not on metre and rhyme but on the balance of thought conveyed by a corresponding balance of sentence. Chapter 1of Isaiah is composed in this pattern, containing short stanzas of individual themes which are further linked in one way or the other by themes such as sin, judgment, deliverance, and choice (*cf.* Blenkinsopp 2000:180; Davies 1981:41).

Isaiah 1: 2 begins with a direct address to the heavens and the earth to hear and listen—שִׁמְעוּ שָׁמַיִם וְהַאֲזִינִי אֶרֶץ. It is followed by a motivation that what they are about to hear and give ear to is from the Lord—כִּי יְהוָה דִּבֵּר. The Lord summons the heavens and the earth to express his concern about his children. He was concerned that the בָּנִים he has raised and brought up have decided to rebel against him —וְהֵם פָּשְׁעוּ בִי.

Verse 3 is a short and powerful parable describing a contrast to the attitude of the בָּנִים in verse 2. It states that the ox knows[11] his master[12] —יָדַע שׁוֹר קֹנֵהוּ, and the donkey also knows his master’s crib—וַחֲמוֹר אֵבוּס בְּעָלָיו. The next

[10] There are no serious variations that affect the actual wordings of the pericope from the translation of different ancient manuscripts. One instance is found in the Septuagint’s translation of the Hebrew verb גִּדַּלְתִּי (literally meaning: ‘to make great’), as ἐγέννησα (literally meaning ‘I have begotten’). The Greek verb γεννάω usually renders ילד and God is rarely the subject of ילד. ילד implies fatherhood In the ANE traditions, “father” suggests a pantheon or a family of gods and that goes against monotheism.

[11] ‘Know’ is the Hebrew verb יָדַע, it has several semantic possibilities. Its use in this passage agrees with the prototypical meaning “to recognise (in the language of treaties, to perceive, to notice, to hear or learn), and to know” (HALOT, 1996:390f).

[12] קָנָה is used to describe the relationship between the animal and its master. It connotes the idea of acquiring something through purchase (HALOT, 1996:1970f).

sentence 3b/b' is antithetically parallel to 3a/a' showing obvious contrast between יִשְׂרָאֵל (further identified as עַמִּי, my people) and the ox and the donkey. The contrast here is that Israel does not understand what an ox and a donkey understand, even though the kind of relationship that exists between the animals and their master and source of livelihood cannot be equated to that which exists between Yahweh and Israel, "my people". Thus, the attitude of Israel who is the Lord's בָּנִים (v.2) and עַמִּי (v.3) is considered a rebellion.

This rib pattern has covenant unfaithfulness in its background, focussing on the people's neglect of the covenant law (see Davies, 1981:47, 53; Melugin, 1996:208; Oswalt, 1986:85; Williamson, 2006:27). According to Childs (2001:17) the summon to heavens and earth

> has its closest parallel in the first verse of the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1–43) […] The Song of Moses calls upon the heavens and earth to witness to God's faithfulness and Israel's corruption (v. 4b). In fact, many of the themes of Isaiah are sounded in similar vocabulary.

However, the text did not follow the technicalities of a system of law or appeals to a covenant obligation (*cf.* Childs 2001:18), rather, it stresses the intellectual side of the moral being. The text did not use notions that are familiar to a covenant treaty in the *Torah,* rather the writer relies upon common reasoning as his epistemological basis. Isaiah draws more on the motif of knowing. Drawing from the motif of knowing, one could argue that the appeal to the heavens and the earth, therefore, is not merely a matter of legality; it is a matter of the whole order of life. It is a general appeal; every rational being (not only the covenant community who has the written covenant code) will agree with the issue that Yahweh is about to address. The appeal to the heavens and earth shows that what Yahweh is about to reveal is an enduring principle for all people. Gerstenberger (2002:263) observes

> Although the ethical orientation is put under the authority of Yahweh …the individual precepts are very often completely neutral in religious terms and have been taken from general norms of societies of the ancient Near East.

Under the assumption that Old Testament prophets rely on the direct revelation from God, it is expected that an indictment such as this uses the

revealed word—the *Torah* which is the repository of Israel's religious heritage—as its basis (*cf.* Barton, 2014:95;[13] Lee, 2013:109). On the contrary, Isaiah appeals to precepts that are neutral in religious terms. Because of the diverse background of individuals at the time of writing, appealing to the general norms would mean that the indictment is inclusive. Thus, one could argue that the epistemological basis of the indictment is natural law since it is neutral to any religious term and appeals to the common reasoning of the society—drawing upon the motif of knowing.

The natural law principle is introduced in the motif of knowing in the pericope. Israel's behaviour is revealed as unnatural. The passage introduces Israel as Yahweh's children with whom he had had an intimate relationship. The writer reports that Yahweh accuses Israel of rebelling because they showed a lack of knowledge and understanding despite Yahweh's caring relationship. Israel's behaviour is contrasted to that of an ox and a donkey—presumably irrational beings. The kind of relationship between an ox and its master is such that the natural outcome is that the ox possesses a kind of knowledge of its owner and a donkey is said to know its owner's manger.[14] Ironically, Israel did not show that natural tendency despite their intimate relationship with Yahweh, thus a rebellion—presupposing that Israel's knowledge of Yahweh is not instinctive. The unnaturalness of Israel's behaviour hails from the fact that Israel experienced a unique relationship with the Lord, a father-child relationship that is characterised by intimacy. The natural outcome of such an intimate relationship is trust and faithfulness. According to natural law principles, Israel possesses some innate power of the intellect to know certain moral principles. Yet the passage says "but Israel does not, my people do not understand".

[13] Barton explains that it was a primary belief that "All moral obligation, it was held, flowed from this act of divine grace and mercy: the God who had saved Israel demanded obedient response. Ethics thus had everything to do with God's communication of his explicit wishes, enshrined in Old Testament law, and nothing to do with the 'orders of creation'.

[14] It is not clear what kind of knowledge is being referred here—apparently it could be instinctive but because of what psychologist might call apparent conditioning, a pattern of behaviour was developed (Ref).

A close example of a situation where an animal of instinct is used to shame the behaviour of humans is the story of Balaam and his donkey in Numbers 22. It is quite fascinating that Balaam was portrayed by the narrator as a seer. Ironically Balaam could not see what the donkey saw. The story portrays the donkey as possessing some kind of knowledge of his master and its duty. That very day the donkey senses danger—it saw the angel of the Lord with a drawn sword—and responded appropriately. The writer makes a caricature of the seer. He portrays the donkey possessing the supernatural ability to see while the seer—supposedly the one with the supernatural ability—did not see because his attitude was rebellious—he decided to numb his natural ability and his conscience which tells him about the evil in what he was about to do.

The majority of commentators (*cf.* Brueggemann 1998:13; Kaiser 1963:8; Oswalt 1986:85; Wildberger 1991:15; Williamson 2006:33) agree that Isaiah employed a powerful parable to explain Israel's rebellion, not to be taken in the cultic sense as turning to other gods, but that their behaviour in terms of injustice is unnatural. Isaiah speaks of the order of nature—Israel has transgressed the law which nature has prescribed. This helped the cultic community of Israel understand that religion is also rational.

Blenkinsopp (2000:108) remarks that there is "very little to say about normative Israelite tradition either historical or legal". He further elaborates that the traditions in Isaiah seem to have drawn from Jerusalemite and dynastic traditions rather than from the interventions of the native deity on Israel's behalf in Egypt, in the wilderness, and the conquest of Canaan. As for legal traditions, though things forbidden in the laws in the Pentateuch are often condemned in these chapters (1-12; 28-33), there are no explicit references either to specific laws as known and acknowledged basis for conduct. The familiar terms for legal enactments are either absent or, if present, carry a different meaning. For example, the word תּוֹרַת (Isa. 1:10; 5:24) and מִצְוָת (29:13) should not be taken as the 'law' and 'status' or 'ordinance' as found in the Pentateuch; rather תּוֹרַת refer to the prophetic teaching, while מִצְוָת means either royal decree or conventional religious behaviour. Natural order forms the basis of the approach especially in the first five chapters (*cf.* Blenkinsopp 2000:108f).

The unnaturalness of Israel's behaviour is further nuanced in the following ways in the introductory section of the entire book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-5:

i. Despite יְהוָה previous punishment and captivity (implied in Isa. 1:5–8), Israel persisted in their rebellion (Isa.1:3–4).
ii. Isaiah 1:18 invites Israel to reason with the Lord. Instead of stirring their memory of covenant obligations, reasoning is called to action.
iii. The song of the vineyard (Isa. 5:1-7) demonstrates how Yahweh has been to Israel, yet, instead of giving sweet grapes, they (unnaturally) produce sour grapes.
iv. The motif of knowing brings in the argument of natural theology. The call narrative in Isaiah 6:3 declares that the earth is full of God's glory, but it seems that Israel did not utilise the moral function of nature in their administration of justice. Their knowledge did not produce works proportionate to what they knew.
v. The tradition presented sin as social ills based on a coherent understanding of how society should be. Isaiah 5:20 expresses concern for turning upside down the natural order of a society. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."

Having seen how the natural law principle is introduced in Isaiah—his appeal to general societal principles as the epistemological basis of Yahweh's indictment, this article argues that African culture and tradition might have a heuristic function on understanding some of the theology and ethics of the Old Testament. It can serve as a common epistemological framework that an African reader may draw upon for the theological ethical understanding of some of the Old Testament texts. The sections that follow provide an overview of Tangale worldviews—a constituent of culture—to show its resonance with natural law.

Tangale Worldviews

Instructions on ethics and morality in the Tangale community are weaved within the structures of their social life and belief systems. Experts (see Idowu,

1965: 144ff, Kunhiyop, 2008:8) in African Traditional Religions observe that it is difficult to put a sharp line between African social life and religion. Similarly, morality is indistinguishable from African social life. It seems that the laws designed to guide human conduct are deeply rooted and reflected in many traditional African societies. However, to understand Tangale ethics demands that one should understand its worldviews—its philosophy of life and conception of the world.[15] Tangale worldviews are very broad; I will therefore narrow the scope of this article by focusing on the Tangale worldview on nature as a phenomenon of the physical environment and human nature. I would like to investigate whether nature is capable of informing and indeed do inform ethical decisions independent of external coded injunctions. Focus is placed on Tangale traditional belief systems, which inform their moral behaviour.

The Tangale notion on the phenomena of the physical environment merely entails seeing nature as created by *Yamba*—God or god.[16] They do not study nature "as the scientist who seeks for the fact and laws of being and life; … Yet the Tangale has much lore regarding the forces [as opposed to the origins] of nature" (Hall, 1994: 6). The phenomena of the environment are viewed by the Tangale as instruments in the hands of the divine being for communication of his pleasure or displeasure for human conduct and character. Nature's elements, weather, seasons, and climate (favourable or unfavourable) are interpreted in terms of *Yamba's* pleasure and displeasure with human conduct and character. For example, Hall (1994: 11f) reports that Tangale people sees a causal relationship between the position of the moon and human conduct—

[15] This article would like to note that there is not much secondary material on anthropological studies on the Tangale ethnic group. As such the writer relies on a book titled *Religion, Myth and Magic in Tangale* written by John S. Hall (1994). Of course, being a Tangale myself, with regards to Tangale culture, I can also speak of personal experience.

[16] *Yamba* is the name of the supreme being. "The meaning of which word, as it does not appear to be derivative or a compound of common Tangale roots or stems, I have not yet discovered" (Hall 1994:32). Although *Yamba* is not exclusively used for the Supreme Being as a mark of distinction, there are other personal uses of the name. for instance, "A man *(sic)* who can do the unusual, without respect at all to the ethical quality of the act, can do it because *anga yamni,* because he has his God (Hall, 1989:35).

i.e., people look at the moon and see bad omen, so they reflect on what they have done to decide whether it was good or bad. This example, however, only refers to natural phenomena. An equally important aspect of the worldviews is, of course on humanity and human nature.

It is unquestionably believed that *Yamba,* the Supreme Being, created human beings and set them on the earth and in families (Hall 1994:16). Broadly, from the Tangale view, human beings comprise three essential elements: *Ik* (body)*, shirum* (spirit), and *kebe* (soul)*.* According to the Tangale worldviews, the spirit of human beings does not die, it continues to live in the afterlife on earth. The spirit in Tangale "carries the concept of real self, the indivisible, essential, continuing, basic self" (Hall, 1994: 21). The Tangale worldview about human nature also has a significant implication on how they behave. For example, morality and human conduct are motivated by the belief in the afterlife.[17] One is motivated to do what is morally right not only because of the law governing the community but because of the awareness that the spirit who is the essential being continues living. And good life in the next world is contingent upon a morally good life that one lives while in the body. But why is it necessary to live a good life at all? As Christians we can give many answers: God commands it, it is necessary for a peaceful and secure life, for survival, it is to prevent us from eternal damnation, it is the consequence of our gratitude/love for God and neighbour. But why do Tangale people traditionally believe it is necessary? This article is not oblivious to the argument of cultural relativism;[18] nevertheless, it objects to the relativist denial that moral values exist in a realm outside of human society.[19] Although what is morally acceptable in a particular

[17] This is purely metaphysical. But of course, not all moral principles/beliefs are founded in nature. However, the belief in the spirit nature of humans informs the motivation for good moral conduct.

[18] Cultural relativism is the view that societies create their own traditions, pass them along from one generation to another, and continually reinforce them through rewards and punishment (Fieser, 2001:2).

[19] This denial presupposes that human nature is the product of culture and society. There is no doubt that culture and society have an effect on human development. However, it should be noted also that the relationship is not a one-way relationship. Geertz (1973:89) says culture "[...] denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their

culture might not be the same in another society, one thing is common to all cultures, namely the awareness of the existence of moral principles that are known naturally.[20]

There is a gross misunderstanding in the assertion by certain scholars that, what Africa possesses as its cultural moral values are nothing to be cherished; at its worst, it is considered evil, because it does not come from God and must be replaced with moral values revealed by God (*cf.* Bediako1989:58). Culture is not synonymous with nature. Culture is a product of nature—i.e., human experience with the phenomena of nature and other humans inform their culture. We shall take the Tangale beliefs as an example and the link between culture and natural law. The Tangale belief system is broad and it is not possible to categorise all under broad headings. As such this article considers only a few aspects of beliefs and practices that affect the Tangale ethics and moral systems.

The Tangale ethnic group believes that supernatural beings and forces exist and that these beings and forces may have direct or indirect contact with human beings in the spiritual realm and sometimes in the physical. Most often the activities of these supernatural beings are the determinant factors of the Tangale social and moral life. Beliefs in supernatural beings range from the belief in the supreme being—*Yamba*, tutelary spirits, and malignant spirits. These supernatural beings are responsible for dispensing evil and good as tools for punishment and reward respectively. Moral and ethical guidelines are

knowledge about and attitudes toward life." Defining culture has been a debate amongst anthropologists. Notwithstanding, the point here is not the definition of culture, but the main concern is the link between morality, culture and natural law. Dearman (1992:2) observes that culture is the social context through which human communication occurs. By implication culture is a medium through which law and morals are communicated in a society.

[20] There is a distinction between natural law (singular) and natural laws (plural). Pertaining to natural laws, this relates to precepts of natural law and in this sense, they can be culture specific and, in this sense, cultural relativists are right. But natural law as defined is based on the first precept of law (see Aquinas, *Summa Theologica:* Q[94], A[2]) thus the *awareness of the existence of the moral principle is universal and natural.*

built-in in the belief of the activities of these supernatural beings (*cf.* Hall, 1994:32-62).

An account of the truce between *Shongwom*[21] and *Borak*[22] provides an interesting ethical sidelight. Being neighbours (*Shongwom* and *Borak*), there was frequent strife between them. At a certain time, both parties decided to bring an end to the strife; so, they made a treaty, but the Shongwom people did not keep to the terms. The historic account says: "That was the beginning of calamitous years for Shongom in their dwelling place. Every evil thing came upon Shongom" (Hall 1994:43). The Tangale believe that calamities and evil are shreds of evidence of the displeasure of the gods with humanity because of failure to keep ethical and moral codes. Kunhiyop (2008:9) concurs and adds that "In Africa, ethical principles and rules of conduct have been preserved over the ages in various customs and traditions that provide explanations of the moral code and indicate 'what the people must do to live ethically'" (*cf*. Adegbola, 1972:116).

Resonance of the Tangale culture with natural law

From the above discussion, it has been demonstrated that the Tangale culture (specifically its worldviews) provides some motivations for the general rules of conduct which are not dependent upon its social convention nor upon transcendent revelation. Culture and social conventions are vehicles through which these universal principles are preserved and made significant for a community (*cf.* Kunhiyop, 2008:9). The discussion of the Tangale worldviews shows that moral values exist in an objective realm that is external to human society. Customs and traditions are not the sources of the law themselves, the universal basic principles for human conduct are the embedded innate quality of every human being. Although, the Tangale appeals to divine rule for its moral values, these cultural moral values were not given to them through biblical means—special revelation. Appeals were made to the divine, but 'reason' is the epistemological basis of such appeals, not the written or

[21] Shongom is a tribe in the southern Tangale. They are Tangale, but preferred to be identified as Shongom.

[22] Borak belong to another tribe (not part of the Tangale) about eighteen or twenty miles south of Shongom.

revealed covenant code or injunctions. Thus, the assumption that moral values and ethics are only those constituted and coded in the covenant laws revealed in the Bible through the ancient Israel community, may be termed a lack of proper understanding of the principle of natural law. Customs and traditions provide explanations and indicate what the people must do to live ethically. And because they are not rooted in the coded covenant laws revealed in the Bible, one would say that these customs and traditions are a repository of natural law. It, therefore, suggests that the laws designed to guide human conduct within the Tangale culture resonate with the idea of natural law.

This understanding and development have significant value in the theological-ethical interpretation of the Old Testament. It implicitly leads to the notion that a reader plays an inevitable role in the interpretation of a given text. According to Lawrie (2005:110), "The reader does not merely discover meaning, but plays an active part in the creation of meaning […] Meaning arises in the interaction between texts and the reader who deal creatively with the texts". Readers do not read texts as isolated individuals. There is a social dimension to reading. "Many aspects of reader's context play a role: cultural and religious values and believes, social conventions and customs, the reader's experience of interaction with other people and so on" (111). Thus, natural law as reflected in one's cultural context provides a point of departure for reading some biblical passages. The question one might ask then is, does the reader-response theory not confirm the fear that the concept of natural law might push God into being the remote origin of moral obligation? Agreeably, the reader-response theory is complex and problematic (114). But at the same time, it would be unrealistic for one to claim to read a text objectively—without distortion. Now to respond to the question, the answer is nay. Natural law does not push God into a realm to become the remote origin of moral obligation. Rather, it acknowledges and affirms God as the ultimate source because he is the creator of all humans. And by virtue of one's being, as created by God, one has inherent dignity to be preserved as well as innate (rational) ability to preserve others' dignity. Thus, this article opines that natural law and culture can be used as the context in the reception of a particular text just as shown in the interpretation of Isaiah 1:2-3.

Again, understanding that customs and tradition explain moral and ethical living, has significance in biblical interpretation. For example, the Bible came

in a particular context. Any attempt to indigenise the Bible in any other context rather than its ancient Israeli context may jeopardise the integrity of the biblical text. Culture impacted the process of the formation of the Bible and impacts even our contemporary reading of it. This article invites African scholars to engage meaningfully in the quest for contextualisation. Hermeneutics in the African perspective is not synonymous with being resentful toward the Western philosophical/analytical approach to the biblical text. Rather it is a call to use what is available from their culture and tradition for a meaningful contribution in biblical hermeneutics and biblical Christianity in the world. It, therefore, suggests that cautions should be taken against an approach that is bent on looking for continuity between the Bible and African traditional religions than is warranted. For example, the search for Africa in the Old Testament by certain scholars tends to lead to uncritical hermeneutic of resonance.[23] Lovik (2001:50) concurs and expresses concerns that there are dangers that (1) some of the approaches have the potential to divorce us (readers) from the original historical setting of the text. She says "If the texts are considered mainly as theological messages for people of today, can this not lead to a situation of misunderstanding or over-interpretation?". (2) That the texts of the OT do not need to be read as historical facts because nothing is known on how Africans related to the Israelites at the time of the events in the texts and the time of the writing of the texts. (3) Not every text that speaks of Africans in the OT portrays Africa and Africans as playing important roles. (4) Consideration should also be given on negative images of Africa found in the OT (example, Ezk 30:5, 9; 2Chr 14:9-15).

In the light of the above, this article opines that the concept of natural law provides a useful point of orientation towards the resonance of biblical tradition and many African cultures and traditions. It is therefore important that caution be taken to guard against a hermeneutic of superficial resonance. Readers should maintain a critical approach towards both Western worldviews and African culture and religion. This approach presumably will give room for the appropriate and relevant incarnation of the Bible into what is truly African, rather than employing uncritical comparison especially because of the

[23] Lovik (2001:43-53) x-rayed four African scholar "E. Mveng (Cameroun), G.A. Mikre-Selassie (Ethiopia), S. Sempore (Benin), and D.T. Adamo (Nigeria)".

presence of Africa in the Bible or because of the resonance of many African cultures to the Old Testament.

Conclusions

This article has shown that natural law theory is rooted in the Bible. Isaiah 1:2-3 shows that even the donkey (illustrated in Numbers 22) and the ox possess some knowledge. It argues that natural law is not a move to push God away into a remote source of moral obligation. It does not equate the authority of the Bible with cultures and traditions. Rather, it still allows for the uniqueness of biblical revelation. However, the uniqueness of biblical revelation does not lie in its ethical and moral teachings,[24] but rather in the salvific work of Jesus Christ, through whom God's grace culminates (see Bonhoeffer 2005:356). The African culture and traditions thus have heuristic potential toward theological-ethical engagement with the Old Testament such that it honours the dignity inherent of all humans—knowing that even the donkey and the ox know.

[24] This assumption was what informs most Western missionaries' denigration of *all* African values as evil.

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The supremacy of Jesus Christ: A theological response to the resurgence of *Mbũri cia kiama*

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Abstract

Among the *Gĩkũyũ* Christians, there has been a push from the traditional council of elders to "return to our roots". Part of this return is the call to give away a goat or goats, called *mbũri cia kiama,* which is usually given to the council of elders as part of the progression of a man into the status of eldership. Some churches and church leaders have taken the position that this practice has no bearing on one's faith in Jesus Christ and that *Gĩkũyũ* men should see no harm in doing this. Further, it would be a sign of celebrating the *Gĩkũyũ* or African identity of Christian men. Utilizing Bevan's contextualisation methods, I make use of an integral approach to theological reflection by engaging Christology in the book of Hebrews with the anthropological findings of the aforementioned practice. I argue that while there are some positive elements in such practices including the African values of communality, mentorship and respect for elders, the covenantal underpinning of the practice obfuscates the New Covenant in Christ and should therefore be repudiated. I, therefore, show how the continuities and discontinuities of *Gĩkũyũ* culture and Christianity impacts African Christianity and African theology and suggest implications for Christian ministry.

Introduction: The Need for Contextualisation

This paper reflects on how the gospel intersects with African cultural practices, particularly the practice of *mbũri cia kiama* among *Agĩkũyũ* Christians. The paper reveals that contextualisation is necessary when it comes to such

cultural practices as it seriously considers the underlying issues while utilising the tools of theological reflection, including the Bible, communities of faith and church history. In the enterprise of contextualising theological reflection, several options have been proposed. This paper begins with the assumption that the gospel of Jesus Christ is unchanging and supra-cultural. Yet on the other hand, as the gospel interacts with different cultures, it must consider the contexts of the peoples that it comes across. Hesselgrave & Rommen (2000:11) consider the necessity of contextualisation as arising from gospel communication across cultures. Thus, models of contextualisation arise from the reality of considering how theological reflection can carefully and biblically engage with different cultural contexts. I make use of Bevan's (1999) synthetic model of contextualisation in this paper.

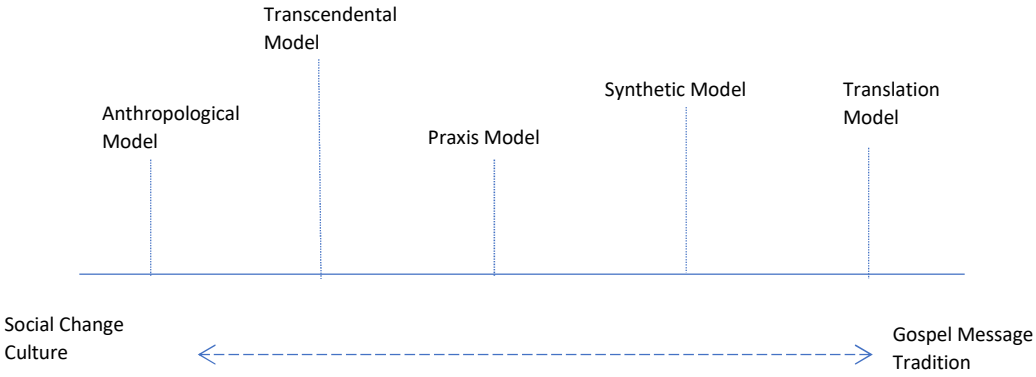

FIGURE 1: BEVAN'S MODELS OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

Bevans observes the necessity of contextualisation through the poles of social change (culture) and gospel message (tradition). Different models seek to balance these two aspects as illustrated above. Translation models remain as close to the text as possible with little consideration of the culture. Anthropological models take the culture seriously while downplaying the universalities of Christian doctrine. Among the other three models, the synthetic model seeks, the "difficult task" of balancing fidelity to scriptural revelation while deeply engaging traditional heritage in the past and present

(Bevans 2018:7). I think this is a helpful grid for considering African cultural practices because they have both positive and negative elements. Arguably, an integral vision for missiological engagement touches all the areas of the African's life, including their culture (Nkansah-Obrempong 2017:292). If the gospel message is to be embedded in African communities, it must engage cultural issues.

Integrating Christian theological reflection with cultural realities is premised on several reasons. First, Christianity does not belong to any particular culture. The late African historian and missiologist, Lamin Sanneh (2009) powerfully observed that the Christian faith is an act of translation into culture. Second, as Hesselgrave and Rommen (2000:2) show, the Bible exemplifies cross-cultural communication and engagement. The Old Testament reveals that although the Israelites were the chosen people of God, they were merely a means of blessing to all the nations (Gen 12:1-2; Ps 18:49-50; 57:11). In the New Testament, being justified by faith in Christ removes cultural barriers and unites Christians from different cultures (Gal 3:28-29; Col 3:11). The passage in Galatians speaks of justification while the passage in Colossians speaks of sanctification. In summary, being declared righteous in Christ and progressing in the new life are realities common to all Christians. Third, the end goal of cultural diversity is to show the riches of God's grace. In the book of Revelation, all ethnicities and nationalities will worship God together and proclaim his glory, which is seen in their redemption (Rev 5; 7:9-17).

Therefore, as Christians express their faith through the richness of their cultural diversities, the end goal is the glory of God in the redemption of his people. On the other hand, there are several ways in which our cultural expressions hinder God's will. One example is Peter who, because of his Jewish cultural background, was initially hesitant about God's inclusion of the gentiles (Acts 10:9-33). A second example is how we can entertain different cultural practices to accommodate everyone. This seems to have been the issue Paul had with Peter in Galatians 2:11-14 – especially seeking to accommodate cultural practices that were legalistic, that is, teaching that those particular cultural practices are what makes one a Christian. An extension of this may be excluding Christians of other cultural backgrounds because of practices that one culture holds in high regard. This can be seen in the decision of the church elders in the Jerusalem council in Acts 15:1-2. The last cultural issue is that of

breaking away from old cultural practices that would either compromise or take away from the work of Christ (Acts 15:28-29), in this particular instance the gentile or pagan practices of sacrificing foods to idols and sexual immorality.

I will proceed to unpack the specific cultural practice of *mbũri cia kiama* in *Gĩkũyũ* traditional culture. In this paper, I utilise such a synthetic model of contextualisation by making use of the doctrine of Christology, particularly as it emerges in the book of Hebrews, and its relationship with the presuppositions in the practice of *mbũri cia kiama.* I argue that some beneficial African values emanate from the practice, such as mentorship, communality, as well as the respect of elders. However, I also argue that since the practice is anchored in a covenantal understanding that is at odds with the New Covenant in Christ, the practice hinders Christian formation and should be repudiated, even as we explore relevant ways to nurture boys and men within African Christianity.

Christological Reflections in African Theology

Stinton (2010) interacts with the written Christologies of the Ghanian Bediako, the Tanzanian Nyamiti and the South African Mofokeng. She also interviews lay Christians and also leading African theologians from different theological backgrounds as follows:

- Benezet Bujo: Congolese, francophone, Roman Catholic
- Jean-Marc Ela: Cameroonian, francophone, Roman Catholic
- J. N. K. Mugambi: Kenyan, Anglican
- Anne Nasimiyu Wasike: Kenyan, Roman Catholic
- Mercy Oduyoye: Ghanaian, Methodist
- John Poebee: Ghanaian, Anglican

Her work is broad in scale and looks at various conceptual, methodological, practical, and contextual issues surrounding Christology. Bediako's (2013:17) call is to engage in theological reflection that is in touch with the grassroots, in his words "where faith lives". This type of theological reflection is in tune with the realities on the ground and removes the burden of academic theology as a

disengaged activity. Part of what this means is that African theological reflection must consider the unique worldviews that are a part of African traditional religions. For the Akan, for example, Bediako (2013:22) argues that a Christology that touches them must explore the theme of *Christus Victor* where Jesus Christ is seen as victorious over their spiritual world – including their supreme being (*Onyame*) and gods (*abosom).* Thus, considering each cultural context is key if the gospel message is to permeate deeply into the cultural soul. Stinton (2010:19) acknowledges Mbiti's pillars of theological reflection as the Bible, African tradition, lived experiences as well as one's theological tradition. I follow this similar concern by applying Christological reflection to the contemporary resurgence of cultural practices within Christian expressions of faith – with particular reference to *mbũri cia kiama* among *Agĩkũyũ* Christians – from a reformed and broadly evangelical theological background.

In both the global North and South, African culture is resurging within the Church. In America for example, there has been the rise of Christian groups such as the Black Hebrew Israelites. This group is largely made up of African Americans who trace their African lineage to the Israelites in the Old Testament. Their major conviction is the ignored black presence in the Bible and of peoples of African descent – although there have been commendable responses on this theme by several scholars.[25] This is to be understood from their location within the United States of America that has a long history of racial tensions. This has been recently protracted through the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and Critical Race Theory (CRT) debates in contemporary global discourse.

In post-colonial Africa, scholars have noted the rise of African Initiated or Indigenous Churches (AICs). These churches were formed to contextualise African culture within the Christian faith inherited from the missionaries and missionary-instituted churches. Some of the positive outcomes were the use

[25] See for instance Thomas Oden, How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP Academic, 2010); Harold C. Felder, The African American Guide to the Bible (Meadville, PA: Christian Faith Publishing, 2018); Eric Mason, Urban Apologetics: Restoring Black Dignity with the Gospel (Zondervan, 2018).

of local languages in worship liturgies and the use of African expressions in songs and prayers. By and large, this is to be commended. However, in the recent past, traditional elders in various ethnicities in Kenya have issued calls to incorporate particular traditional practices in their Christian faith. Some of these practices are very syncretistic of the traditional religions and take away from the person and work of Christ. I will shortly pay attention to the specific practice of giving the *mbũri cia kiama.*

Mbũri Cia Kiama in Gĩkũyũ Tradition & Culture

Continuity and Discontinuity between Gĩkũyũ Culture and Christianity

The Very Rev. Dr John Gatu, past moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, observes that there were many similarities between *Gĩkũyũ* as well as Old Testament worship. Gatu (2016:65) mentions monotheism, the deification of mountains and the sacrificial system as examples. Similarly, some of the oral narratives in the *Gĩkũyũ* culture have parallels to the Hebraic narratives of the Old Testament – similar to the Ancient Near Eastern background narratives and the Old Testament. They worshipped God, *Ngai* or *Mwene Nyaga* and observed the fig tree *Mũgumo* and certain mountains as sacred - such as *Kirinyaga* or Mt. Kenya to the North*, Kiambiruiru* (Ngong' hills) to the south, *Kianjahi* (Ol Donyo Sabuk) to the east and the Aberdares or *Nyandarua* to the west (Gatu 2016:65).[26] However, many traditional practices were against the faith, which churches such as the Presbyterian Church of East Africa rejected – this includes issues of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as well as the Mau Mau oathing.

On the other hand, several discontinuities emerge. The concepts of God in biblical theology in light of *Gĩkũyũ* culture denotes several distinctions. For

[26] John G. Gatu says that diviners pointed to these four mountains, imitating the sign of the cross, before meditation. My late grandfather, a Mau Mau secretary turned Christian (Presbyterian) told me that in the past, before the 19th century missionary presence, there were discoveries of a cross in Gĩkũyũ land. This is an unsubstantiated anecdote. Kenyatta observes some cultural practices that are, in my observation, similar to the Old Testament sacrificial system: they offered sacrifices on specific days and seasons, the elders entrusted with the sacrificial duties were to observe sexual purity, recitation of special prayers, the abhorrence of witchcraft and their death penalty if discovered.

one, the concept of the triune God is something unique to the biblical understanding. Secondly, the work of Christ in redemption is also something unique to the biblical worldview, even though there were foreshadows in the *Gĩkũyũ* sacrificial system just as in the Old Testament sacrificial system. In short, there are both continuities and discontinuities in the area of Christianity and *Gĩkũyũ* culture.

Mbũri Cia Kiama as Part of Initiatory Rites into Adulthood

With many African cultures being hierarchical, *Gĩkũyũ* culture respected elders. Some *Gĩkũyũ* (2017) anthropologists observe seven critical stages between the birth and death of a *Gĩkũyũ* male:

1) *Gakenge* – A newborn baby for the first few months or so. After that he is referred to as *Kaana*, baby. Major ceremony – Being born, *gũciarwo* kwa mwana.
2) *Kahĩĩ* – A young boy frolicking about like a young kid goat. Major ceremony – The second Birth, *gũcokia mwana ihu-iinĩ*
3) *Kĩhĩĩ* – A big boy nearing circumcision which would be anything from 12 to 18 years. To be called a *Kĩhĩĩ (Kĩhĩĩ gĩkĩ)* is an insult as it is a reference to the fact that one is due or overdue for "straightening" or circumcision – n*ĩ ũtigĩtie handũ*.
4) *Mumo* – *Kiumĩri* (singular), literally means "coming out", "emerging" like a butterfly from a cocoon into the full bloom of God's creation. Circumcision ceremonies – These were the most important of the *Gĩkũyũ* ceremonies of coming out. *Mambura ma irua*.
5) *Mwanake* – A young man until marriage. God's material creation in its full glory. God, Ngai, did not create a child but a fully grown man. A young man is God's fragment that was fashioned into a man by the creator, *Mũmbi*. *Mwanake nĩ kĩenyũ kĩa Ngai*. *Mwanake wa Njaama ya ita* is a member of the warrior coupes, military. *Mwanake wa Njaama ya kamatimũ* is a member of the policing and guard coupes, police.
6) *Mũthuuri – Karabai*. A married man who can still be called upon to serve military duty in a major war.
7) *Mũthuri wa Kĩama* – An elder who serves in one or more of the many Councils. Because the *Gĩkũyũ* system of government had no

chiefs or kings, all government was through consensus in the various tribal Councils.

After a boy was circumcised, he became a man but had to go through stages of preparation into eldership. Humphrey Waweru (2011:42) enumerates this preparation into five stages. The first stage was the council of boys (*Ngutu*), who had trained responsibilities such as organising games from the family level to the village level. The second stage was called the council of commons (*Kamatimu*). It was the warrior stage and was accessed through the giving of one goat, usually given by the father, and a calabash of beer. As junior elders, they are assistants and messengers of peace, to the senior elders. The next stage was the council of peace (*Matathi*). The condition for joining this council meant the stopping of raiding and having one's child circumcised (Muriuki 1969:162). A person was required to give another goat to the elders and Waweru observes that it took about 15-20 years to move to this stage. A mark of maturity in this stage ended in the initiate being given a staff (*Muthigi*) and leaves from a tree (*Matathi*). These junior elders would be given minor cases to exercise judgement, which was part of their ongoing training into the next stage. The next stage was called the governing council (*Maturungaru*). Through the giving of two extra goats, the elder was officially initiated into the governing council and is referred to as *muthamaki* or full leader. Because of the age requirement, wisdom characterised most of these leaders. If a young man exhibited high levels of wisdom, he would be approached and assisted to join the council of governing elders. It was possible to see a young man in a council of elders. The last stage was the religious council of elders (*Kiama kia guthathaiya*). The requirements were to have their children's children circumcised and his wife to be sexually inactive and to have stopped childbearing. This was the most honoured stage whose purpose was to offer national and communal sacrifices and prayers. Few got to this stage.[27] Waweru observes that women also had their own councils within their different clans (*mnari)*.

[27] My late grandfather told me that before he became a Christian, he had started the initiatory rites to become part of the religious council. As a Christian, he served as a deacon in the Presbyterian Church for many years.

The concept of sacrifice and intermediaries within eldership initiation rites

Sheep and goats were held in high regard in terms of their economic value. They were the currency of the day and it was said that "it is better to have sheep than to have a shilling because a shilling cannot give birth to another shilling" (Kenyatta 2011:45). Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president and a noted anthropologist, observes that these animals were important for the religious and cultural life of the *Agĩkũyũ* – they were used for purification and sacrificial rites among the *Agĩkũyũ*. They were also a prominent part of initiation into the council of elders. The anthropologist Louis S.B. Leakey (2007:207), who wrote the substantive three-volume work on the Kikuyu, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903,* concurs on the importance of goats and sheep in the social organisation and religious rites of the *Agĩkũyũ.*

Mbiti observes the importance of sacrifices in African religions as the interaction of the visible and invisible worlds – and Karangi (2013:612-622) notes the role of sacrifices (*mathĩnjĩro*) as communication between *Ngai* (God) and his people. Mbiti (1991:63) distinguishes between sacrifices and offerings in that sacrifices involve the shedding of blood whereas offerings include the giving of things such as foodstuffs, milk, or honey. Mbiti (1999:66) notes that prayers are also involved through the giving of offerings and sacrifices. These are not always offered to God but can be offered to lesser spiritual beings – such as "divinities, spirits and the departed" (Mbiti 1999:66). Since in *Gĩkũyũ* traditional religion, priests, kings, the living dead and ritual elders are seen as mediators between man and God, then it would be fair to conclude that the eldership system in *Gĩkũyũ* traditional religion is also seen as a mediatorial office. Mbiti (1999:68) observes that in traditional African religions, "In order to reach God effectively, it may be useful to approach him by first approaching those who are lower than he is but higher than the ordinary person."

As earlier cited, some of the intermediaries here include the ritual elders. Mbiti acknowledges that in using the intermediaries, Africans do not directly worship them but use them as "conveyor belts" in showing their reverence in approaching God. The point seems to be that eldership is seen as a mediatorial office within *Gĩkũyũ* culture. Any religious functions in the *Gĩkũyũ* tradition had to be conducted by a priest – these priests comprised the head of the family

or clan and was assisted by other junior elders (Leakey 2007:1082). Thus, the eldership system was also mediatorial in function. Since this cultural thinking is carried over into the Church, it is evident that there is a sense of reverence that is given to church elders.

The literature on the actual process of initiation into eldership is scanty.[28] However, from my research, it involved a call and response type of oathing that is similar in many other African cultures – and also a part of other *Gĩkũyũ* customs. Kabetu (2017:103) gives the oathing done during this process, after the meat was shared:

Atiririi kiama, tondu nitwaria ngoima cia ng'ania twamutonyia kiama-ini-ri, toigai kiama kiromwenda, magacokia: Kiromwenda. Toigai angikanatua cira urothira, magacokia: Urothira. Ugai angikanateithurana mbaara irothira, magacokia: Irothira. Ugai angikanahorohaniria kundu gutemanitwo, horohio io ironina uuru, magacokia: Ironina uuru. Ugai angikanaigwithania andu mahitanitie maroiguana, magacokia: Maroiguana.

[ENGLISH TRANSLATION follows][29]

Now council members, since we have eaten the meat from this candidate's (name inserted) goats for his admission into the eldership of this council as one of us, say: May he now be admitted as a full member of the council.
And they reply: May he be admitted as a full member of the council.
Elder in charge says: Whenever he exercises judgement on whatever case that may be brought to him, may his judgement be final.
And members repeat: May it be final.
Elder in charge says: If he arbitrates where there are disputes or quarrels, may his word be final.
And they repeat: May his word be final.

[28] I personally tried to contact *Mũkũyũ*, who keeps the website *Gĩkũyũ Center for Cultural Studies*, for this specific information. I was informed that this information is only given to the initiates of these rites.
[29] By one of the old *wazees*, mzee Kimeria, that I interviewed for this research.

Elder in charge says: Whenever he reconciles between fighting parties where injuries or blood has been shed, may his wise counsel end the bitterness thereof.
And they repeat: May his wise counsel end the bitterness thereof.
Elder in charge says: Whenever he arbitrates between two parties in dispute, may his counsel result in lasting peace.
And they reply: May his counsel result in lasting peace.

Afterwards, the new elder is inducted into the council and advised on the proper conduct of an elder and his manner of speech. He spends the rest of the days walking closely with the elders to understand the responsibilities of the oaths that he took. These initiation rites that are crucial for the lifecycle of the *Gĩkũyũ* man are also observed in other cultures such as the *Akamba* (Mbiti 1999:122). Chege (1985) also observes similar rites of passage among the *Ameru*, another close "relative" of the *Agĩkũyũ*. What is instructive is the place of offering sacrifices, usually a sheep or ram, during the rite of circumcision (*irua* in Gĩkũyũ) as well as the rite of *ntuiko* or *ituĩka* (in *Gĩkũyũ*) which refer to the handing over of judicial power to the next generation (or age set) of elders. Chege observes that these sacrifices were accompanied by the shedding of blood as a sign of thanksgiving to God as well as a libation to the ancestors (Chege 1985:55, 166). Among the *Ameru*, for the elders to serve in these sacrificial rites, they had to have the right pedigree – character, age, proper teeth formation, proper birth process among others (Chege 1985: 123).

In summary, when considering the question of *mbũri cia kiama* it is necessary to consider the relationship between *Gĩkũyũ* culture and Christianity. First, we need to appreciate the similarities between Old Testament Judaism and *Gĩkũyũ* culture – and the same could be stretched to other African cultures. Secondly, it seems that to a large extent the practice of giving *mbũri cia kiama* reveals strong hints of animism as well as legalism. The animism can be seen in the shedding of blood as well as the pouring of libation. Since these practices have ceased under the new covenant, there is no longer any need for them. Legalism can be seen in the entire conceptualization of the lifecycle as a hierarchical process of growing from one stage to the next – through certain do's and don'ts. I think it is commendable that there was a strong sense of mentorship between the elders and younger men and that is something we

have lost in contemporary and post-modern Africa, even within the urban African churches.[30] However, by and large, forcing *Gĩkũyũ* Christians to go back to this practice is similar to the Judaizing group of the early Church who was forcing the rite of circumcision for both Hebraic and gentile believers. I will now offer a biblical and theological response to support my point.

A Consideration of Christology in the Bible

The Old Testament similarities: The priestly and sacrificial systems

From the foregoing research, it seems that many African traditional religious and societal practices are very close to the Hebraic conceptualisation of the same. Exodus records the laws about altars (20:22-25), laws about restitution (21:3-15) as well as laws about social justice (22:16-23:9). Consecration of the priests is recorded in Exodus 29 with Leviticus expounding on the offerings and sacrificial system at length (Leviticus 1-7). I was struck by the many similarities between *Gĩkũyũ* traditional religious worldview and the Jewish religion in the Old Testament. These include the wide variety of ceremonial purification laws rituals including *rũruto* (misfortune), *mũrimũ* (disease), *ũrogi* (witchcraft), contact with the dead, contact with menstrual blood, and natural events among others (Leakey 2007:1232-1242). There are also similarities in the nature of the priests in the Old Testament and *Gĩkũyũ* traditional religion – who played a similar role to the *athuri a kiama*. These are just but a summarised version of the similarities between *Gĩkũyũ* religion and the Old Testament. However, the differences emerge in the New Testament interpretation of their significance.

The New Testament relevance of Jesus Christ as Sacrifice, Priest and Mediator

Although God related in a special way with Israel, his chosen nation, they were to be a channel of blessing to the nations. This is revealed not only in the Adamic covenant but also in the other covenants – including the Noahic, Abrahamic as well as Davidic covenants. In the Noahic covenant, God promises

[30] This is the reason the Presbyterian Church of East Africa began the Rites of Passages (ROPES) programmes for the early adolescents who are transitioning into high school and who have undergone circumcision in order to pass on important cultural and Christian values.

that he will never destroy the visible world as in the time of Noah. In the Abrahamic covenant, Abraham is promised offspring as many as the stars in the sky and the sand in the sea. In the Davidic covenant, David is promised a King who will sit on his throne and bring blessing to the nations. Although the ministry of Jesus in the Gospel accounts is mainly geared towards Israel, the entire Acts of the Apostles begins in Jerusalem but spreads to Judea, Samaria and all the world (Acts 1:8). The mission of Christ was not a privilege for only one culture but for the entire world.

The problem with some of the Jewish believers was that they struggled with cultural pride. Peter, the apostle, struggles with the vision he receives concerning the inclusion of the gentiles in the Kingdom of God (Acts 10). The elders have to make several decisions concerning Jewish-Gentile relations in Acts 15. In the Pauline epistles, Paul also tackles the issues of Jewish-Gentile relations and specifically rejects the sectarian groups that tried to force their cultural practices on the rest. In fact, on the matter of Jewish circumcision, Paul teaches Christians that this outward practice had spiritual significance. To go back to that practice would be to take the shadow instead of the reality, to which circumcision pointed to – that is the spiritual birth through the new covenant promise (See Col 2:16-23; Heb 10). These issues are handled at length in the Pauline epistles.

The book of Hebrews is of particular significance in its exposition of Christology which is foundational to New Testament Christology (Parsons 1988:195-216). Kvidahl and Lioy (2020) note that the book's emphasis on the high priestly ministry of Jesus makes it unique within the New Testament corpus. The book of Hebrews looks back at the Old Testament figures and sacrificial system and finds its fulfilment and realization in Christ. So, for instance, Jesus Christ is seen as the Great High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, the Old Testament priest of Salem (Heb 4:15 - 7). This highlights the significance of Jesus Christ as the Supreme Priest-King (Num 24:16; Deut 32:8; Ps 76:2; 110:4). The High Priesthood of Jesus Christ transcends that of the Mosaic Law – the eminent John Owen in his commentary to the Hebrews (8:1-6) observes that Jesus Christ's priestly ministry is distinguished for its dignity, excellence, and efficacy (Owen 1980). Jesus Christ is also contrasted with the Old Testament priests in Hebrews 10:11-13. Although the Old Testament priests "stand" daily, and offer sacrifices repeatedly, their sacrifices cannot take away sins. On the other hand,

Jesus Christ is "seated" at the right-hand God, offers a "single sacrifice" for sins which "perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Heb 10:14). Jesus Christ is truly the King-Priest that the Old Testament predicts. Jesus Christ is also seen as the mediator of the New Covenant, which takes effect through the shedding of Christ's blood (Hebrews 8; 9:11-28).[31] In doing this, he makes some of the older religious practices obsolete (Hebrews 8:6-8; 13). In other places, Jesus Christ is referred to as the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). The book of Hebrews sees Jesus Christ's death on the cross as the better sacrifice – that the sacrificial system of the Old Testament was merely a shadow of this great sacrifice on the cross (Hebrews 10:1-14). Jesus Christ is greater than the Old Testament religious system and through his various roles procures redemption, reconciliation, and victory for his people (Heb 2:14-15; 4:14-16; 9:12, 15, 21-22, 28; 10:14). To go back to the old system would be not only retrogressive but "shrinking back" to slavery – even in the face of suffering for identifying and living for Christ (Heb 9:26-27; 10:39).

Conclusions and Implications for the African Church

Banda (2018:61) articulates the importance of Christology for the practical African Christian life. For instance, he observes that the fear that undergirds the African traditional worldview and which leads to excesses in our understanding of the spiritual life – including deliverance ministries and witchcraft practices – can be better understood by considering the effectiveness of the atonement of Christ. Part of this doctrine includes the importance of reconciliation, redemption, and victory, which are the various interpretive foci of the various atonement theories in the history of the church.

This paper has briefly explored the global resurgence of African cultural practices, and in particular, the practice of *mbũri cia kiama* in African churches. By doing this, this paper traced the continuities and discontinuities between *Gĩkũyũ* religion and Jewish religion in the Old Testament, as well as their

[31] One of the old *wazees*, mzee Kimeria, noted that the underlying issue in the understanding of the *mbũri cia kiama* is the concept of covenant. For the believer who is under the new covenant, the old covenant is made obsolete. He concluded that those who dub in both Christian faith and *mbũri cia kiama* practices are confused as they participate in two covenants, which is impossible.

interpretation in the New Testament. This interpretive key was offered through the doctrine of Christology, including atonement theories, the offices of Christ, and the new covenant, concepts that are at the heart of a covenantal and redemptive-historical approach to biblical interpretation. This paper offers the following conclusions:

1. African theologians should pay close attention to the African traditional religious (ATR) worldview and cultural practices. This is because they have a clear outworking in the practical life of Christians in Africa. Secondly, considering ATR is a helpful way of theological reflection that is contextual and relevant and honours the gains made by the forerunner African theologians including Augustine, Athanasius, Mbiti, Idowu, Bediako and Sanneh.

2. Theological reflection with African realities must robustly engage scripture. I suggest a redemptive-historical and covenantal hermeneutic as one that honours what the whole Bible says on particular issues and finds its centre in Christ. Even while we take our cultures as sources of theological reflection, biblical revelation is the supreme authority – as per the reformed understanding of *sola scriptura* and *tota scriptura*.

3. African Christians can learn from their traditional culture. One positive lesson from the practice of *mbũri cia kiama* is the importance of mentorship with our African traditional cultures. Within contemporary African societies, many of the ills we are seeing, including family breakdown, complexities in adolescent development and youth transitions, could be minimised through mentorship. For African Christians especially, mentorship must begin in the home through family discipleship and in the church through holistic discipleship of young people.

4. Although African culture is highly oral, we must not use that as an excuse to disengage in Scripture study – with many translations available in local languages, Bible study must take a central place in African Christian practices. Additionally, Africans still pay more allegiance to their cultural practices rather than to their Christian

convictions. Since we are a new body in Christ, our allegiance to Christ is what informs our core identity as Christians. Where there is a conflict between Christ and culture, it is clear that Christ is Lord of all – including culture.

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Rethinking ecclesiology and the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi

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Abstract

This study discusses the phenomena of ecclesiology and the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi. The study aims to investigate the resilience and adaptation of the church in Malawi to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It used qualitative research methods: literature review and interviews. The study argues for the necessity of rethinking ecclesiology and the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi in the following areas: (1) the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) Malawi government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic; (3) the importance of re-defining the *being* and *doing* of the church; and (4) the viability of house churches in the Malawian context. The study has one major implication: "maintaining the Biblical view of the *being* and *doing* of the Church given the dynamic changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi."

Introduction

This study discusses the phenomena of ecclesiology and the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi. The study aims to investigate the resilience and adaptation of the church in Malawi to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) presents a global unprecedented challenge in all aspects of life including the church. Under the current circumstances, it is imperative to redefine the *being* and *doing* of the church. This type of understanding could be helpful for the church in negotiating with some COVID-19 restriction measures; particularly, limitations on church gatherings and actual church closures. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic has

occasioned an opportunity for the church in Malawi to engage in an ecclesiological reflection that ensures its sustainability amidst uncertainty and turmoil caused by the coronavirus.

In line with the aim of the study, the paper addresses the following four sections: (1) the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) Malawi government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic; (3) the importance of re-defining the *being* and *doing* of the church; and (4) the viability of house churches in the Malawian context.

The global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic

Wu et al (2020:44-48) contend that the first outbreak of a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) was reported in Wuhan, Hubei province, mainland China in December 2019. Patients who were infected by the virus and were admitted to hospital demonstrated conditions characterised by pneumonia and respiratory failure. Additionally, COVID-19 infection has the following symptoms: high temperature, a new continuous cough, and a loss or change of a person's sense of smell and taste. These symptoms then progress to shortness of breath.

Ferrer (2020:323-324) observes that the World Health Organization (WHO) named this etiological agent 'Coronavirus Disease 2019' (COVID-19) on 11th February 2020. On 11 March 2020, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, General Director of the WHO, declared COVID-19 as a pandemic.

Velavan and Meyer (2020:278-280) claim that SARS-CoV-2 evidently succeeded in making its transition from animals to humans on the Huanan seafood market in Wuhan, China. However, endeavours to identify potential intermediate hosts seem to have been neglected in Wuhan and the exact route of transmission remains unclarified. Rothe et al. (2020:970-971) maintain that the global spread of COVID-19 can be largely attributed to its person-to-person transmission. Cucinotta and Vanelli (2020:157-160) contend that the COVID-19 pandemic has become a public health emergency of global concern which requires an urgent, high-level, and coordinated effort to control the outbreak.

Ji et al. (2020:1-4) insinuate that human-to-human transmission was initially verified in family/friend clusters. Hu et al (2020:1) argue that super-spreading events, mainly during social gatherings, have played a crucial role in the worldwide spread of the novel coronavirus. These events include parties, religious services, weddings, funerals, sports events, carnival celebrations and political rallies. Liu et al. (2020:557-560) relay that dense transmission has also been documented in hospitals and nursing homes possibly through aerosols.

As of 22 September 2021, over 230 million confirmed COVID-19 cases were reported worldwide, with 207 million recoveries and 4,7 million deaths. The USA accounted for 43 million COVID -19 confirmed cases, 33 million recoveries, and 700 000 deaths. South Africa is the leading African country with over 2,9 million COVID -19 confirmed cases, 2,7 million recoveries, and 86 000 deaths. Malawi had reported 62 000 COVID-19 confirmed cases, 53 000 recoveries, and 2300 deaths (Worldometers 2021).

Malawi government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Malawi, a sub-Saharan African country has not been spared from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Patel et al. (2020:71) argue that the Malawian health sector which battles the epidemic is already challenged by inadequate funding, insufficient staffing, dilapidated infrastructure, and lack of essential medicines and equipment. Together with a high poverty level and poor health literacy, all these posed further challenges towards an effective containment. Aggravating the already tense situation, health personnel went on strike for two weeks forcing the government to employ more personnel, provide enough personal protective equipment and increase hazard allowances. Inadequacy of equipment adds to the grim picture as the country has a total of only 25 intensive care units (ICUs) and 7 functioning ventilators. Mhango (2021:1) reports that Malawi's decrepit healthcare system rendered frontline health personnel incapable of mounting an adequate response to critically ill COVID-19 patients who required ventilation during the surge of patients during the peak of the epidemic as was experienced from January to February 2021. This led to one of the nurses at a COVID-19 Isolation Centre in Lilongwe to cry out loudly: "Malawi can't breathe. Lord, please hear our cries and heal our land."

A patient who died of COVID-19-related illnesses posted an SOS message on his Facebook page as he was on his deathbed gasping for oxygen to breathe at the Kamuzu Central Hospital (KCH). He lamented as follows (Msoma 2021):

> In Hospital, diagnosed covid positive. The hospital staff are so wonderful and l can see pain in their eyes. Yes they have oxygen cylinders but in my case they cant connect me to the much needed Oxygen because the whole KCH has no Oxygen flowmeter. My situation is getting bad and l desperately need oxygen. Anyone who can urgently help out there please please help by donating this very gadget (sic).

His cry for help deeply moved Malawians of goodwill to start a fund-raising initiative to complement government efforts in containing the pandemic (Nyasa Times Reporter 2021).

On 20 March 2020 Peter Mutharika, former President of Malawi, declared a COVID-19 national disaster even before any COVID-19 case was reported in the country (Chilora 2020:1). He instituted a COVID-19 Taskforce Committee to oversee the pandemic and set aside funds amounting to $20 million to mitigate its impact. Some of the preventative measures included the closure of schools and universities on 23 March 2020. Authorities also banned public gatherings of more than 100 people and this applied to weddings, funerals, religious congregations, rallies, and government meetings. Security forces were deployed to enforce these restrictions.

Chilora furthermore reports that President Peter Mutharika appealed to the religious fraternity to intervene in the crisis. He called upon all Malawians of different denominations and faiths "to turn to God in times of fear and uncertainty as we do in times of joy and celebration. Let us join together as we pray for God's heart of love, mercy and truth to dwell in us and show us how to face challenges posed by the Coronavirus."

Tengatenga (2006:12) is of the opinion that Mutharika's appeal reverberates with the notion that Malawi is a God-fearing nation and recognises the crucial role which the church plays in the country's socio-political sphere.

On 2 April 2020, President Peter Mutharika confirmed the country's first three cases of COVID-19 (Kaponda 2020). The cases involved a resident of Lilongwe who had travelled to India, one of their relatives, and their maid.

Twelve days later, on 14 April 2020, President Mutharika announced a 21-day nationwide lockdown aimed at preventing, containing and managing the further spread of COVID-19. He made the announcement together with the then Minister of Health, Jappie Mhango, who was also the chairperson of the Presidential Task Force for COVID-19. At the time of the announcement of the lockdown measures, statistics showed that Malawi had registered 16 confirmed cases and two deaths due to COVID-19 (Kaunga 2020).

Kaunga furthermore noted that the lockdown measures were met with fierce criticism from traders, religious communities, civil society organisations, and the general public. Consequently, numerous protests were held throughout the country against the lockdown measures. Protesters accused the president of failing to consider the well-being of ordinary poor Malawians. The demonstrators demanded upkeep money from the government to survive the lockdown period.

The Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC) obtained a court injunction on 17 April 2020 restraining the government from implementing the lockdown measures. According to Gift Trapence, chairperson of the HRDC, they had obtained the injunction because of the government's failure to announce any measures to cushion the poor during the lockdown (Chiuta 2020:1).

Kaponda (2020) reports that on 10 August 2020, Malawi's new administration led by President, Dr Lazarus Chakwera imposed new COVID-19 restrictions. Among other things, the government restricted public gatherings, including religious meetings, to a maximum of ten people.

The religious fraternity in Malawi was extremely infuriated with this restriction on the number of people who could attend public worship services. The Episcopal Conference in Malawi (ECM), a group of Catholic Bishops, accused the government of announcing the new measures without consulting the country's faith leaders to hear their views on the restrictions. But, they

nevertheless advised their flock to abide by the regulations announced by the government (APA-Lilongwe 2020).

Rev Collin Mbawa, the General Secretary of the General Synod of the Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP) reported that the General Assembly met on 12 August 2020 in Lilongwe to deliberate on the government's new COVID-19 restrictions. They unanimously agreed to defy the new COVID-19 restriction capacity of 10 people and instead maintain its church gathering capacity to 100 people while observing all COVID-19 preventative measures (Nation Publications Limited 2020).

An Assemblies of God pastor who was interviewed for this study vehemently defied the government's COVID-19 restrictions which stipulated that a church gathering should have only ten people per service. He explained:

> I am told that the government has banned the gathering of more than 10 people, what does this mean? How many services does a big church like mine going to have on a Sunday? Indirectly you are telling us to close the church ... Let the government know that Walemera Assemblies of God will not close the church but we will try our best to have a bucket of water outside and handwashing soap, all members to put on face-masks, observe social distance and avoid greeting each other by hands. We will continue with our church services.

Study findings also revealed that there were disagreements between the clergy and the laity. An Evangelical church member argued that as much as the pastors are saying that the government has not consulted them, the same pastors have also not consulted their church members so that they can have a consensus on the way forward. She explained:

> I commend the government for bringing stringent COVID-19 restrictions because the aim is to avoid exposing us to the risks of contracting COVID-19 and saving lives in the process. But, our pastors are speaking their views as if they have consulted us. It's our own lives that are in danger. Myself and my family we have

decided to stop attending church services until the situation stabilises.

On 10 January 2021, the President of Malawi said that he was saddened by statistics showing an alarming spike in coronavirus infections in the country. In a radio address, he announced that he was starting a 21-day prayer and fasting to seek divine intervention into the COVID-19 pandemic (Masina 2021). However, health experts and other social commentators argued that the situation needed more than prayers.

President Chakwera's resort to prayer and fasting demonstrates the role of prayer in Malawi's socio-political sphere (Van Dijk 1998:156). However, the president, who is also an ordained minister of the Malawi Assemblies of God (MAG), goes beyond the scientific interventions employed to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and engages in prayer and fasting as weapons of spiritual warfare.

The foregoing discussion further demonstrates the interaction of the Church and State in Malawi. However, any church's engagement in public theology entails the church's self-understanding to preserve its identity and mission. Therefore, the next section of the paper presents an ecclesiological reflection amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and attempts to respond to the question: "What is the church?"

Re-defining the being and doing of the church

In continuing with the discussion on the ecclesiology and COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi, it is imperative to re-define the *being* and *doing* of the church. This type of understanding could be helpful for the church in negotiating with some COVID-19 restriction measures; particularly, limitations on church gatherings and actual church closures.

The believer's need for the church cannot be disputed. McGrath (1997:198-199) recounts that John Calvin identified the church as a divinely founded body, within which God affects the sanctification of his people. Thus, Calvin confirms the importance of the church by using two of Cyprian's great ecclesiological aphorisms: (1) "You cannot have God as your Father unless you

have the church as your mother," and (2) "Outside the church, there is no hope of remission of sins nor any salvation." Therefore, the institution of the church is a necessary, helpful, God-given and God-ordained means of spiritual growth and development.

As we reflect on the question "What is the being of the church?" I am of the view that the nature of the church can only be properly understood in its relationship with the triune God. Ormerod (2015:1) submits that there exists a web of symbiotic relationships between the Christian faith in the triune God and our understanding of the nature and purpose of the church. If indeed we are "partakers of the divine life" (2 Peter 1:4) and that life is trinitarian, then undoubtedly there must be some way in which the church's life reflects the life of the Trinity. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, I will employ three primary New Testament metaphors for the church which are grounded in the Triune God. These are the people of God, the body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit to construct a Trinitarian ecclesiological framework.

The church as the people of God

Migliore (2014) argues that one of the biblical images of the church is the people of God. The theme of the covenant between God and God's elect people is deeply embedded in both the Old and the New Testaments. "I will be your God and you shall be my people" (Leviticus 26:12). "You are God's own people, in order to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9). Van Rensburg (1981:139-179) asserts that the term "people of God" is closely related to the term "children of God" which refers to people who have been called by God and adopted through Jesus Christ by the regeneration of the Spirit. Thus, the call of God the Father of a people to Himself serves as a basis of the church's foundational identity as the family of God.

Bosch (2011:10) avers that as a people called by the God of Jesus Christ, the church participates in the mission of God. The Son sends the church into the world with the power of the Spirit on a mission to glorify God by making disciples of all nations, baptising them in the Trinitarian name of "…the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Thus, as the people of God, we are united in Christ and sent in the power of the Spirit to proclaim the

gospel so that people from all nations might become part of God's family. However, this mission is accomplished as the church functions as the body of Christ for the glory of God as witnesses in the world.

The church as the Body of Christ

Hultgren (2002:127) argues that the phrase "the Body of Christ" is a common New Testament metaphor for the church and it refers to both the universal as well as the local church. Paul speaks of the church as a universal entity (1 Corinthians 10:32; 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6) or as a specific congregation, meaning the church in that particular place (Romans 16:1, 5; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1).

Kreeft (2011) argues that the catechism of the Catholic Church states that the comparison of the church with the body casts light on the intimate bond between Christ and His church. Not only is she gathered around Him; she is united in Him, in His body. Three aspects of the church as the Body of Christ are to be more specifically noted: the unity of all her members with each other as a result of their union with Christ; Christ as head of the Body; and the church as the bride of Christ.

The image of the church as the body of Christ makes a provision for grounding the church in Christology. Bonhoeffer (1991) avers that the church means community through Jesus Christ because no Christian community is more or less than this. T.F. Torrance (1958:8-9) states that the image of the "body of Christ" has at least three implications. First, it refers us directly to Christ Himself, the Head and Saviour of the body. Second, it recognises that the incarnate Son of God has identified Himself with us, and assumes us into union and communion or fellowship with Him. Third, it points to the fact that as the church we find our essential being and life, not in ourselves but everything is derived from Him alone and that we owe our continued existence to Him.

The church as the temple of the Holy Spirit

Averbeck (2008:40) explains that the image of the church as the temple of God is illuminated in 2 Corinthians 3. The Corinthians are said to be, "a letter from Christ, ...written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (v. 3), and Paul is a minister of "a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit

gives life" (v. 6). The passage goes on to emphasise the overwhelming glory of this work of the Holy Spirit (vv. 8, 17–18; see also 5:5), contrasting it with the glory of the old covenant (vv. 7–18; see also 4:6, 17). The concluding verses are almost poetic in nature: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (vv. 17–18). Thus, the spiritual formation work of the Holy Spirit consists of transforming us into the likeness of Christ. We become the glory of Christ in this world as we increasingly reflect His glory to the world through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Chia (2020:22) deduces that in grounding ecclesiology in the triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the church can remain confident about its identity and the authenticity of its ministries in the face of challenging circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To be sure, the church is no stranger to disruptions because in its long history it has faced various challenges both moral and natural evil but has always emerged triumphant in all the circumstances. This should remind us of Christ's promise concerning the building of his church which says: "Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it (Matthew 16:18) (NLT).

The foregoing discussion has ecclesiological implications given the current COVID-19 outbreak. Pillay (2020:17) argues that the COVID-19 pandemic raises at least four ecclesiological questions. First, what it means to be the church (body of Christ) without going to church (a place of worship or a building)? Second, what is the possibility of being a church without our understanding of the church as an institution which is usually associated with buildings, offices, organisational arrangements, budgets, ministry, leaders, theology, doctrine, and visibility? Third, is COVID-19 teaching us what it means to be the invisible church since churches are not allowed to meet physically? How can we reimagine the idea of the church as a community (*koinonia*)?

Although churches in Malawi are allowed to congregate with a restriction of no more than 100 people in attendance, some churches have chosen to close down while very few churches have opted to use the digital platforms to

continue with the ministry. Thus, COVID-19 has disrupted the external structures of the visible church including its public worship and ministry. Nevertheless, COVID-19 is teaching us to appreciate the importance of having a living faith in Jesus Christ despite the apparent dismantling of the church as a community (Tengatenga, Duley, and Tengatenga 2021:20).

Okoro (2015:1-9) is of the opinion that the idea of the church as community resonates with the African idea of *Ubuntu* whose cardinal spirit is expressed in Xhosa language as: "*Umntu ngumntu ngabanye abantu,*" understood in English as: "People are people through other people" and "I am human because I belong to the human community and I view and treat others accordingly." In this respect, COVID-19 has also disrupted African communal life by affecting people's gatherings in community events such as weddings and funerals which are also officiated by the church.

Therefore, COVID-19 challenges theologians to reimagine the idea of the church as a community. Pillay (2016:16-18) argues that the Christian call to community is definitive for both the Christian faith and practice. The very notion of community is established in the Godhead; God is a trinitarian community (i.e. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and the church (*ekklesia: the gathering of those summoned or called out*) refers to the gathering of a community of believers whether it is a local church, a citywide church or as the universal church. God works with a community and whenever God does work with individuals, He sends them right back into the community. In other, words, the church exists by virtue of the various relationships between and among believers. So, the question is: what happens when the relationships within the Christian community are disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic? Imagine a church that has closed and cannot meet for a Sunday worship service, a Bible study, a discipleship class, or an evangelistic outreach event.

It should be noted that the above-mentioned questions can be answered differently depending on our various contexts. Chia (2020:23) argues that one of the most effective ecclesiological responses to the novel coronavirus in most developed countries has been the employment of virtual or digital ways of being and doing church. Churches are continuing with their core ministerial activities using Zoom, Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, WhatsApp, YouTube, TV, Radio, and other such media. Certainly, a virtual community has

been created replacing the physical, person-to-person relationships which form the basic units of a traditional, ecclesiological community. Partly, the virtual community provides a perfect answer to the question of social distancing as one of the primary preventative measures of mitigating the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bryson et. al (2020:1) explains the church's experience in the UK when the state imposed a lockdown on 23 March 2020; consequently, affecting the closure of the churches. Most religious denominations transitioned towards widespread adoption of telemediated virtual worship forms, very different from professionally broadcast Sunday services. The virtual service can connect worshippers who are in their respective homes and bring them together for a worship experience at the same time. Virtual services can be live-streamed or recorded, edited and delivered as real-time experiences, but are digitally stored and open to all. Such an approach sustains the service beyond a specific time and date, being in principle more spatially and socially inclusive. This demonstrates that COVID-19 has stimulated rapid shifts in ecclesiological practices calling for innovation and improvisation. It has transformed homes, via telemediated worship, into sacred places in which homes become linked together to share in common worship.

The development of an ecclesiological virtual community serves as an opportunity for creativity and the ability to reach audiences outside of the usual physical gatherings. However, in Malawi, the church is lagging in shifting to virtual services for various reasons. First, a lack of access to internet connectivity. Kainja (2019) paints a picture that truly reflects the situation of most churches in Malawi regarding internet connectivity. He observes that the Internet-enabled device, the power needed to run the device and the Internet data all have costs that must be met by the would-be Internet user. It is, therefore, very possible that the Internet may be available, meaning that the Internet coverage is there in a certain area, but people in that area would still not have access to the Internet because it is beyond their financial means.

Kainja's assertion can further be buttressed by the Inclusive Internet Index (2021) report which revealed that out of the 120 countries accessed in the report, Malawi has an overall rank of 114th in the global index and 27th in Africa. Moreover, the country's efforts to extend Internet access are stymied by low

digital literacy, high prices for data (relative to per-capita national income), poor network quality and coverage, and a dearth of relevant content. As a result, usage, even of mobile services, is exceedingly low by international standards.

Second, lack of adequate electricity due to persistent blackouts as a result of ESCOM's load shedding program (Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi 2017). Third, the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi are widespread. Alfonso (2020:11-15) established three critical findings in this regard. First, the majority of Malawians (80%) reported that their households are economically hit by COVID-19. Second, the majority of Malawians (87%) are worried that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the economy. Third, about 6 out of 10 Malawians (58%) are seriously worried that the COVID-19 pandemic has put Malawi's economy in tatters. The above-mentioned study findings conclude that most churches in Malawi do not have the financial capacity to access Internet connectivity. Also, it should be mentioned that church offerings and tithes have been affected during this period of the COVID-19 pandemic since most church members are living on a 'hand to mouth' existence. They are preoccupied with finding the daily bread to feed their families; hence, resulting in low giving to the church. As such, it's difficult for the churches in Malawi to sustain virtual services.

Now, if the church in Malawi has not effectively transitioned to the provision of virtual or digital services, what is the viable alternative given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic? I propose that the most effective way of being and doing church in Malawi during the COVID-19 pandemic is the establishment of house churches. Thus, the next section of the paper presents a discussion on the viability of house churches in Malawi.

The viability of house churches in Malawi

The current COVID-19 situation in Malawi necessitates an ecclesiological rethinking on the viability of house churches, home churches, or home cells (*Domus ecclesiae*). In this section of the study, I present the biblical and historical basis for house churches.

The biblical and historical basis for house churches

Corpuz and Sarmiento (2021:115) argues that the Lord Jesus Christ gave us an example of worship that took place in a house church. Luke 22:8-22 narrates a story in which Jesus tasked Peter and John to prepare the Passover meal in a large upper room of a house in Jerusalem. Therefore, it was in a house church where Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist or Holy Communion.

They furthermore observe that the gathering of Christians in hospitable homes goes back to the very first days of the Early Church (117). Acts 1:12-15, portrays the disciples, after Christ's ascension, as returning from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, entering a house whereupon they went into an upper room. The upper room, a common architectural feature of the East in those days was built on the second or third floor of a house. It was a fairly large room mainly used for rest. It is in the upper room where the disciples and the Christian believers totalling up to 120 continually gathered, experienced community, prayed, (Acts 1:14; 4:31) and possibly breaking bread and teaching and preaching (Acts 2:46; 5:42). Therefore, we can infer that this upper room served as a house church.

Chupungco (1997:106) explains that a feature of the early Christian church was the celebration of the breaking of bread in the houses of believers, as Acts 2.46; 20.7-12 narrates. The domestic or house liturgy was the tradition that the disciples initiated in the Graeco-Roman world.

Witherington (1998:163; 241) points out that the early Christians were meeting daily, sharing food "from house to house" which might suggest that they rotated where they ate and worshipped God, or more likely that since there was a good number they shared in various homes (Acts 2:46-47). Moreover, the apostles continued to teach the gospel daily in the temple and from house (church) to house (church) proclaiming Jesus to be the Messiah (Acts 5:42).

Filson (1939:105-112) argues that the specific mention of a prayer meeting in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, (Acts 12: 12) serves as a reminder that when the early Christians wanted to meet as Christians, no place suited their need except the homes of their members. Moreover, the book of Acts 12:17 suggests that this was not a meeting of the whole Jerusalem church, but only of one group. Therefore, it indicates that as the church grew in size it

became increasingly difficult for all the believers in the city to meet in one house. One would imagine that for all ministerial and liturgical meetings, then, the total number of Christians could be divided into smaller groups, housed in the homes of believers.

Payne (2008:1-2) indicates that Paul's missionary activities are replete with the concept of house churches. For instance, in Acts 16:40, when Paul and Silas had come out of the prison, they went "to Lydia's house where they saw and encouraged the brothers and then left". In Romans 16: 3-5, Paul states: "Greet Priscila and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus… greet also the church in their house." In Colossians 4:15, Paul says: "give greetings to the brothers in Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house." When Paul writes to Philemon in verses 1-2, he states: "Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus and Timothy our Brother, to Philemon, our beloved and our Co-worker, to Apphia our Sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church at your house."

Cairns (1967) postulates that the historical basis for house churches during the period of Apostolic Christianity was primarily because of fear of persecution by the Romans. Moreover, the domestic worship of early Christians from the first to third centuries was in harmony with the spirit of early Christianity. In the first century, Christianity was not free to erect buildings for use in worship. In Jerusalem, for a very short time, Christians worshipped at the temple and in the synagogues, under the umbrella of Judaism, which was a *religio licita* (permitted religion). For three hundred years, Christians endured different forms of persecution until Constantine legalised Christianity by issuing the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. Also, Theodosius I (347-395 A.D.) contributed to the flourishing of Christianity by making it the state religion of the Roman Empire and developing great architectural projects in Constantinople.

The Early Church practice for worship in house churches was due to political, economic, and sociocultural reasons (Hannah 2019:95). But, I infer that the contemporary house churches being proposed in this paper are due to lockdowns, home quarantine, and social distancing to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the church in Malawi should consider reviving the house churches during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic and provide opportunities for

families and friends to engage in worship, prayer, Bible study, faith-sharing, and the breaking of the bread. In this vein, the house churches would meet the reformation criteria of a true church: where the word of God is preached and sacraments are administered (McGrath 1997:188-200).

"Mphakati": house-church theology in Malawi

In this section of the paper, I will engage with Bishop Patrick Augustine Kalilombe's *m'phakati* theology (1999) as one of the ecclesiological models from the Malawian soil. In 1973, he catechised an ecclesiological rethinking on house churches, home churches or home cells which would be comprised of small Christian communities (*m'phakati*).

Corpuz and Sarmiento (2021:117) agree with Kalilombe by arguing that house churches and their emphasis on liturgical renewal has the potential of substantially and positively impacting the spiritual lives of the faithful during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In engaging with Kalilombe's *m'phakati* theology, I will present his ecclesiological conceptualisation of house churches in three sections. These are: (1) the vision of the *m'phakati*; (2) the nature and mission of the church; and (3) the formation of small Christian communities (*m'phakati*).

The vision of the m'phakati

Kalilombe (1999:33-34) argues for the necessity of building a self-reliant church in Malawi based on the principles of self-ministering, self-propagating, and self-supporting. The realisation of this vision was based on the creation of grassroots Christian communities in which the laity are fully empowered to participate in the church's life and mission. The *m'phakati* theology was based on the ecclesiological model of Vatican II whose motto was: "The Model of People of God and Mystical Body of Christ." – church that sees itself as the evangelical light, salt, and leaven planted amid the world to minister as the "sacrament of the coming kingdom of God."

Kalilombe (1999:45) postulates that a successful ecclesiological re-thinking needs to be worked out and applied to fit concrete circumstances of a particular place, people, and time. The church should be able to discern the

signs of the times. This is reminiscent of 1 Chronicles 12:32 which states that: "From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders of the tribe with their relatives. All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take" (NLT).

Similarly, the contemporary church must understand the times we are living in and confront the challenges that we are currently facing. Mwakikunga (2021) argues that the COVID-19 pandemic has not spared the church in Malawi. We have lost prominent Christian leaders who were faithful and committed to the advancement of God's kingdom here on earth. For instance, two prominent Malawian clergies, Bishop Dr Charles Tsukuluza of the Revival Life Ministries and Rev. Dr Edward Chitsonga, the immediate past president of the Malawi Assemblies of God succumbed to COVID-19 in early January 2021.

Kadewere (2021) reports that the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM) also bemoaned the death of two of their priests due to COVID-19. For instance, Rev. Fr. Dr Dominic Kadzingatchire, a renowned academician succumbed to COVID-19 on 18 January 2021. Also, Rev. Fr. Kankhono of Thondwe Parish died of COVID-19 on 3 February 2021. Mzumara (2021) accounts that a catholic priest: Fr. Martin Mthumba of the Lilongwe diocese succumbed to COVID-19 on 24 January 2021 at Bwaila COVID-19 Isolation Centre.

Study findings have revealed the need to take COVID-19 seriously by observing the prevention measures. A pastor of the Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP) who was infected with COVID-19 and was interviewed for the study narrated his experience as follows:

> I was just feeling general body weakness, fever, chest pain or pressure, and difficulty in breathing. Then I went to Zomba General Hospital and they diagnosed me with high levels of Blood Pressure and sugar. I was admitted the same day and had a COVID-19 test. The following day, I got my COVID-19 test results which indicated that I was positive.
>
> I was moved from the general male ward to the COVID-19 Isolation Centre. The doctors also explained that my oxygen level was very low and for three days I was receiving supplemental

> oxygen. By God's grace and power, I recovered and was discharged out of hospital. But, up to now, I can't smell anything, no taste in any food I eat and still feel general body tiredness. COVID-19 is a dangerous disease and I nearly died. My advice to the church is that they should strictly observe the COVID-19 prevention measures. Prevention is better than cure. It's not a good experience at all to suffer COVID-19.

Mzumara (2021) reports that the surging numbers of COVID-19 infections have subsequently led to the closure of several churches in Malawi, both Catholic and Protestant to facilitate the process of fumigation. Meanwhile, congregants who were in touch with the clergy who have tested positive to COVID-19 have been advised to go for testing and self-isolation.

Therefore, it is in this milieu that Bishop Kalilombe called upon the church to understand the times and re-cast its vision to be relevant in the prevailing circumstances. Nonetheless, any attempt to contextualise the church's ministry given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic should not in any way compromise on the nature and mission of the church.

The nature and mission of the church

I believe that any ecclesiological rethinking should always maintain the integrity of the nature and mission of the church. Even during the raging COVID-19 pandemic, the church should remain true to its holy calling. The Apostle Paul states that: "…if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

Kalilombe (1999:46) articulates an understanding of the church as both a community of salvation and an agency of the same salvation to lost souls (1 Peter 2:9-10). Sonea (2017:73) argues that the *missio Dei* (the mission of God) brings implications for the *missio ecclesia* (the missionary activities of the church). Bosch (2011:391) says that the main purpose of the *missio ecclesia* cannot be limited to the planting of churches but extends to the service of the *missio Dei*. It involves representing God in the world by proclaiming the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to all the nations of the world.

Kalilombe (1999:46) explains the missionary character of the church by grounding it in the triune God. He argues that the church is not a human creation but it is God-given, God structured, God-led, and God-animated. Newbigin (1995:19-29) defines the missionary nature of the church by its participation in the mission of the Triune God. The church's source and identity are rooted in the missionary action of God on behalf of the world. The church participates in the mission of God, continues the mission of Christ, and bears the witness of the Spirit.

Kalilombe (1999:48) argues that the church is a community with a mission of bringing salvation to the world. Schirrmacher (2018:31) concludes that Jesus says in John 17:18, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world," and in John 20:21 he changes this into a personal address to his disciples: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." God the Father sends His Son and His Spirit as missionaries, and the church continues this sending mandate in world missions, whereby it remains dependent upon the exalted Lord (Matthew 28:18–20) and the Holy Spirit's empowerment (Acts 1:8).

Kalilombe's understanding of the church as a community of salvation implies a relationship between the Great Commission and the house church. Green (2004:251) argues that one of the most important methods of spreading the gospel in antiquity was by the use of homes. It had positive advantages: the comparatively small numbers involved made real interchange of views and informed discussion among the participants possible; there was no artificial isolation of a preacher from his or her hearer.

Adubofuor and Badu (2019:83) give at least four reasons why the church can be able to accomplish its mission through house churches. First, house churches are key to evangelism in the communities because they attract new believers who find adequate care in the small groups. Second, they create a new kind of missionary who can meet human needs and make an effective follow-up with the gospel. Third, they create a miracle church, which is a church that is sure to multiply itself through setting and achieving conversion and discipleship goals. Fourth, they facilitate the exercise of authority with love since the leaders are in constant touch with the members, sharing their achievements and challenges in multiplying their cells.

Thus, any ecclesiological rethinking for the church in Malawi should remain faithful to the nature and mission of the church amid the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic.

The formation of small Christian communities (m'phakati)

Kalilombe (1999:68) explains that the church exists concretely on different levels. However, there is a law that stipulates that the proper functioning of the wider levels of the church are governed by the vitality of the narrower levels of the Christian communities. This can be observed in everyday life experience whereby people do not consciously live as wide communities but as cells: basic and manageable social entities. These cells (herein called the *m'phakati*) provide a sense of communal belonging and form the basic Christian communities of faith.

The *m'phakati* which is comprised of a small grouping of the faithful can easily meet the COVID-19 restriction of social distancing and mitigate its negative implication of collapsing the church community. Cho (2021:16) argues that social distancing is one of the ways employed in preventing the spread of COVID-19. But, if the COVID-19 pandemic is prolonged, "social distancing" will negatively lead to "social isolation." Social isolation is the lack of people's social interaction and this lack of community may, in turn, lead to a lack of humanity; subsequently, collapsing the church community. Unquestionably, it should be acknowledged that the church is currently involved in various socio-concern activities that express love, empathy and solidarity amid the suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the gravity of the situation cannot be undermined given the disruptions which the COVID-19 pandemic has caused on the church community. A proper ecclesiological response to the current crisis is to ensure that the four elements of the church community are sustained. Fundamentally, the church is a "community of gathering," a "community of sharing," a community of fellowship," and a "community of communion." All these four elements of community are essential in fulfilling the church's purpose and function. Therefore, in this milieu, the *m'phakati* provides an opportunity for Christians in house churches to continue with the fellowship (*koinonia)* or the communion of the saints (*communion sanctorum*) while strictly adhering to social distancing.

Kalilombe's thinking resonates with the New Testament concept of house churches (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 12:12; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians. 16:15, 17; Philemon 1-2). The church is called to live and work, in the first and essential place, on this basic community level. It is here where the majority of Christians live and work. Likewise, the same Christians can be organised to gather around the altar where God's word is consistently preached and the church's liturgy celebrated (1999:68-69). Gehring (2004:7) claims that the house church served as a building block and building centre of the church at any given location, as a support base for missional outreach, as a gathering place for the Lord's Supper, as a sanctuary for prayer, as a classroom for catechetic instruction, and as an opportunity to experience and exercise Christian brotherly love.

A pastor of a big Pentecostal church in Lilongwe who is a survivor of the COVID-19 pandemic insisted that the church should utilise the home cells during the COVID-19 pandemic. He narrated his experience as follows:

> Myself and my wife were all infected with COVID-19. It was a difficult time for us. We were both doing self-isolation at home. One evening, the situation got worse for my wife due to severe difficulty in breathing. I called one church elder and we picked her and rushed her to the COVID-19 Isolation Centre at Bingu International Stadium. The doctors immediately put her on oxygen therapy. She was admitted for two weeks and then was discharged from the COVID-19 Isolation Centre.
>
> We eventually closed the church for at least three months without holding any church worship services. However, I think that it is possible to continue with church ministry in the home cells that we already have. The most important thing is to follow the COVID-19 preventative measures i.e. limiting the number of participants in the home cell, washing of hands with soap or hand sanitiser when entering the house, wearing face masks, and observing social distancing. In this way, church ministry can continue in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Adubofuor and Badu (2019:85) argue that the house church should be considered essential to church survival and growth because it is regarded as a

key to durable numerical growth for four reasons. First, the house church serves as a discipleship, fellowship and leadership development tool. Second, the house church offers a natural, informal and caring environment that is essential for meeting personal needs, making even children disciples of Christ, and grooming disciples into leaders under closer family-style supervision. Third, the house church also serves as an evangelistic vehicle because the widespread house church meetings can bear testimony to more parts of the same community than the entire church meeting at one place only. Fourth, the house church is financially viable and sustainable because it does not attract immediate rental and building costs that could be hindrances to starting churches. Rather, it allows for making savings to fund missions and is itself considered a very dynamic and cost-effective way of starting and growing churches in mission areas.

I also interviewed a pastor of a charismatic ministry in Zomba who reiterated the need to utilise home cells during the COVID-19 pandemic. He described his experience as follows:

> When the COVID-19 pandemic started in Malawi, we sat down with the church board and made a conscious decision to close the church but continue worshipping in home cells. We divided the church into 6 home cells and appointed a home cell leader for each cell to be leading the services. I was going around the home cell meetings to attend the services with one or two church elders. However, when the COVID-19 restriction measures were eased and church gatherings were allowed, we discovered that church members from one cell were not coming to the church. After some enquiries and follow-up, we discovered that they took advantage of the situation to start a break-away church.

The above-mentioned scenario should serve as a caution that some ill-intentioned members of the church can take advantage of the *m'phakati* (house church) to cause a division or a split in the church to start a breakaway church.

The *m'phakati* theology although conceptualised some four decades before the COVID-19 pandemic offers at least three insights into the viability of house

churches in the currently prevailing condition. First, social distancing can be properly maintained at a house church. Second, the restriction of church attendance to either 10, 50 or 100 members can easily be followed at the house church. Third, it is easy to enforce other COVID-19 safety measures such as hand-washing with soap or hand sanitisers and the wearing of face masks at the house church (Masina 2021:1). Therefore, I argue that the house churches (*m'phakati*) serve as a viable alternative for being and doing church in Malawi during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed the phenomena of ecclesiology and the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi. It has argued for an ecclesiological rethinking given the current COVID-19 pandemic. The church in Malawi must negotiate with COVID-19 developments in at least four areas. These are: (1) the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) the Malawi government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic; (3) the importance of re-defining the *being* and *doing* of the church; and (4) the viability of house churches in the Malawian context.

In negotiating with the aforementioned factors, I argue that the church must maintain its nature and mission regardless of the changing dynamics brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, I have demonstrated the viability of house churches (*m'phakati*) in Malawi as one way of being and doing church without compromising its nature and mission.

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The church, poverty and public theology in Africa: a reflection in African (Nigerian) context

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Abstract

The problem of poverty in African contexts is a pervasive one. It continually confronts the Church and society with serious questions on how best to address the problem. There are no easy answers, but that does not mean that there is nothing at all to say concerning it. It could be historically necessary to reflect on what the leading missionary enterprises did to Africa when they came with the gospel within a colonial administration. There were instances in which they were almost oblivious about the plight of the African people as long as the people to whom they presented the gospel would accept it and obey the rules of the church and biblical teaching. Little or nothing was done to address the poverty situation in which the African people suffered and died. But in recent years we have seen some paradigmatic shifts in the sense that many of the so-called mainline churches are now beginning to be open to the sociopolitical dimension of life in Africa. The contribution of the African theologian Samuel W. Kunhiyop will be discussed below to bring him to the centre of the dialogue on the church and poverty in Africa. The reception of the 'theological-logic' of Russel Botman of South Africa alongside other voices of ethical concern will also be closely considered. This essay aims to argue for the responsibility of the church in Africa to intentionally address the economic, political and ecological problems that continue to challenge the problem of poverty in Africa. This would be a call to the Church in Africa to be active and innovative in presenting a holistic gospel that is mindful of the spiritual, academic and social situation of people in different contexts. The article serves as an introduction to how

Christians would hopefully continue to interpret the Bible in responsible and constructive ways.

Introduction

This essay focuses on discussing the ravaging problem of poverty in Africa. As highlighted by Piet Naudé, the idea of Africa can endlessly be problematic in itself (Naudé 2010:221-230). Nevertheless, we shall continue to describe what we mean by "Africa," perhaps to come to an understanding of its meaning and scope. Africa has historically been associated with blackness and poverty. This is nothing beyond human ideological prejudice against the African people through histories of dehumanization. This kind of view may generally be attributed to the legacy of slavery and historic segregations on the continent. Be that as it may, it is my view that the continent of Africa is loaded with a lot of issues and histories of struggle. This essay attempts to highlight some of the struggles in Africa to create an awareness of it, which will hopefully raise the interest of many readers among African Christian theologians, pastors and writing scholars to critically and (hopefully) adequately rise to the challenging problem and history of the problem of poverty in Africa from an African public theological perspective.

Africa in this context is not just a description of the home of the black race; Africa is historically and technically beyond the home of only black people. Like Nelson Mandela once said of South Africa, I want to postulate about Africa today: it is the home of all those who live in it, and hopefully add the idea of those who work to build and maintain it as a good and beautiful continent. From southern Africa to the eastern, western and northern parts, we more often than not hear stories of human suffering, death and dying, due to various and sometimes intersecting problems of evil, poverty and diseases. In what follows, I would like to provide a survey on the problem of poverty in Africa, with the hope of suggesting some ethical ways that Christian biblical interpreters can closely engage with the problem and hopefully find useful ways of progress in life beyond them.

Poverty in Africa: A Dialogue with Samuel W. Kunhiyop[32]

In chapter 10 of *African Christian Ethics,* Samuel Waje Kunhiyop briefly describes the problem of poverty in Africa. He opens the chapter with a Malian story as a microcosm of Africa, referring to Harber Sabane, the then elected Mayor of Timbuktu in Mali, who described his African context by saying: "We are very, very, very poor" (Kunhiyop 2008:137). The reality of poverty can be seen especially in the degree of its presence in these words by the repeated use of "very" to emphasise the enormity of the problem. Wilbur O'Donovan, after many years of living and ministering in Africa, discovered that "Poverty is one of the greatest problems in Africa today" (2000:141). He further describes what he calls "[t]he Painful reality of poverty in Africa" within which he discusses the fact that "[o]ne out of every three Africans does not get enough to eat….[t]ens of millions of African children suffer from malnutrition, which means retarded physical and mental development, disease, disability and death" (2000:143; Kinoti 1994).

Furthermore, from the United Nation's Human Development Report, the five "poorest' countries "in the World are Niger, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad – all located in Africa" (Kunhiyop 2008:137). Regardless of where these countries are located in Africa, the point is that they are African countries and that they are poor. Even the so-called developed countries within Africa, places like South Africa, have a very large number of poor people roaming the streets and living in shacks in townships. The regions and slums where they stay are often very dangerous places because of the incessant presence of violence and dehumanisation.

Sunday B. Agang, among others, highlighted the problematic effects of corruption in Africa. This may be considered from both the secular political system as well as the religious (even Church) leadership systems as being one

[32] The reason for my choice to dialogue with Samuel W. Kunhiyop is mainly because of his interest on giving Christian ethical approaches to questions of life interest in African contexts. He is not alone in his viewpoint but he has been largely ignored by many African scholars specifically on the question of poverty and the church in Africa. I found his reflections on the presence of poverty in the Bible insightful and thus I focus on him in this section.

of the keys for breeding unnecessary situations of poverty in Africa. In Agang's view, corruption more often than not leads to violence and violence leads to poverty and dehumanisation (2016; 2017; Kajom 2015). Popular examples can be cited to make this point clear and concrete; places like the North-Eastern regions of Nigeria have seen the ravaging effects of violence through the Boko Haram militia. The people of the Niger Delta region can also tell many stories of ecological and human destruction and poverty because of the historic conflicts that they have experienced around the oil wells in their region. The problem of land ownership and control has been the struggle of the day in Nigeria, mostly between the Fulani Herdsmen and farmers in Benue, Kaduna and Plateau States. Other contexts, like in Kenya, have seen the disastrous effects of Al-Shabaab. In the Central Africa Republic, the recent years of political instability have witnessed actual dehumanisation and intolerance and the notorious South Sudan religio-political conflicts remain an African embarrassment because of the betrayal of an African sense of identity. The so-called "Ubuntu"-identity has been damaged. It is supposed to bring Africans together into solid communitarianism and religious homeliness, especially within the One Body of Christ, so that others who are not within this metaphoric context may see the goodness of God manifested in ways that confront and counter poverty and all forms of injustice.

It is acknowledged that "[p]overty manifests itself in many ways" (Kunhiyop 2008: 138) such as socioeconomic poverty, religious poverty, political poverty, collective poverty and individual poverty. All these forms of poverty do not necessarily mean the "lack" of something good and essential. For example, "religious and political poverty" is not necessarily the lack of basic commodities within a particular context, but rather the lack of the necessary "will" and "wisdom" to responsibly manage them to satisfactory ends. Unfortunately, we have to face the reality that "poverty is pervasive" in Africa, as described by Kunhiyop. He further explains that "Television viewers are bombarded with pictures of weak, hungry and emaciated human beings all over the continent. Beggars roam the streets of most of our cities, laying siege to car owners and begging for coins in order to feed their families and stomachs" (Kunhiyop 2008: 138).

In her book *Surprised by the Man on the Borrowed Donkey,* the South African theologian, Denise Ackermann saw and described South Africa as a context of

"deep contrast." She discusses the gross problem of "[e]conomic inequality" (2014:241; Terreblanche 2002; Terreblanche 2012; Mbeki 2009) that seriously characterised her country in surprising and challenging ways. In connection to the idea of poverty in (South) Africa, Ackermann has another concern, namely the "feminization of poverty", which she describes as "a pernicious problem in our country" (Ackermann 2014:242). In her effort to help us see the market ideology that has been consuming us in the world today, Ackermann acknowledges that "Consumerism is a worldwide phenomenon" (Ackermann 2014:250; Atwood 2008; Brubaker 2001; Cavanaugh 2008; Childs Jr. 2000; Wheeler 1995). For life to be possible and (hopefully comfortable) for everyone, we need to be serious in deconstructing our consumerism and embrace communal love, care and generosity.

Going back to Kunhiyop, I would like to argue that poverty emerges not within Africa's needs but mostly from Africa's abundance. He helps us to focus on some basic needs of Africa that have to do with the social, economic and political systems of life. These spheres of life are replete with cogent needs that need to be closely addressed for Africa to be liberated from herself and be bold enough to rise and thrive. There is no doubt that "Africa's Needs" are many and as I mentioned previously, these "needs" are not the necessary reasons for poverty in Africa but rather are the result of the misappropriation and mismanagement of the resources which lead to the ever-growing sense of those needs. These needs are pointers to the clarion call that this contribution among others needs to make to raise the consciousness of many who might be unaware of the grim reality of poverty in Africa with the hope that the church as Christian faith community will take the lead in rising against these enormous challenges.

One of the actual needs that Kunhiyop pointed out is the "[n]eed to develop resources." The resources that need to be developed are not actually in terms of the elemental naturalness of the resources, this is because we believe that God has naturally endowed Africa among other continents with abundant wealth in terms of human and natural resources. But one of the main areas that need development in this regard is the processing of these natural resources to meet the needs of the poor. "Though Africans are poorer than people in other continents, they have more children to feed" (Kunhiyop 2008:139).

It is, unfortunately, true that "Africa's government do not always make wise decisions when it comes to developing and distributing the continent's resources" (Kunhiyop 2008:139). Many politicians in African governments have made their calling into public service to be a profession that must be paid in millions and billions of dollars, Rand, Naira etc. while the people who have elected them into office and gave them the mandate to occupy those public offices die of starvation or inadequate social amenities. We have very good governing structures in Africa even before the advent of democracy. At this point, I am thinking of the traditional system of Africa's territorial protection, personal and corporate work ethics as well as the well-known communal system of life that looks into the other in search of oneself and its appreciation. But in the contemporary systems that are mostly democratic in many countries around the world including many African countries, the story is a far cry from actual democracy. This is why some people tend to ridicule Africa's democracy by calling it 'democrazy.' It is because of how crazy some politicians have made the democracy become. There is no justice and equity in many senses of governance. This reason among others, calls us to rethink our "African Democracy" into a more preferable option that will be useful to our communal development, not just personal enrichment.

In connection to the above-mentioned need is the 'need for better health care.' O'Donovan discovered that "(t)here are already serious problems with poor health in Africa due to tropical diseases and parasites such as bilharzia, malaria, hepatitis, dysentery and other things" (2000:143). It is rightly observed that "[i]nadequate health care means that infant and maternal mortality are high on the African continent" (Kunhiyop 2008: 139). There are well-known health challenges in Africa today like HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria, Ebola, SARS-CoV-2, etc. which need urgent and intensive response towards lasting solutions. The problem with the "Ebola" virus has been reasonably addressed to the extent that I am not sure if there are any serious cases in recent times. Nevertheless, it is not a call for us to relax about it. There is a growing concern about Lassa fever as well as the increase of malaria and other transmittable diseases that appear deadly and are a serious threat to many people in Africa.

Another important need that must not be neglected in Africa is the need for better education. "Poor education restricts the progress of life" (Kunhiyop

2008:140). Many young people are either uneducated or undereducated in Africa today. Many of them are seen parading the streets and are consequentially a threat to the security and wellbeing of the general public. Those young people need to be rescued from the terrible situations that keep them captive to liberate them into a viable life system within which their presence can be felt and their contributions can be accepted and appreciated. Many politicians use those undereducated youth as their political weapons during their campaigns and afterwards to keep themselves safe and to maintain the distance between themselves and their opponents. This has unfortunately taken a very bad and sad turn in northern Nigeria whereby undereducated girls are being misused. These young girls should have been the pride of the nation and by giving them a good education we shall save the country and guarantee a future for the next generation.

There is also a need for food in Africa. One of the seriously challenging reasons for the attention to food security in Africa today has to do with the presence of "natural calamities" (Kunhiyop 2008:140) such as epidemics, drought, deforestation and global warming. Lack of good food to eat is gradually pushing people away from one place to another and worst of all prompting some to disastrous behaviour in order to survive. The church in Africa needs to be careful and mindful of ways to closely respond to these challenges. There is a need to "inhibit warfare" which is mostly caused by poverty and marginalization. Kunhiyop rightly observes that poverty both fuels and is fuelled by wars and internal strife (Kunhiyop 2008:140).

There is a need for good governance in terms of "honest" governance in Africa. As has earlier been mentioned, there is a lot of corruption in the governing systems of African governments today. "Corruption has infected politics and government in Africa" (Kunhiyop 2008:141). It is unfortunate but necessary to face the truth that our African political systems need to be thoroughly reformed and transformed from what they have been and what they are today. It is interesting and timely to note that there is a need "for Christians to live out their faith." There are many professing Christians in all tiers of government in African countries today but the question is whether they are living according to the principles given in the Bible and exemplified by Jesus Christ and his disciple. There are many African Christians in public services who do not live up to the expectation of the life of Christ. "Sadly, Christians are also

implicated in some of the factors that contribute to keeping Africa in poverty" (Kunhiyop 2008: 142). In a more explicit prophetic voice, Kunhiyop observed that "Christians are also complicit in the corruption that plagues many African countries and inhibits development" (2008:142).

As earlier indicated, this essay aims at providing the reader with some leading and challenging issues around the phenomenon of poverty in Africa with the hope that the Church can be motivated to take the discussion and the quest for truth and justice further in the search for the Africa we want and that God wants us to live in. This will be possible if we pick up the challenge for doing public theology within biblically revealing truth, and a humanly honest sense of engagement in the ways we see, think, pray and respond to the realities around us. In what follows I would like to provide a short survey of poverty from biblical perspectives of both Old and New Testaments and then suggest some theological thoughts that can be useful in responding to these private and public, life-threatening realities.

Poverty in biblical perspective

Stephen Adei agreeably suggests that "Poverty is a recurring theme in the Bible…. Many are poor because we live in a world where injustice and skewed economic order mean they lack access to education, land and other means of improving their material conditions (Jas 5:1-6)" (Adei 2010:788).

In this section, the idea of poverty will be discussed briefly from both Old and New Testament perspectives as indicated above (Hoppe 1987). There will not be exhaustive discussions of the concept in terms of linguistic analysis. This will be left for further critical and comparative studies.

Poverty in the Old Testament

Humanity as "Adam" was created in the abundance of God's provision (Gen. 1 &2), in the sense that everything that mankind needs was provided in their first home before the coming of the problem of sin as rebellion from God (Gen. 3). Sin was the first reason that pushed humanity away from the abundance of God's provision into the world of poverty (lack and needs). While out of the Garden of Eden mankind had to toil and suffer because of their rebellion against God's will and plan for their lives. The fact that work became tedious

and life was lived under very harsh conditions brought a new perspective to the life and role of mankind in the world. Nevertheless, the grace of God has already been sufficient to all the generations that came and gone until the time of the law when God's provision came to the people of God in God's generosity and generative love. Even though mankind has fallen into sin, God's heart of love was always open to man and to search for them. This is seen in the body of the law given to the Israelites especially on issues that have to do with God's concern for the wellbeing of humanity.

The Pentateuch is replete with God's legal provision of protection and principles that help the poor to be well taken care of by those who are rich in context (Michael 2015: 72-73). The poor were not neglected in the Torah. "God in his love and mercy made provision for them" (Kunhiyop 2008:144 cf. Exodus 22:21-24; 23:6-11; Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 15:4-5; also see Gelin 1964; Gutierréz 1991, 2013, 2015 and Hughes and Bennett 2006).[33] Furthermore during the time of the prophets, "being poor became synonymous to being oppressed (cf. Amos, 2:6; 4:1; Isa. 3:14; 10:1-2; 11:4; cf. Kunhiyop 2008: 144). There was no room for the oppression of the poor, widows and orphans in the Old Testament. Whoever did that was rebelling against the revealed will and law of God. This is mainly to teach the people of God to learn to take note of those in need and to live according to God's ordained principles of neighbourliness.

In wisdom literature, the issue of poverty and being poor was not neglected. But rather it receives practical attention from a correlative perspective. This shows that people do not become poor for no reason, but that it must be connected to some kind of cause (cf. Prov. 19:1; 28:6; 19:22). One may ask within the context of the wisdom literature and more especially the book of Proverbs, what causes poverty? The answer that one may readily encounter in response to the foregoing question could be either or both of the following; Laziness (10:4; 19:15, 24; 20:13; 21:17) and foolishness (Prov. 11:14; 10:14-16; 13:18). The call within this book in particular is for the life of responsibility and wisdom which leads to success and affluence.

[33] For more on what God says concerning the poor and poverty cf. Deut. 15:11; Ps. 140:12; 74:21-22; Prov. 31:8-9; Ps. 82:2-4 etc.

Poverty is also mentioned in the Psalms. Like in Proverbs, poverty is also related to some kind of circumstances and/or people that must have caused it. Thus in the book of Psalms, the enemies of the poor are the wicked ones (cf. Ps. 10:4-7; 140:4, 8; Kunhiyop 2008:145).

After considering the problem of poverty in the Old Testament we shall now turn our attention to the New Testament for further explorations.

Poverty in the New Testament

From the start of the ministry of Jesus, the poor are addressed in the way He lived and taught. The concept of being "poor" does not necessarily refer to physical lack but rather it could be pointing to one's spiritual state of being. It is good to be "poor in spirit" (Matt, 5:3; Luke 6:20) for this kind of people shall experience God's abundant provision in Jesus Christ that fulfils their lives. It may be striking to note here that Jesus was among the poor in the NT (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:50; Kunhiyop 2008:146). The life of a poor widow features in Mark 12:38-44 and is used as a framework to criticise those who are rich and unwilling to make sacrifices from the abundance they have been blessed with. This widow's generosity is a point of departure to remind us of the scarcity of resources in the hands of many women (widows) in Africa, yet, to call us to the Christian possibility and responsibility of giving by faith and hope.

The rich are further criticised by Jesus during his encounter with the rich young ruler (Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22). This is a person who had so much that he was not willing to give up anything for any other person. This kind of life does not show any sign of true repentance to follow Jesus by faith and hope. This kind of life must be critically confronted and reconstructed within our hermeneutical lenses and active participation in helping those in need around us. Jesus' life was one of surprising invitations, awe-inspiring words of grace and wisdom, and wonderful extensions of love and life even to the poor. The invitation to the great supper (Luke 14:10-24) clearly demonstrates that the poor also do have a space in Jesus' life and economy. These "poor" may be hermeneutically understood today to mean those who need God's salvation. Yes, they are indeed poor, and we have a lot like them in present African contexts. Thus, whether poverty is something physical concerning the lack of enough food to eat or clothes to wear, the life and teachings of Jesus challenge us to be true disciples who care and give to those in need. The parable of the

poor Lazarus and the Rich man (Luke 16:19-31) feature clearly in the teaching of Jesus that those who are marginalised, exploited, and neglected by the rich can be assured of God's presence and care. This is the calling of the church in Africa today. The story of the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke. 19:1-10) further describes how the evangelist Luke, criticised the evil structures of dishonesty and selfish-aggrandisement. Jesus confronted Zacchaeus in his affluence and that encounter led Zacchaeus to a new life of generosity and honesty.

The problem of poverty was confronted in the active care of the early church. As reported by Luke, there was "no poor" among them (Acts 2:44-45; 4:33-35; Kunhiyop 2008:147). This is because the members of the early church have created spaces within themselves that those in need among them could share. No one held onto anything and claimed that it belonged to them alone. The caring and sharing life of the early church was legendary and it is a continual challenge for us in Africa today. The caring nature of the church was not just a collective effort but is also reflected in their individual lives of service toward one another. This could be seen in the life and ministry of Peter and John at the temple gate (Acts 3). On their way to the place of prayer, they met a beggar. He was begging for money but the disciples did not have any money with them that they could give him. But they prayed for him and gave him wholeness through their love and care. We have a lot of beggars in contemporary Africa; we need to think of what to do for them, how to pray for them and when to reach out to them and hold their hands so that they can get onto their feet and walk.

We are further challenged by the helping hand of Tabitha/Dorcas (Acts 9). She was most probably not a very rich woman, but she was willing to help those in need around her. The problem of poverty in her context includes the lack of clothing for the vulnerable. She spent her time and skill to provide clothing for those in need. When she died her testimony filled the air, she was not left dead but rather by the help of God and in God's power, she was brought back to life through the prayer of Peter. We need such prayer warriors in Africa who will be humble enough and willing enough to listen to the needs of people in context and always be ready to take those needs to the Lord in prayer.

In the life and ministry of the apostle Paul, we could see the interface of need/poverty and satisfaction/supply. Some passages present us with the record of Paul's calling and the Church's example of help to those in need (Rom 12:13; I Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:1-4; 9:1-2). Within these verses, we can see his challenging principles of giving in love and hope thus identifying and meeting the needs of the church with the gifts of God's grace. The brother James also called for justice to the poor (James. 2:1-6). This is done in the context of ecclesial segregation especially between the rich and the poor. But James, through the power of the Holy Spirit, admonishes the Church to be Christ-like and humble, persevering in good deeds that actively characterise their faith in Christ.

From the above exploration of poverty and being poor in the New Testament we could see that the phenomenon does not only entail material poverty but also spiritual poverty. In one sense poverty is good and desirable, for it is only in our state of spiritual and ethical poverty that God's grace and mercy will be manifested to help us. Nevertheless, despite evidence of people who suffered from material poverty, they were never neglected by the Church. When help was called for, believers, both individually and collectively, strived to meet the needs of those within the Church community. In what follows in this contribution we shall briefly reflect in terms of some further elaboration on the nature and calling of the Church as a community of active responsibility even to the conditions of the poor among us in Africa.

Theological logics[34] for a transformative public theology in Africa

The leading question that we wish to closely ponder upon and respond to within this contribution is this: what can, and should Christians do, in Africa, about the problem (and crime) of poverty? This is where we need to reflect on some useful theological logic to meaningfully and responsibly respond to the problem of poverty in Africa. One of the big challenges before us is to learn from our mistakes and see how to start living better for and with others. Our

[34] The idea of 'theological-logic' comes from the contribution of Russel Botman and its reception by Dirkie Smit (Botman 1994; 2002; Smit 2015:3-13). This notion points us to the new pattern of life and thinking of Christians from a theological perspective.

failure to know where our mistakes are will continue to keep us within its darkness but the moment we realise where the problem lies will be our moment of liberation from it. We must not deny the presence of poverty and suffering in Africa and we cannot claim that we are innocent. Sampie Terreblanche, a respected South African economic historian has amply shown how Christianity has been used as a tool for colonisation and segregation (Terreblanche 2002). In other words, it has been abused as a tool for oppressing and impoverishing the other (the black other etc). Early in this essay, we have seen Kunhiyop's observation in the sense that Christians are also "complacent" about the poor condition of life in Africa. This kind of passivity is also an addition to the problem, not its solution. But at this point, we need to think and act better in order to lead the way for the liberation of Africa from the deadliness of poverty. Our theology at this point must be an existential one, in that it should be concerned about the possibility and the flourishing of life.

We need to note with Sider once more that we as Christians live in such a way that there are "rich Christians" within the "age of hunger" (1977). There is no doubt that "hunger" in this context can be interpreted from different metaphoric perspectives including of course the spiritual hunger for the word of God. John Stott among other evangelical Christian theologians and writers insists that Christians around the world need to be people of the gospel. We need to share "God's word for today" (1992). If the need of our context includes economic and ecological needs, we cannot turn a blind eye to it. The Bible has been given to us as a faith community, yes, for theological and spiritual formation and transformation, but also the social-ethical formation and transformation of our ordinary lives and societies. There is the need to use biblical teaching and principles for social change in the sense that we see the coming of justice in our socioeconomic life in Africa and beyond. E. Calvin Beisner has critically argued that we need to be "compassionate" in the way we use our God-given resources in a "world of scarcity" (1988). This act of "compassionate" care and justice is what we need in contemporary Africa to

adequately face and transform our socio-economic challenges. This is a good and useful theological logic[35] that cannot be overemphasised.

Denise Ackermann also joined the lead of theologians, from a South African context, on how we need to theologically and responsibly respond to our African socioeconomic problems, not least the problem of poverty. Ackermann argues that we need to acquire the art of sharing the blessings of God with freedom. This is the act of knowing when "enough is enough" (2014:237). Ackermann rightly saw herself in a way different from those around her and her radical view prompted her to a new way of speech when she admits that, "I am a 'have' living in the world of great need" (2014:237). This is the actual starting point of our transformation in Africa when we come to the moment of truth, the *Kairos* that brings us to the light of who we are and where we are so that we can know what we need to do, not only differently, but usefully for and with others who are not us in many ways.

Our new vision of ourselves in relation to others is a good theological logic that reminds us of our unity and responsibility in Christ. Ackermann, after long heart-pounding discussions, faced the fact that "I resort to the truth that everything on earth belongs to God, that all I have is temporary, to be held in trust, to be accounted for, and to be used wisely" (2014:264). This is what we need our "rich" Christians and political elites to learn to do, to learn that we are co-human beings in the world of need and that we are all stewards of God's blessings. This is when we need to stand up to our calling for compassionate justice, active solidarity and faithful stewardship.

As a Christian community another theological logic that we need to consider is our understanding of the fact that we are called into the household of God (Eph. 2:11ff). Living in God's household entails living together and with responsibility, with a great sense of love and sensitivity to the needs of others. In Ackermann's words, "Living together in a household signals interdependence, relationship, belonging and the common desire to keep the household sustainable, both socially and economically" (2014:271). Jesus has

[35] I borrow the notion of "theological logic" from our late Vice Chancellor and theologian Prof. Russell Botman (Stellenbosch University) as well as its articulation by Dirkie J. Smit in Botman's memorial lecture.

called us into an “abundant life” in Him. We must not trivialise this “life” to material affluence alone, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that we are given life and one another to experience the richness of the blessings of life together. We need to constantly rethink our theology within categories that can be useful towards providing a viable and enjoyable life together (McFague 2001).

Stanley Hauerwas, one of the leading American ethical theologians, reminds us that as Christians we need to be “A Community of Character” which will be our stepping stone towards building or constructing a useful Christian social ethics (1981). The character that we must have and also exhibit from the Church into the larger world context is the life of Christ (Phil. 2:5-11). But first of all, we need to learn to be conforming daily to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:1ff). We need to be people of godly character. Kunhiyop succinctly mentioned that we need to learn to be the “salt and light” of the world according to the teaching of Jesus Christ (2008:154). Within our Christ-likeness, we need to be active in upholding “human dignity”. This is our act of sharing the gospel of Christ in practical ways as we follow His example while also setting a good example for others to follow (Kunhiyop 2008:155).

Kunhiyop agreeably sees our need to responsibly respond to the plight of the poor as part of our gospel to them when he said, “A proper response to the poor involves presenting the whole gospel” (2008: 157). We can also share God’s blessings with those in need when we give to “charity” (2008:159). This is the gift of grace. We cannot tell the extent of help and blessing that our gift will do (cf. Matt. 25: 31ff; Ishaya 2017:132-146). From a general sociopolitical responsibility network we need to learn to suggest, accept and “implement policies that help the poor” (Kunhiyop 2008:160). Wilbur O’Donovan suggests that the Church and the State (government) must work together against the deadliness of poverty when he said, “Human governments also have the authority to take actions which will help to relieve conditions of extreme poverty” (2000:147; O’Donovan 1996). We can help alleviate poverty continuously by creating and sustaining “Church-based NGOs” (Kunhiyop 2008:161). Through these Church-based NGOs, we can strategically provide what O’Donovan calls “the principle of empowerment” (2000:156). The Church

can empower its members and even trained pastors towards becoming actively involved in living useful and profitable lives in the world.[36]

Dewi Hughes in his book *Power and Poverty* helps us to see God's role in giving and managing the blessings of life in the world. The blessings include material blessings as well. He calls the Church to its proper role from her self-understanding as "God's Governed Society" namely the Church (2008:191). We need to always realise that we are in the ordered society of the Supreme Ruler (2008:193). The Church must understand itself as a gathering community, (i.e., local assembly) for the making of disciples while actively getting involved in helping for the flourishing of life. The Church is also seen as a suffering community (2008:200). This does not mean that we should be complacent with suffering especially when it comes with injustice, or when it can hopefully be avoided, but more than that the Church needs to know its identity as a joyful community (2008:208). The Church must also be a community that speaks God's words (2008:225). This is the advocacy nature and calling of the Church in the world. The Church as we shall see as we finish up this section must closely understand itself as the community of the Kingdom of God.

Stanley Hauerwas in his *Christian Existence Today* argues that there is an interface of life between the Church and the World (Hauerwas 1998). There is life within and between both realities. In our search for a useful public theology in Africa, we need to critically reflect on how the Church and the World (State?) can meaningfully enrich each other. We need to also understand that there is

[36] Let me briefly share a story from Nigeria (especially for international readers). At ECWA Theological Seminary Kagoro, Nigeria where I currently serve as lecturer, the vision of equipping pastors for the pulpit ministry and beyond came about under the visionary leadership of Prof. Sunday B. Agang whose ideas with Dr. Dennis Shelly, a missionary from America, led to the establishment of the Skill Acquisition Center at the Seminary. Earlier they had started a Seminary fish pond which produces fish for staff and students. Right now students at the Seminary are being trained to serve not just from the pulpit but also as active people for social development. This engagement with society gained some good theological grounding in the introduction of the Master Degree Program called, "Christian Theology and Public Policies." Presently, the Seminary has extended it to the PhD level. These are interesting developments in the Seminary that will surely continue to help to make our theology public and relevant in context.

"living between" both entities. Following Wessel Bentley and Dion Forster from the South African perspective, we are called to think about our theological logic of negotiation for an inclusive society whereby religion is seen as a means to an end and not an end in itself. The interface between Church and State should be one of creative existence that enriches both entities (Bentley and Forster 2012).

The Church as the Kingdom of God has its context and task within a particular life and world context. Dion Forster's contribution to the collection of essays on the relationship of the Church and the State is titled, "God's Kingdom and the transformation of Society" (Bentley and Forster 2012:73). In his contribution, he presented something that is an almost controversial option for a secular state as one that represents God's common grace in a free society within which everyone could live and flourish with dignity. Forster certainly did not opt for a godless society, or even an anti-God society which is a common ideological understanding of being "secular" in many contemporary understandings. But rather the Church has a prophetic calling in light of its God-given responsible space and actions: "Christians have God-given responsibility to engage any power, whether an individual or an institution, that acts contrary to the principles of the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of Christ" (2012:78). It is interestingly agreeable and challenging to note from Forster's view that, "[e]very believer is to be a prophet, listening for the will of God in society and living to see *that* will enacted" (2012:78). He further concludes his challenging essay with the following words, "The Kingdom of God, as expressed in both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Scriptures, espouses social justice, economic responsibility, peace for all people and stewardship of the earth's resources" (2012: 81). In this light, we need a public theology in Africa that lives and thrives within the framework of the Kingdom of God in the world.

In agreement with practical-public theologians like Jürgen Hendriks (Hendriks 2004; 2016:1-16), Russel Botman (1994; 2002); Allan Boesak (Boesak 2014:1055-1074) and Dirkie J. Smit (Smit 2007:431-454; 2015:3-13), our African theology must be deeply biblical, with the sense of its identity, vision and mission rooted in the gracious, generative and generous love (*agape*) of God revealed through the incarnational presence of Jesus Christ. We need a public theology that is characterised by fellowship/companionship (*koinonia*)

and service (*diakonia*) that will transform and empower the African contexts to be communities that God desires. This is the vision for active relational responsibility that challenges and changes the present status quo to the life context of compassionate justice and prophetic witness of the abundance of life given by God for all His people against the harsh, exclusionary, and dehumanising presence of poverty in Africa.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the above contribution attempts to call for a creative response to the problem of poverty in Africa from biblical-ethical paradigms. In what has been discussed above this article has moved the idea of poverty from a sociopolitical sense and systems to the inner human sense. Thus, it argues that poverty is not necessarily a lack of what is needed but rather the injustice of other human beings within a given system through their ideological thoughts and lifestyle that makes life difficult for many. Poverty in Africa is not the lack of recourses but the lack of good ethical responsibility on how to creatively and constructively use what has been given to the common good of everyone. Secondly, the article received the "theological-logic" of Botman into another dimension, namely, the theological-ethical dimension. This notion as the new Christian pattern of reasoning and action has been used in the areas of discipleship in conversation with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's contributions (Botman 1994; 2002; Smit 2015:3-13)). But in this contribution, it has moved to the sphere of the theological-public-ethics of the human life of responsibility. This does not intend to neglect the original emphasis on discipleship but rather to add to it by applying it to the social ethical and life of the Church in the context of poverty in Africa. These notions may not seem novel to many South African readers, nevertheless, the conversation with Samuel Waje Kunhiyop has brought another voice into the conversation that may not have been very widely known or used.

The painful presence of poverty and its disastrous effects have not been neglected in this essay. A few instances have been highlighted as points of departure. We have also reflected alongside very important voices of biblical theologians who have given meaningful contributions in various contexts and from various points of interest. Nevertheless, our concentration has been on

how to suggest the rise of a public theology in Africa that can be useful in addressing the problems of poverty in our contemporary contexts.

We have discussed biblical principles given by God and exemplified by God's people on how the poor should be treated. If we take those thoughts seriously, we shall surely have good and meaningful achievements in our theological interest for a public theology that addresses the poor conditions of life. We also need to continue to think and rethink our theological logics from different perspectives and in conversation with different scholarly interests and possible suggestions with interest on thoughts that help us to better understand the Bible and our Christian traditions in contexts and how they can be utilised to better thoughts and actions for a better life.

Poverty can be avoided in Africa if we choose to be true to the kind of life that God has called us to live. We must never lose sight of our calling and ministry to the other. The Church must continue to be a hopeful agent for the world. This will lead us into the complex and simple obedient actions that will eventually renew our lives and contexts. The idea of transforming society for a better understanding of God and ourselves has been our leading vision. Within this calling, we shall continue to encourage the Church and various theological institutions (Seminaries and Universities) to think and articulate these truths and produce materials and manpower that will be useful in actually transforming our lives and world.

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Revitalizing the Christian ministry through a holistic discipleship programme

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Abstract

Revitalization is utmost in God's heart – the desire to bring life to declining ministries; dealing with the causes of decline; building a renewed fruitfulness, faithfulness, and loyalty to God in churches. Rescuing and turning around struggling, seriously ill or dying congregations involve the price for radical change, continually reflection on discipleship's existence and fulfilment through prayers to receive instruction and inspiration from God for the future. Laying a solid foundation would help God's people reconnect with the vibrant, life-giving Spirit of God through spiritual disciplines of holistic discipleship. Church leadership should consciously organize discipleship programs with a fresh understanding of the biblical narrative capturing believers' imagination in the context of the Church's mission. Spiritual growth and vitality of individual members is enhanced, as believers grow in faith and fellowship in Christ. Therefore, this article explores Christian ministry revitalization, holistic discipleship approach and principles for revitalizing the church through discipleship programs

Introduction

Some churches have gone down so far that they should have been shut down for the apparent reason of spiritual deadness. Those churches should formally close their doors, sell the properties, and quit dishonouring the Name of Jesus in the community. For several years in some churches, no one has been saved

or baptized, no mission and evangelistic activities carried out, sin became rampant, and worship becomes lifeless. It implies that different Christian ministries which make up the Church seemed not functional, church activities become a routine devoid of spiritual fervour, leading to a decline in the number of persons claiming Christianity as their religion while God's heart is yearning for revival in God's churches (Brown 2001).

The church around us today is faced with the issue of decline and stagnated growth. The reason could probably be found in the different perspectives and attitudes of leadership to discipleship, for as much as leaders remain the key figure to the discipleship process within the local church. There seems to be lack of biblical understanding to discipleship, an unbalanced approach that separates the believer's life from the church life, thereby leading to unhealthy and unproductive churches (Rainer 2005:45). A discipleship programme that leads to a healthy and productive church is formational, transformational and expresses the application of the Word of God within the believer's life. When the understanding of biblical discipleship is addressed and implemented within the church, when a believer continues to develop in the areas of formation and transformation, there must be an avenue through which believers can practice their faith. It is at this point that strategies for practicing the Christian faith will be implemented. Application of the Word of God will lead to a true biblical disciple; then the issue of declination in churches will be addressed (Whitney 1991:17). It is the application of the principle of the Word of God within the church that will bring about revitalization of the church.

Meanwhile, revitalization is utmost in God's heart, a desire to bring life to dying fellowships and ministries, dealing with the causes of decline, building toward renewed fruitfulness, faithfulness, and loyalty to God in churches. But, rescuing and turning around struggling, seriously ill or dying congregations may be difficult. However, if successfully salvaged by paying the price of radical change, it becomes a viable option to give the church a future and a hope (Bush 2008). Therefore, this paper builds a case for church revitalization by looking into the Nigerian Baptist Convention Discipleship Programme to provide some successful church renewal guidelines.

Christian Ministry Revitalization

The concept of revitalization was proposed by a renowned anthropologist specializing in studying the culture of American Indians, A.F. Clarke Wallace, who sees revitalization as efforts of members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture by inner revival (Wallace 1956). The term has become popular in recent years, thus describing various revival forms (spiritual, physical or fitness, material situation) in everyday life. It is concerned with gathering new experiences and developing a more conscious society increasingly interested in co-deciding about their environment while still growing. Today, revitalization is defined as a many-sided effort including revalorization, restoration, reconstruction, modernization, and actions aimed at the revival of a community or town, an organized body or Christian ministry and Church devastated in various aspects, spiritual, economic, and social (Pawłowska and Swaryczewska 2002).

In this vein, Brown (2016) describes revitalizing Christian ministry as a spiritual effort and action geared towards making more active, healthier, and energizing again the covenant community of born-again believers empowered by Christ to advance the kingdom through the disciplining of all. Invariably, Christian ministry revitalization is a process by which a church membership is redirected toward a healthy and sustained exaltation of Christ, the gospel's proclamation to the lost, affirmation of the Scripture guiding the church and expressing God's love in their communities. However, this definition stresses the particular importance of full church membership participation as a distinctive element of revitalization and as an indispensable tool to initiate, shape and carry out the developmental processes in the church to its final success (Skalski 1996).

According to Mark Shaw (Kim 2009:138), revitalization (or renewal or comeback) in church congregations is “evangelical activism”, and this progresses within a church community that “turns its attention from internal growth to outward mission”. Evidently, Shaw implies that in revitalization, there will first be the foundation of ‘internal growth” that should consequently propel “outward mission”. Shawchuck and Perry (1982:9) agree with Shaw, assuming that each local congregation and denominations know what *missio ecclesia* is and thus define revitalization to be taking place when the people of

God are brought “to the place where they can serve Christ fully”, doing “all that He asks of them”. From the perceptive of Shaw, Shawchuck and Perry, a congregation that is evangelistically in-active, a doing-nothing assembly that revels in “low spiritual vitality” is the contrast of a revitalized church. Such congregations neither grow in grace nor are effective in mature kingdom service. It is on this ground that the Church Growth Movement lists key indices of revitalization to include an emphasis on house churches, development of lay leadership, focusing on responsive cultural people groups, communicating vibrant faith, and providing a sound theological base (McGavran 1980:322).

However, defining revitalization sometimes suffer the same fate of the quality-quantity controversy as does the characterization of church growth. Declining and stagnant congregations often defend their smallness in size by claiming to be focused on quality. They claimed to be watchful against the trap of a congregation made up of a “mass of baptized unbelievers” (Wagner 1990). In this search for the glory of Christ, revitalization is a comprehensive strategy that fulfils the Great Commission by striving for church growth, church multiplication, and church perfection in both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Buys (2008) rightly says that there can be no separation between the preservation (the qualitative dimension) and the extension (the quantitative dimension) of the church in the practical labour of building the body of Christ. However, though revitalization has both statistical and spiritual dimensions, one can agree with the Church Growth Movement on the inherent difficulty of measuring the spiritual dynamics of revitalization. One can therefore narrowly conclude a church to be revitalized if the congregation has experienced a comeback numerically from a significant period of stagnation due to membership plateau and/or decline and it is continuing in actions that keep aglow the fire of revitalization, such as teaching God’s word, training God’s workers and touching God’s world in context.

Biblical and Theological Basis for Revitalization

Revelations 2 and 3 relay the scriptural need for revitalization in the church of God. Jesus, through John, addressed the spiritual condition of each of the seven churches in Asia Minor. The Lord assessed each of the churches and its leadership; gave an appreciation of their good works, a condemnation of their evils and finally gave a counsel to do that which is good. A summary of Christ’s

counsel to these first century churches include, but are not limited to the following:

A return from the path of spiritual lethargy, death, apostasy, mediocrity, decline and stagnation (Rev 2:14–16, 20–24; 3:15–19).

A charge to the angel of each church (that is the leadership) to cause revitalization to begin in the congregation through repentance from sin (Rev 2:5, 16, 22; 3:3, 19).

Rekindling the first love for God by those who have lost it in the church (Rev 2:4, 5; 3:1–3)

Zeal for evangelism and consistency in grace (Rev 3:8–11).

Faithfulness unto death by those engaged in the face of fierce persecution (Rev 2:10).

Congregational Revitalization Sensitization

Palmer & Marjorie (1976:161–169) came up with sensitization procedure for congregational revitalization, which has relevance in all cultures and cities serving as alert to re-awaken the consciousness of any church for change and eventually alter the congregational profile completely if appropriately applied. They are:

Analyse and Evaluate

There is the need to subject every department of church work to critical performance analysis in order to discover strengths and weaknesses. There should be periodical analysis of other institutional structures that will impact the numerical grow of the congregation within its political and socio-economic environments. This will lead to effecting change and improvement on areas of stagnation.

Strong Biblical Emphasis

This is beyond just preaching the doctrines of the Bible correctly, though critical. It includes making the truth simple and practical. It is paying special

attention to planting God's word in the deep worldview level of hearers until it changes the lives of both the young and old in the congregation.

Love and Care

Church effectiveness is usually provoked by obedience to the Great Commandment of loving one another. In congregations where the rule of love binds the hearts and lives of members, hurts heal faster, and a strong "family" tie is built.

Dynamic leadership

Dynamic leadership is visionary leadership that carefully selects able assistance and motivates fulfilment of goals. This kind of leadership encourages every department to creatively think through its own programme and challenges prompt execution.

Adaptability

Adaptability helps to turn problems into opportunities, as nothing is completely counted to be a liability. Congregations should learn to adapt to the needs of the church and community by putting to use members' gift to reach community members. It is the degree of adaptability that determines the relevance of a church to its changing environment.

Programme Revitalization among Church Members

Churches should use various strategies and other principles that find relevance in both biblical and theological reflections on church revitalization to attract interested people to the church.

Desire Change and Communicate Revitalization

The leadership of a stagnant church must desire revitalization before it can be brought to bear on the church. Such desire needs be communicated and owned by the entire congregation, with each member knowing what his or her responsibility is in the revitalization process.

Teach and Train on Church Revitalization

Churches that will experience revitalization would teach the congregation how to go about it. The word of God relevant to revitalizing the church has to be diligently taught, and there should be training on specific methods relevant to

the context of the church community. This helps the congregation to have a solid theological foundation for its belief.

Keep Revitalization vision in Focus

The book of Habakkuk gives applicable counsel for revitalization of stagnant institutions. It says: "And the LORD answered me: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end – it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay" (Hab 2:2, 3). The church declines due to weak leadership that does not give adequate direction, motivation, and positive reaction to the efforts of the followers. Therefore, revitalization demands leadership and congregational vision that is kept in focus (Buttrick 1956:987, 988).

Biblical Concept of Discipleship

Discipleship is the process of developing or making a follower or disciple. The first time the term disciple is mentioned in the Bible is in Isaiah 8:16, which speaks of God's disciples. The Hebrew term *limmud* is translated "disciples," which means accustomed to; a disciple, one who is taught, a follower (Mounce 2006). Based on the first mention of the term disciple, it is clear that a disciple is two things. First, he/she is taught by someone or something. Second, he/she is a follower of their teacher. When speaking of discipleship in the New Testament, it is important to look at the first time that the term is mentioned in the Greek New Testament. Matthew 5:1 is where the disciples came to Jesus and were taught the Sermon on the Mount. The Greek term *mathetes* means disciple, student, and follower; a committed learner and follower (Mounce 2006:183). This is the first mention of the term *disciples* in the New Testament and it also implies the two prior points addressed in Isaiah 8:16. The first call to discipleship is found in Matthew 4:19, which states, "And he saith unto them (Simon Peter and Andrew), follow me, and I will make you fishers of men". It is here that discipleship moves beyond learning and following, to the actual practice of that which is taught. France (1985) states, "Jesus calls his disciples … to take an active part as fishers of men". Based on these three passages a disciple is someone taught by a teacher, who follows their teacher, and actively practices what they are taught.

The Biblical Responsibility of Discipleship

Discipleship is formation, transformation, and application. The term disciple simply means that an individual has become like their mentor or leader. It should be the believer's desire to follow after Christ. It should be the pastor's desire to follow after Christ and model a Christ-like example. The reason the leaders should model this example before his family, church, and community is based on the call to the Disciples in Matthew 10, the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20, and the leadership of the pastor to equip the saints in Ephesians 4:11–16. The words of Paul in Ephesians 4:11–16 place the responsibility of discipleship on the leadership of the church as thus:

> And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom they whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

It is the leadership's responsibility to make disciples of Christ, who can also make disciples of Christ in their home, workplace, and other locations outside of the church. In Matthew 10, the authority is given to the believer to make disciples of Christ. Weber (2000) gives seven steps in delegating authority or making disciples. These steps are: talk about the task, do the task while the learner observes, let the learner help you do the task, help the learner do the task, let the learner do the task while you observe, let the learner do the task on his own, under your supervision and guidance, and the learner becomes a trainer, repeating the steps with someone else. It is the believer's

responsibility to follow these steps in the discipleship process, but the pastor must lead the congregation by example. It was the example of Christ that led to the Apostles' ministries, which changed the world. Disciples are taught by someone and they follow their teacher. It is the pastor's responsibility to be taught by Christ and to follow Christ. It is also the pastor's responsibility to approach discipleship with a biblical understanding. This means that discipleship is the formation, transformation, and application of the Word of God within the believer's life.

Educational and Learning Theories

The theoretical emphasis for this study is the educational/learning theory argument. Educational and Learning theories assist learning in creating life change; it also supports the synergistic methodology purported to be effective in any discipleship programme. Learning and its goals can be defined as the process that produces the capability of exhibiting new or changed human behaviour (or which increases the probability that new or changed behaviour will be elicited by a relevant stimulus), provided that the new behaviour or behaviour change cannot be explained on the basis of some other process or experience such as aging or fatigue (Knight 2006). Educational and learning theories presented will elaborate upon how the mind learns best and how teaching methods of instruction better facilitate learning into life transformation. Various educational pedagogies and learning theories support the inherent biblical and practical initiatives that are foundational for discipleship from the perspective of transformation.

Traditionalist educators believe in a more didactic, lecture or sermonic form of one-way communication whereas constructivist educators place more emphasis upon two-way communicative small group learning as the teacher becomes more of a facilitator of the learning environment. Jesus was certainly a master in both pedagogical methodologies as seen through his varied use of instructional methods and how he utilized his relational connectedness to his students as he understood them through his intentional relationships with them. Indeed, Jesus employed both traditionalist and constructivist's pedagogies. In front of large groups Jesus would employ more traditional or traditionalist pedagogies. When Jesus would address a large crowd he would do so didactically or instructionally via one way communication. An excellent

example of this is seen in Luke 4:16–30 as Jesus was the "preacher" of the synagogue and directly addressed his hearers with little to no discussion. Jesus would "preach-teach" in this way often as is evident in the plurality of the word synagogues from the previously cited verse.

However, Jesus would also utilize a more constructivist approach with smaller groups of people, most notably his disciples. Consider Jesus' constructivist tendencies in small groups as a certain type of learning and instruction takes place. Ponder how Jesus would ask or answer the questions of his disciples (Mk 8:27–30), provide reinforcement and practice activities (Mt 14:13–33; Lk 9:1–6), coach and check for understanding not to mention his careful verification of the accuracy of the disclosed information (cf. Mk 8: 1–30). These varied types of learning methodologies helped Jesus' disciples reformulate what they had heard and cemented the information in their mind. Impressively, from these methodologies presented alone we see process, interference, and retroactive theories of learning. Other interesting educational pedagogies or learning based theories that could be included to support discipleship programs are the modified traditionalist pedagogy, proactive facilitation, and scaffolding theories of learning. These theories recognize the complexity of learning, and the combination of a whole group instruction with small or cooperative learning groups over the same subject and will favour reinforcement and higher-level thinking (Shenendoah 2011).

Holistic Discipleship Approach

The Nigerian Baptist Convention Education Ministry of the Church has a platform for developing, growing, and advancing every member through the Church's all-inclusive discipleship programmes. Ayandokun (2005) defines discipleship as a process whereby a Christian who has voluntarily surrendered to the Lord Jesus is being made to become like Christ by various experiences, activities, and disciplines administered by the Lord Himself. It includes the Follow-up activity immediately after (an individual is saved) salvation, Church Membership programme, Church Discipleship programme and Disciple's lifestyle programme. A deliberate and committed effort of both the church leadership and membership to understand and follow the local Baptist churches' procedure will enhance both the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church and revitalize the different ministries in the churches. Therefore,

let us consider the discipleship procedure from salvation experience to Christian maturity.

Follow-up activity immediately after salvation

Follow-up is the first assignment church leaders and workers through the follow-up team carry out on a new convert within the few days of conversion. Olabode (2017) affirms follow-up as an extension of pastoral or shepherding ministry by a matured Christian to give watch-care over those saved through the Church or those contracted by the Church who are struggling for stability in Christian walk. It is to provide an opportunity for every believer for growth towards spiritual maturity.

Follow-up Model (Acts 2:41–47)

A soul led to Christ becomes a spiritual baby that needs nurturing in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The following steps will assist the new Christian to grow spiritually:

1. Present a Bible to the convert if he/she does not possess any

2. Start the new convert with this lesson: That you can be saved and know it (1 Jn 5:13): That you may know you have Eternal Live (vs13): The authority of God's Word; and your faith in God's infallible Word is your assurance of salvation. "He who believes in the Son has (present tense) eternal life" (Jn 3:36). The bible is a book of certainties, which reinforces beliefs and establishes your conviction. God desires you are confident that:

    i. You are now a child of God. (1 Jn 3:2)

    ii. You are now the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor 5:21; Rom10: 1–4)

    iii. You are a new being now in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).

    iv. You are now both a son and heir of God (Gal 4:7). There is no greater assurance than one found in God's infallible

Word. Heaven and earth would pass away, but My words shall not pass away "(Mt 24:35).

3. Take this second lesson with the new covenant: You are God's child now, and you are to obey Him. "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:20). You belong to Jesus Christ now. Christ now becomes your Lord and Master, and no one can serve two masters (Mt 6:24). Determine to obey your Lord and Master, Lord Jesus Christ, in all things now.

    i. Unite with a New Testament Church (Acts 2:47)

    ii. Follow Christ in the baptismal ordinance (Acts 2:41). Baptism does not save; it is a witness of your faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:4).

    iii. Begin to attend Sunday school class and study God's Word with God's children (2 Tim 2:15).

    iv. Attend the worship service of your Church (Heb 10:25). You need the preaching of God's Word and Christian fellowship.

4. Be a faithful steward (1Cor 4:20, 6:19–20; Mal 3:10; Lev 27:30).

5. Create time to pray and read God's Word daily that you may grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

    i. Encourage the new believer to join the different departments in the Church (Mt 10:32).
    ii. Encourage the new believer to witness: "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so" (Ps 107).
    iii. Now, help the new believer through the membership outline your Church has prepared. By the end of these lessons, the new believer must have achieved a healthy and spiritual status; the new believer could now be encouraged to start the church membership programme.

Church membership programme

This is also known as the Church training programme designed by the Nigerian Baptist Convention for church membership training on doctrines and principles of Baptists concerning the community and the society at large as they discharge their roles. Odewole and Adeniji in Ayandokun (2002) believed it helps to reshape the members' world view on interpersonal relationship with people and interfaith relationship with people of other faith. This programme aims at training in church membership, develop the church members, educate the church members, lead members in evangelism, create awareness of ongoing events in the association, conference, and convention; lastly, it emphasizes the nature of the Baptist Church as a denomination as well as its distinctive, ordinances, doctrines, beliefs, faith, practices, polity and mission. After a thorough training as a Baptist member, the brother or sister is encouraged to start the church discipleship programme.

Church Discipleship Programme

This is one of the educational organs of the Church to upgrade the Baptist members' knowledge about the life of Jesus Christ through His words and the revelation of the scriptures. Ayandokun (2016) opines this programme enlivens and enriches the fellowship and helps to ensure its extension to the future, defining discipleship as a process whereby a Christian who has voluntarily surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ is being made to become like Christ by various experiences, activities and disciplines administered by the Lord himself. Babarinde (2009) highlight the need for discipleship programme as follows:

1. Establish Christians in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus and His Word
2. Build quality and mature workers in God's vineyard
3. Wage war against wrong doctrines and heresy
4. Discover and develop spiritual gifts for service
5. Prepare new convert to become active members in the Church
6. Reduce rancour and conflicts among the congregation

7. Resolve, reconcile and restore broken relationships arising from a dispute

8. Disciple souls as God provide an opportunity for building.

9. Enabling emotional stability in the life of members

The resources of discipleship with each category of training and the duration are as follows:

Christ indwelling in your life: 6 weeks

Follow the master: 11 weeks

Serve the master: 11 weeks

Experiencing God: 12 weeks

In His Presence: 6 weeks

Master life: 3–6 months

Prayer Life: 6 weeks

Mind of Christ: 12 weeks

Million Mandate: 6 weeks

Lead Like Jesus: 6 weeks

In His Steps: 6 weeks

Purpose Driven Life: 40 weeks

These programs could be in the discussion, lecture, interaction, and question and answer form based on individual skills of imparting knowledge; meanwhile, the resources are available in the Nigerian Baptist bookstores across the nation.

Disciple's Lifestyle programme

The Disciple's Lifestyle is another essential discipleship programme of the Baptist Churches designed to provide in-depth knowledge on social, political, and relational issues to serve as a significant growth process of the new believer. It aims to train church members, develop church members spiritually, educate members on doctrinal matters, and lead quality evangelism. It creates awareness of ongoing events in the environment, society, and the world at large, informing members about the positive programmes of government and its agencies (Ayandokun 2016). Disciple's Lifestyle also provides a balanced programme that promotes unity, love, patience, and better relationships. It helps in organizing the Church for future mutual coexistence with the provision of a visionary leader. It equips members to cope with life challenges and reinstates members' roles within the Church and society, preparing to discharge functions paying taxes to the government and tithes to the Church. It reshapes the Christian worldview on cultural differences, politics and interfaith relationships, touching human problems, suggesting lasting solutions on joblessness, health-related issues, communal relationships, and other identified issues (Adebajo & Adedoyin 2008).

Utilization of the Holistic Discipleship for Christian Ministry Revitalization

Like the rebuilding of the temple, God addressed the issue in two primary ways. First, three key leaders are to be His catalysts for rebuilding (Haggai 1:1–2). Second, Judah's people are commanded to change their conduct and move from selfish behaviour to selfless behaviour. The people obeyed, and the house of God was rebuilt (Haggai 1:12–14). Invariably, two foundational issues must be addressed in Christian ministry revitalization. First, the Church must have veracious leadership at the elms of affairs. Second, the behavioural patterns of the church members have to change. Invariably, the congregational revitalization sensitization becomes a jump start process for any congregation to prepare for a lasting revitalization in the church. Cronshaw (2015) therefore, puts all together to suggest five principles or practices that are foundational for Christian ministry revitalization.

Principle of Revitalizing Leadership

Leadership is a significant revitalization element; therefore, a wise and careful leader with a commitment for suitable processes and a commitment to see a revitalization process is essential for congregational revitalization. A leader with a uniquely reengineering leadership style; gifted by God to thrive on the challenge of taking a troubled situation, a team that has lost its vision, a ministry with people in wrong positions, a department trying to move forward without a strategy and turn it around (Hybels, 2002). The leadership role is to facilitate the congregation to discern a direction through coaching and gathering for discipleship and mission. Revitalizing leadership requires a careful approach to cultivating trust, building a team, developing vision, fostering experimentation, and persevering with a non-anxious commitment to transformation. A quality revitalization process will seek to recruit, make room for, and create that kind of leadership.

Principle of Spiritual Formation

The foundational element of revitalization is spiritual in-depth. The heart of revitalization is reconnecting a church to the relationship with the living God. Jesus Christ said, "I am the vine, and you are the branches, abiding in me and I in you make you bear much fruit because apart from me you can do nothing." (Jn 15:5). Part of people's dissatisfaction with existing forms of Church is over-reliance on rationalism, cerebral conditions. Walker and Bretherton (2007) affirmed that mission-shaped churches and emerging churches for all their resourcefulness, vigour, and imaginative drive, but would not succeed unless they heed the lessons from their charismatic precursors in renewal and drop anchors in the deep waters of a church that goes all the way down to the hidden reservoirs of the life-giving Spirit. Revitalization is not firstly about strategic planning and organizational restructuring, nor do heroic leadership and innovative programs, but foundationally about helping God's people reconnect with the vibrant, life-giving Spirit of God through classic spiritual disciplines-Discipleship.

Principle of Connecting the Biblical narrative with Congregational Story

Another principle for revitalization is the leadership helping a church reconnect biblical story with its congregational story. A church with a fresh

understanding of the biblical narrative can have their imaginations captured with how they can locally continue God's mission they read about in Scripture. A church that understands its own story: its origins, narrative highlights, key characters, crises, and the values that continue to shape the Church will be more likely to understand its DNA and how to best live out its mission in ways that are authentic to their own story (Cronshaw 2015). The leadership should improve on discipleship exercises and programs that will help a church understand its history in the context of the biblical story and their own local church story; this will inform an imagination of a renewed story.

Principle of Congregational Conversation and Discernment

Another essential principle for Christian ministry revitalization is to invite the congregation into a conversation and some discernment process. The assemblies will reflect on and discuss the church history, present status, weakness and strength, and Church future growth plan. Roxburgh (2011) believes that the great reality of the Church is that by the Spirit, God's imagination for the future is already among God's people. So the work of leadership is in the discipleship programme to cultivate an environment that will allow this image to gather energy. There is a need for conversations at congregational and denominational levels, leaders and churches clustering to dream and scheme about listening to God and respond. Devine (2014) believes that relationship deterioration happens when a couple stops paying attention to their relationship. Invariably, Church discipleship programme helps churches to reflect on the reason for existence and mission fulfilment. However, a church that seeks to be attentive to God's instructions through listening with discernment to one another's prayers and visions will experience fresh inspiration for the future.

Principle of Creative Dreaming and Innovation

The final principle of revitalization is creative dreaming and innovation. Church turn-around process begins from thinking outside-the-box to change the status quo, for it is an organizational insanity to think you can continue doing the same things and get different results. Church discipleship programme establishes a mandate to dream about new directions for developing appropriate pathways to grow people in faith, make disciples increase their relevance, process guide in imagining and exploring fresh ways to express worship, prayer, mission, and community (Roxburgh and Romanuk 2006). In

the story of God's people, it is often those who dared to imagine a different reality that was crucial in helping their community that will move in God's new direction (VVB 2011). It is essential that Churches need to reconnect with God, biblical narrative, and congregational story, and listen to one another and their leaders, to dream outside their boxes, they also need to listen to their neighbourhoods and neighbours who are not already engaged with church life.

Conclusion

The discipleship programme of the convention and other denominations serves as foundational hold prepared from the life-giving Spirit's hidden reservoirs and orderly administered to the new believers. The foundation should help God's people reconnect with the vibrant, life-giving Spirit of God through classic spiritual disciplines. However, observations in churches have shown lack of commitment to discipleship programs from the part of both the leadership and members for obvious reasons. Therefore, the entire Nigerian Baptist Convention Discipleship activities must be completely overhauled by a uniquely committed reengineering leadership strategy to turn around the whole discipleship programme and restore its original vision.

The need for the leadership to organize discipleship programs with a fresh understanding of the Biblical narrative that will capture the believers' imagination in the context of the mission to the Church is emphasized. There should always be interactive sessions at the Church, association, conference, and convention levels to continually reflect on discipleship's existence and fulfilment through prayers and receive instruction and inspiration from God for the future of ministry. There should be creativity and innovations in the discipleship programme; that will birth a consistent dreaming of fresh direction to develop appropriate pathways, providing a guiding process for exploring new means of engaging the believers with ministry and church life.

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Synthesising the right and left models of teaching in the null curriculum: pruning religion from education for development in Africa

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Abstract

The study engages the exegetical consequence of the right and left models of religion in Matthew 25:31-46 as applicable to identifying and synthesising the right and left models of teaching in the curriculum, as a model of (and also as a bridge) to integrating education and human development. This integration is designed for schools in the context of education and human development in Africa. Tyler's Rationale was engaged as the theoretical framework to guide the study. The study itself is a product of the documentary research methodological component of social research. Conclusion: A key strategy for addressing the religious challenge to educating for development is to employ the Right Model of Teaching in non-null curriculum terms. This strategy stresses the possibility of experiencing God's kingdom, better life, and the future right now, in the overt curriculum, and leaving matters of Elysium to the null curriculum.

Background of the study

Introduction

This study is a synthesis of teaching models deduced from the Biblical passage of Matthew 25:31-46, which have curricular implications in null terms, in a manner relevant to effectively integrating religion, education, and development. Upon a closer study of the Nigerian situation (as an example of an African country), it can reasonably be stated that there is a disconnect between religion and the everyday life of people that education is meant to serve. From the case of Nigeria, it is evident that religion has no impact, as it should, on the developmental affairs that concern real needs of people in terms of quality of life, security and welfare and (social justice) of people, as well as their economic development; nevertheless, Africans generally resign themselves to religion, hoping things will get better even if they do nothing beyond the religious (Morphé 2011:18). For example, the majority of people who populate the schools come from Christian, Muslim, or other religious backgrounds; yet, it appears these backgrounds do not come to play in the life of participants in the schooling system or graduates, towards addressing basic human needs (such as the need for food, water, housing, clothes, health, and social justice).

The education system can serve as a connecting bridge of learning between the religious and the developmental. Consequent to identifying and synthesising the right and left models of religion, this capacity is applicable via engaging the right model of religion in the education system via the curricular components of schools, towards ensuring and sustaining transformational human development in the society. Engaging the right model of religion in the education system is possible through enshrining the model in the curricular components of schools, designed towards achieving quality of life, security and welfare, as well as social justice in the Nigerian society; it is expected that the curricular components so enshrined would also be consolidated through such an engagement.

The null curriculum

When a curriculum is overt or formalised, it usually leaves no one in doubt as to which learning experiences a teacher is supposed to help facilitate in the

classroom. Items that are considered significant are enacted for the teacher to emphasise in the process of facilitating learning in the class. In other words, while there are learning experiences that are emphasised in constructing and developing the curriculum, there are also others that are not mentioned completely or which are not stressed, thereby communicating the message that they are not important; in a twist, those things ignored in the teaching-learning process could be of ultimate relevance in "creating significant learning experiences" (Fink 2013:7-9). Accordingly, whatever a teacher does not teach is equivalent to teaching that it is not of value; the null curriculum is dependent on this understanding. So, the null curriculum considers learning experiences in a dual sense: firstly, things stressed overtly in the learning process are important, and things not taught at all are also important in the learning process.

Those experiences that are not given prominence in the curriculum implicitly or explicitly constitute a message that they are not important; it is in their lack of importance in the formal curriculum that they become important as basically constituting what is referable in curriculum circles as the Null Curriculum. The Null Curriculum is also found in other forms of the curriculum such as the societal curriculum, covert curriculum, phantom curriculum, concomitant curriculum, rhetorical curriculum, curriculum-in-use, planned versus received curriculum, internal curriculum, electronic curriculum, and competency curriculum.

In unsophisticated terms, whatever learning experience that is not stressed for the benefit of the learner is the same as communicating that it is not significant. This is the null curriculum in effect. It is that which is not captured in the curriculum design, development, and delivery system of a school; the null curriculum is simply a capturing of any learning experience (positive or negative) which the educational system or which other agencies outside the school system have deliberately chosen to ignore or exclude from other forms of curricula. So, the null curriculum is made up of things which we do not teach (as can be exemplified by these subjects in the current Nigerian curriculum: History (formerly withdrawn from basic education curriculum), Nigerian Languages (sidelines other vernaculars such as Ham in Jaba Local Government Area of Kaduna State-Nigeria, and Kuvori in Kauru Local Government Area of

Kaduna State), Christian Religious Studies (excluded from subject offerings for Muslim students), Islamic Religious Studies (excluded from subject offerings for Christian students), African Traditional Religion (completely ignored in subject offerings at basic education and senior secondary school level).

Addendum. It needs to be noted that it is often necessary to make conscious decisions as to what to include or exclude from the overt or written curriculum. This necessity recognises the impossibility of teaching everything in schools; in reality, many topics, subjects, and subject areas must be excluded intentionally from the overt or formal curriculum. This intentional act of leaving out or including some things from the teaching plan is a key element in constituting the null curriculum.

Thesis statement

Sequel to the details above, this study is focused on making a synthesis of what is referable as the right and left models of teaching in a manner that connects a model considerable as credible to development via the curricular facility of the education system. This connection is made in a manner that discredits and deemphasises the left model of teaching, while emphasising the right model within the religious context of the educational system, as a model for development on a larger scale.

Purpose of study

The study has a three-point purpose, built upon Matthew 25:31-46. First purpose: to engage the exegetical consequence of Matthew 25:31-46 in a manner applicable to identifying and synthesising the right and left models of teaching in the curriculum, as a model of (and also as a bridge) to integrating education and human development, without religion constituting itself as an obstacle to the desired development. Second purpose: to examine the left model of teaching in connection to the null curriculum, as a way of pruning religion in cases where it is considered as an obstacle of consequence, to achieving the reality of integrating education and human development in Africa. Third purpose: to strategise on engaging the right model of teaching in the context of the applicability of the null curriculum, in a manner that puts religion in proper balance in terms of consolidating education and human development in Africa.

Research questions

Sequel to the three-point purpose of the study, the research sought to address three questions. Question 1: What is the exegetical consequence of Matthew 25:31-46 in a manner applicable to identifying and synthesising the right and left models of teaching in the curriculum, and as a model of (and also as a bridge) to integrating education and human development, without religion constituting itself as an obstacle to the desired development? Question 2: In what way is an examination of the left model of teaching in connection to the null curriculum, significant to pruning religion in cases where it is considered as an obstacle of consequence to achieving the reality of integrating education and human development in Africa? Question 3: What strategies can be applied towards engaging the right model of teaching in the context of the applicability of the null curriculum, in a manner that prunes and integrates religion in proper balance in terms of consolidating education and human development in Africa?

Significance of the study

This study was developed with a view that it would be significant in nurturing the right model of religion in society, schools, and development agencies. Firstly, if the right model of religion is instilled and practised at the societal level, which is the context from which people are recruited in schools, students would enrol and learn with a view to ultimately and positively meeting the needs of society as enlightened developmental agents, whose impact would be felt in areas of improved quality of life, security and welfare, and social justice, for people from all kinds of backgrounds. Secondly, the consciousness of the right model of teaching, in a manner incorporable in the curriculum of schools in Nigeria and Africa at large would empower the schools with the capacity to serve as the link between the religious practices in the society, and the developmental needs of the society, thereby translating religion to development. Thirdly, recognising the right model of teaching as applicable to the affairs of developmental agencies (government inclusive) would bring about rendering of services by such agencies, “as unto the Lord” based on “as unto man”, thereby bringing religion to be evidenced positively in development.

Theoretical framework

Tyler's Rationale, developed by Ralph W. Tyler in his Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction, also referable as the "Aims-and-Objectives Model of Curriculum Development," was engaged as the theoretical framework to guide the study. Tyler's Rationale allows considering religion, education, and human development in an integrated curricular framework. Tyler points out four questions to be considered in curriculum work: 1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain? 2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes? 3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organised? 4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? These questions were addressed within the research questions that expressed the purposes of this study.

Limitation and delimitation of the study

The study was confronted by one major limitation. The study was also developed subject to one major delimitation.

In terms of limitation, the study was developed under various COVID-19 "lockdown" restrictions. While at the time the study was developed, it would have been proper to visit some churches and religious gatherings to get more perspectives on the right and left models of religion, the lockdown made it impossible to do so.

In terms of delimitation, the scope of the study was concentrated on the right and left models of religion as consequential from a hermeneutical exploration of Matthew 25:31-46. Other marks of these models (for example, as in James 1:27-2:26) were not given much space in the study, due to the limited focus of the study.

Operational definition of terms

This study engages six terms that have been simply defined to provide a working guide to comprehending it. These are Curriculum, education, development, null-curriculum, religion, and right and left models of teaching.

Curriculum. The term "curriculum" can be generally and summarily described as whatever is considered as constituting a learning experience for the

individual. However, to be more specific, the study concurs with Kelly (2004:3) that the learning experience should be justifiable in educational terms, based on particular educational criteria set for such justification.

Education. While various definitions of education abound, Ralph Tyler's description is found suitable for this study. Accordingly, education can be said to be "a process of changing the behavior patterns of people" (2013:5-6). The people, in the case of this study, are the learners, particularly in a formal education setting.

Development. For the purpose of this study, development is described in a transformational sense. In line with this, Bryant Myers' encapsulation of transformation and development is found relevant. Pursuant to this purpose: transformational development is about making positive changes towards finding and enjoying human life as it should be and as it was intended to be in its whole, and experiencing the entirety of its ramifications materially, socially, psychologically, and spiritually (2011:3-4). In this study, religion is juxtaposed with this kind of development, which Myers also considers as a lifelong journey undertaken to "recover our true identity as human beings created in the image of God and to discover our true vocation as productive stewards, faithfully caring for the world and all the people in it" (3-4).

Null curriculum. Simply put the null curriculum is a way of teaching by not teaching. In the words of Dogara (2018:64):

> The null curriculum is made up of things which we do not teach, which in reality is communicating a message to the learners that such things are not important in their educational experiences in particular, or to the society at large.

Religion. The monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) define religion in connection to one Supreme Being. African Traditional Religions connect a definition of religion with many gods, superior or inferior. Many other definitions abound from across different belief systems in the world. However, for this study, Rabbi Marc Gellman and Monsignor Thomas

Hartman's definition (2002:32) is considered to be more comprehensive and simpler:

> A religion is a belief in divine (superhuman or spiritual) being (s) and the practices (rituals) and moral code (ethics) that result from that belief. Beliefs give religion its mind, rituals give religion its shape, and ethics give religion its heart.

Right and Left Models of Teaching. The right and left models of teaching are deductions from Jesus' original teaching in Matthew 25:31-46, which connects acceptable religion as that which meets basic human needs for food, health, clothes, social justice, and adequate welfare, whereas unacceptable religion as that which fails to address these needs. Acceptable religion is considered in this study as constituting the right model of religion, while the left model of religion is considered as a product of unacceptable religion. These two different models are modified in this study in a manner applicable to integrating religion, education, and development in the teaching-learning process.

Deducting from the original teaching of Jesus Christ, as in the above exordium, the right model of teaching is that pedagogical operation within which the impact of acceptable religion is evident, as it should be, on the developmental affairs that concern the real needs of people in terms of education in all its ramifications, quality of life, life expectancy (in relation to security, social justice, and the welfare of people), and general economic development of people both individually and as members of communities. Conversely, the left model of teaching is the specific pedagogical process derived from the unacceptable side of religion, in which there is a disconnect between religious practices, everyday life and the real needs of people whom education is meant to serve.

Sequel to deducting from Jesus' teaching based on aforementioned details, religion is generally evident officially, unofficially, overtly, and covertly within formal education realities connected to any citable examples in Africa, but its connection to human development is deliberately de-emphasised by its lack of impact on real needs in teaching. In the null curriculum, this lack of emphasis

amounts to emphasising that religion does not apply to human developmental issues; in this respect, the left model of religion is a channel through which the null curriculum is expressed.

Methodology and Procedure of Study

Methodology of Study.

This study is a product of the documentary research methodological component of social research. This methodology was chosen because of its suitability to the documentary source for the study, as well as for its cost-effectiveness when compared to in-depth interviews, panel discussion, open-ended questionnaires, or participant observational components of social research.

Generally, the documentary research method is a social research technique that investigates, identifies, categorises, analyses, and interprets data from documentary sources (written texts) that contain information about a phenomenon being studied. For this study, the Biblical data of Matthew chapter 25: 31-46 is the primary document of investigation because it was written by Matthew (Levi), one of Jesus' twelve disciples who was an eye-witness to the events he wrote in the text of this study. Accordingly, mediate access (or inference) is established in this study between the text and the religious challenges in question in this study, from a curricular perspective of the interconnection between religion, education, and development.

Procedure of Study

This study was done in four steps. Firstly, a background was given to provide a general idea of the direction of the study. Secondly, the methodology and procedure of the study were designed as a bridge to the main body of the study. Thirdly, the main body of the study was made up of presentation and analysis of data, guided by three research questions developed for the study. Fourthly, sequel to the aforementioned steps, the study was summarised through a concluding process that was also guided by all research questions concerned.

Presentation of Data and Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1

What is the exegetical consequence of Matthew 25:31-46 in a manner applicable to identifying and synthesising the right and left models of teaching in the curriculum, and as a model of (and also as a bridge) to integrating education and human development, without religion constituting itself as an obstacle to the desired development?

Academic Background: Matthew 24:1-3

Verse 1: Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to the buildings. Verse 2: "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down." Verse 3: As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of age?" (NIV).

The original circumstance that brought about this passage can be said to be academic in nature. It was Jesus Christ (the teacher) having a private class discussion with His disciples (students) concerning the end times (Matthew 24:1-3). In this class, Jesus was asked three questions by His disciples: When would the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem happen? What would be the sign of Jesus' second coming? What would be the sign of the end of the age? In response to these questions, starting from Matthew 24:4-5, and concluded in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus outlined His program of activities when He finally comes in His glory accompanied by all the angels. Specifically, He will be calling "nations" to account in terms of what individuals ("people one from another") in each nation have done or have not done in furthering human development particularly in three key areas: quality of life (hunger, thirst, clothes), security and welfare of the needy person (stranger, the sick, prisoner), and the interconnected economic factors of the previous two areas. Those who act to meet the basic needs of people (in areas of quality of life and welfare) are considered as "sheep" and will be placed on the "right" side of Jesus Christ, while those who act otherwise are considered as "goats" and will be put on

the “left” side of Jesus Christ. However, it should be noted that both sheep and goats were important to the Jews in Biblical times; while sheep were more economically valuable, goats were ritually clean animals and important in sacrifices (Leviticus 4:22-31). Therefore, “it would thus be wrong to read into this parable any notion that sheep and goats stand in any strong natural contrast to each other, as would be the case if Jesus had spoken of separating sheep from pigs” (Richards 2002:90).

Sequel to the background above, the passage can be considered as having a contemporaneous connection of service as providing the “right” and “left” models of religion. Speaking from a Christian perspective, it is doubtful if there has ever been a Christian community or individuals that have aligned themselves with the “left” model of religion, even when there are clear evidences of having qualities not applicable to the “right” model of religion. So, specifically, what constitutes the right or left model of religion?

Eschatological Background: Matthew 25:31-33

Verse 31: When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. Verse 32: All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Verse 33: He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.” (NIV).

1. Jesus Christ (referred to in the Gospel of Matthew as “Son of Man”) has authority over participants in both the rights and the left models of religion, Matthew 25:31-33.
2. The act of the Son of Man in placing people either on the right (sheep) or on the left (goats) is eschatologically timed, it will happen at a future date “when the Son of Man comes in his glory,” Matthew 25:31-33. However, the context of Matthew 25:31-46, suggests that the human actions that would constitute a criterion for dichotomising people into two groups have currency in contemporaneity.
3. Practitioners of any of the models of religion are found in “all nations” just as people all over the world have a common need for food, shelter, social justice, clothes, and other basic human needs, Matthew 25:32.

By application, any of the models of religion can be practised in any location or nation on earth

4. The fact that the Son of Man will "separate the people one from another" is an indication that they are mixed in their day-to-day activities, as well as to whether or not they are disciples of the Son of Man. These activities may be so similar that it would take only a much-practised eye to know the difference; hence the need for the Son of Man to dichotomise them "as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats," Matthew 25:32. Accordingly, while there may be superficial similarities between the right and left models of religion, the difference is distinguished via the actions or inactions of professors of any religious model (as subsequent verses indicate). At least within the limitation of Matthew 25:31-46, it is applicable to say that the distinctive identity of the authenticity or otherwise of any professors of Christ is situated within their actions.
5. After separating the sheep from the goats, the Son of Man will put the sheep on his right (which in Biblical symbolism indicates a place of favour), and the goats on his left (which in Biblical symbolism indicates a place of disfavour), Matthew 25:33.

The Right Model of Religion: Matthew 25:34-40

Verse 34: "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. Verse 35: 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, Verse 36: 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.' Verse 37: "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? Verse 38: When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? Verse 39: When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' Verse 40: "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.'(NIV).

1. People who belong to the right model of religion are blessed with inheritance prepared for them since the creation of the world. They apply this blessing towards meeting the basic human needs of people (25:34). The invitation to them is to "come."
2. People who belong to the right model of religion can discern real human needs of people; they recognise "hunger," "thirst," "strangeness," need for "clothes," "sickness," and being in "prison" (25:35-36).
3. People who belong to the right model of religion have the capacity and resources to *act* towards meeting human needs. They "gave," "invited," "clothed," "looked," and "came," in response to human needs. They are people of action (25:35-36).
4. People who belong to the right model of religion provide solutions customised to problems. For example, they provided food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, shelter and protection for the stranger and exposed, clothes for those who lack, care for the sick, and visitation to the prisoner (25:35-36). It is possible to note along with Keener that "except for visiting the imprisoned, the deeds Jesus lists are standard righteous deeds in Jewish ethics" (Keener 2014:171).
5. People who belong to the right model of religion are driven by the need to meet human needs. They did not serve as unto the Lord, because they were not even aware that the Lord was monitoring them or had any expectations from them (25:37-39).
6. The principal focus of people following the right model of religion is downward or earthward. It is not upward or heavenward. They want people to live meaningful lives here and now; they are contemporary in their approach to life (25:35-36).
7. The beneficiaries of acts of kindness in question are referred to, collectively, by Jesus Christ as "these brothers of mine" (25:40) or individually as "one of the least of these" (25:45). The pre-tribulation view of Bible interpretation considers "these brothers of mine" to be neither sheep nor goats, but believing Jews who shall benefit by acts of kindness from Gentile believers whose redemption in Christ is evident by what they do instead of what they profess (Louis A. Barbieri 1983:81). Another perspective to this is to consider the term "these brothers of mine" as generally speaking of the disciples of Jesus Christ, or "anyone who befriends those whom Jesus is prepared to call

brothers of mine in the hour of their need" (Ellison 1986:1148) or any other person whose need Jesus is willing to satisfy. This last perspective is the one engaged for this paper, which is a view shared by the Africa Bible Commentary: "We are called to respond to all human need, for that is what love does" (Kapolyo 2006:1164).

8. *The Right Model of Teaching*: Derived from the Right Model of Religion In juxtaposing Tyler with the Right Model of Religion, the ultimate educational purpose of a school is to produce people who would recognise human developmental needs in areas of quality of life, security and welfare, and economic development. Educational experiences provided for learners should be targeted at connecting them with the real human needs that are existential; capturing this target in the teaching-learning process is a way of making religion work in schools (as opposed to various religious buildings and activities on campuses of schools as is evident in Nigeria and other African countries). These experiences should be organised and evaluated in an immediate sense within the provisions of a formal teaching plan and in the long-term as learners graduate and become part of the larger society. By this understanding, the Right Model of Teaching is, in a sense of development, targeted at meeting human needs; in so far as this target is not captured in teaching, it can be said in null curricular terms that it is teaching that human needs are not important to whatever is being taught.

The Left Model of Religion: Matthew 25:41-46

Verse 41: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Verse 42: For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, Verse 43: I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' Verse 44: "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' Verse 45: "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Verse 46: "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (NIV).

1. Jesus Christ has authority over participants in the left model of religion, Matthew 25:31-33.
2. People who belong to the left model of religion are cursed and allocated a place prepared for the devil and his angels. The instruction for them is to "depart" (25:41).
3. People who belong to the left model of religion can discern the real human needs of people. They also recognise "hunger," "thirst," "strangeness," need for "clothes," "sickness," and being in "prison" (25:42-43).
4. People who belong to the left model of religion are known for deliberately ignoring clearly discerned human needs, although they have the capacity and the resources to *act* towards meeting those needs. They did not "give," "invite," "clothe," "look" and "come," in response to human needs (25:42-43).
5. People who belong to the left model of religion are not part of the solution to human developmental problems (25:42-43).
6. The main issue with people on the left model of religion is not that they did not see the human needs in question. On the contrary, they clearly saw what required their practical response. The main issue with them is that they did not act (25:44-45).
7. People following the left model of religion have no touch with the realities of contemporary times as evident by their lack of concern about the human needs around them (25:42-43).
8. *The Left Model of Teaching*: Derived from the Left Model of Religion.
   In juxtaposing Tyler with the Left Model of Religion, when schools graduate people who have mastered the academic and practical requirements of their academic disciplines but who fail to recognise human developmental needs in areas of quality of life, security and welfare, and economic development, such schools can be said to have miscomprehended the ultimate purpose of education. Furthermore, it can be said that the presence of religious affiliates in campuses of schools has not yielded any "religious" effect on the curriculum if the human developmental angle is ignored in the teaching-learning exercise. This kind of situation is possible when learning experiences lack any form of connectivity with the existential needs of people. As such after learners graduate, they lack any substantial impact in shaping the larger society to meet the basic needs of its people. In the

long run, such education can be evaluated as being feckless to human development. By this understanding, it can be said that while the Left Model of Teaching is capable of producing highly capable people in various areas of knowledge, it is developmentally deficient concerning satisfying human necessities if the exigencies concerned are not deliberately addressed in the formal teaching-learning process; failure to intentionally feature such concerns in teaching in this regard is equivalent to activating the negative effects of the null curriculum.

The Right and Left Models of Religion: Synthesis in Juxtaposition: Matthew 25:31-46

A clearer understanding of the Right and Left Models of Religion is possible when the two models are placed side-by-side with each other. At least three clear points of connection are discernable; three points of disconnection are also identifiable.

Points of Connection.

1. Jesus Christ has authority over participants in each of the models of religion. They will all come to give an account before Him, Matthew 25:31-33.
2. People who belong to both models of religion have equal capacity to discern the real human needs of people. Irrespective of the model to which people are aligned, they can recognise “hunger,” “thirst,” “strangeness,” need for “clothes,” “sickness,” and being in “prison” wherever such conditions are present (25:35-36, 42-43).
3. Irrespective of the model of religion to which they are participants, people have the capacity and resources to *act* towards meeting human needs. They can (or refuse to) “give,” “invite,” “clothe,” “look,” and “come,” in response to human needs. It is entirely up to them to act or refuse to act (25:35-36, 42-43).

Points of Disconnection.

1. There is a point of disconnection on the eternal destinies of people from both sides of the divide. On the one hand, those on the right hand

of religion are destined to go through an experience of eternal life with its attendant positive consequences; on the other hand, people on the left hand of religion are mandated to go through an eternal experience of punishment.

2. On the one hand, people who belong to the right hand of Christ are "down-to-earth" in their approach to human developmental needs where issues of human welfare and quality of life are involved (25:35-36). They have met with heaven (the Lord) on earth and were not even aware of it, because their initial desire was neither to "bring down God's glory" on earth nor to do acts worthy of heaven. On the other hand, those on the left side of religion did not participate in any way to address human needs.
3. On the one hand, those who belong to the right hand of Christ have carved out for themselves a distinctive identity as "sheep" (25:32-33). They did not act the way they did because they were sheep, but it was in acting in response to human needs that they earned an identity as sheep. On the other hand, those who belong to the left hand of Christ have also carved out for themselves a distinctive identity as "goats" (25:33-33). They did not act negatively because they were goats, but it was in ignoring clearly discerned human needs that they earned an identity as goats.

Right and Left Models of Teaching: Capturing the Right and Left Models of Religion

Placing Tyler side-by-side with the Right and Left Models of Religion, learning experiences (as a matter of fact, any learning experience) can be evaluated in terms of the ultimate significance of such experiences. The most effective way to do this is to be properly guided by the template of the Master Teacher, Jesus, in whom is vested the authority to evaluate both kinds of religions and teaching practices.

1. Based on Jesus's template, learning experiences should be evaluated as to whether or not they address existential human exigencies in areas of "hunger," "thirst," "strangeness," need for "clothes,"

"sickness," and being in "prison" wherever such conditions are present (25:35-36, 42-43).

2. Based on the null curriculum, if basic human necessities are not emphasised in the teaching-learning process, (not just in the overall comprehensive curriculum of a school or an educational system, but also in the requirements of each course of study), it is equivalent to stressing that they are not important.
3. Not stressing basic human developmental exigencies as a non-spontaneous component of the teaching process is a recipe to disaster when history finally culminates into shape, at the point of which teachers and learners will give account to Christ of those things engaged in the educational occupation. Teachers and learners in schools in Africa as a "religious" continent (Nigeria as a case in point) should ponder on this point. In this regard and in line with deductions from the main text of this study, a way to be religious is to be irreligious; in other words, let religion be seeing in human development instead of in public religious practices.

Research Question 2

In what way is an examination of the left model of teaching in connection to the null curriculum, significant to pruning religion in cases where it is considered as an obstacle of consequence to achieving the reality of integrating education and human development in Africa?

In Response

It is possible to say, substantially, that human developmental initiatives (including educational development) have not kept pace with the speed at which churches, mosques, and other religious structures are being established in almost every nook and cranny of Africa, in general. In particular, Christian and Islamic campus ministries (examples: Fellowship of Christian Students, Nigeria Fellowship of Evangelical Students, Evangelical Church Winning All Students' Ministry, Young Catholic Students, Muslim Students Society, International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, Scripture Union) are proliferating schools in a public exhibition of religion, while students (and parents concerned) are largely left to feed themselves (meaning, the

students), to find and pay for accommodation and school fees, to get academic wears for themselves, to finance their medical care, and to do all they can to live a life above the reality of hopelessness. Sequel to these actualities, there is a need to examine some of the ways through which the left model of teaching interconnects with the null curriculum in a manner significant to pruning religion, in cases where it can be said to be an obstacle of consequence to achieving the reality of integrating education and human development in Africa.

Points of Examination

The points above are examined as noted below:

1. Members of the academic community, for example in Nigeria, have largely (overwhelmingly) come from backgrounds where the left model of religion is having an impact on daily life, with elements that are exportable to educational institutions in a manner that consolidates the disconnection between education and development in both religious and non-religious courses of the institutions concerned. Churches, for example, are so much concerned with "kingdom business" (religious activities for each day of the week, raising tithes and offerings, the struggle to occupy leadership positions, preoccupation with materialism, etc.); this sharply contrasts with the reality of Jesus' physical presence on earth whereby He fed the hungry, loved the stranger, healed and took care of the sick, and worked in favour of the down-trodden of the society; the situation today is the contrary. Today, it is the pastors that are encouraging Christians to skip school in favour of participating in one religious activity or the other, it is the hungry that are feeding "Jesus," (pastors); it is the Christian that is denying welcome to the stranger, and churches generally do not have massive plans for accommodating their members; Churches prefer to build gigantic worship structures instead of establishing community hospitals to take care of the sick; even when churches build schools, the expensive nature of the schools makes it impossible for the down-trodden of the society to aspire to be there; it is apparent that there is neither attention to the people in

the church nor any proactive practical interest on the Right Model of Religion. It is from this context that teachers and students in schools emerge; they come to the educational system with these traditions of the Left Model of Religion which needs to be pruned as a way of preventing religion from constituting itself as an obstacle to human development.

2. Religious organisations (in this case, churches; in other cases, mosques) have infiltrated and saturated the schools with elements of the left model of religion in a manner consequential to human developmental aspects of the null curriculum. Christian and Islamic religions have one form of representation or the other (through churches, mosques, groups) in schools. The effectiveness of churches and mosques as represented by these agencies, need to be seeing in how actively they participate in human developmental affairs of "everyone" (not necessarily people who share their religious beliefs) on campus; not in how much they pray, how they dress, meet, read their holy books or other public manifestations of popular religion.
3. Religious departments (in this case, Christian religious departments; in other cases, Islamic religious departments) have disconnected religious education from human development, through the null curricular expression of the left model of religion in the formal teaching-learning process. Religious departments largely focus on religion and its practices, without really capturing the developmental angle of religion in meeting basic human needs.
4. The religious life of teachers and learners reflects elements of the left model of religion in the null curricular components of non-religious courses in human developmental terms. Even in classes, you often hear the mention of "God", "Christian", "Muslim", "In sha Allah", "by God's grace". There is so much religion in the classroom and less concern for human development which the Right Model of Religion encourages, outside the classroom even for students. For example, when teachers or former students of tertiary schools now occupying leadership positions in Nigeria, they still engage religion in their offices and official function and even commission projects "in the name of God the Father, in the name of God the Son, and in the name of God the Holy Spirit"; yet the impact of their leadership is not felt in terms of significantly reducing hunger in the land, providing water and

hygiene to the generality of the people, providing security and protection to strangers within the constitution, establishing and operating hospitals and health care facilities, social justice and improved quality of life for all including prisoners. Religion, in this case, (as seen in public communication or in knowing the leader concerned as belonging to a religious affiliation) has constituted itself as an obstacle to true religion, the practice of which would make it possible to satiate human developmental needs. For example, just as prayer should not be allowed to cover poor lesson planning and teaching (Newton 2001:127), religion as a whole should not constitute an obstacle to human development. Therefore, there is a need to remove the camouflage of the Left Model of Religion with its emphasis on the popular and public as enshrined in the rhetorical curriculum advanced by the political leadership; removing this camouflage is possible through an effective engagement of the Right Model of Teaching in schools. A way of applying the Right Model of Teaching in Schools is by emphasising those issues that matter to human development, which the political leadership system has assigned to the domain of the null curriculum.

5. The life of graduates of theological institutions generally does not necessarily indicate a strong connection between theological education and human development at grassroots levels of religion, as evident in the manifestation of elements of the left model of religion in pastoral and pulpit ministry at grassroots levels of "everyday theology" which is a term borrowed from Kevin Vanhoozer (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, Michael J. Sleasman 2008:Cover Page), or "theology by the people" (Pobee 2010:339). After graduating from pastoral training institutions, they soon also join the band-wagon of church and ministry in which the Christian faithful are constantly bombarded with calls to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness, while issues of human development are thrown to the back-burner. The situation in this band-wagon is more pronounced when church affiliates (the sheep) are now made to believe that they are obligated to care for the physical needs of the pastor (shepherd), while the pastor takes care of their spiritual needs. It seems that Jesus is so preoccupied with seeking and saving that which was lost that He is no longer in the business of feeding people with five loaves of bread and

two fish. As a remedy, theological schools may need to reformulate their curricula and take away human development from the null curricular domain to the overt curricula table, thereby pruning theological education in furtherance of the Right Model of Religion and teaching.

Research Question 3

What strategies can be applied towards engaging the right model of teaching in the context of the applicability of the null curriculum, in a manner that prunes and integrates religion in proper balance in terms of consolidating education and human development in Africa?

In Response

The basic strategy for applying the right model of teaching in integrating religion and education towards consolidating human development is to shave off popular religion with the scissors of developmental religion. Based on principles deducted from Matthew 25:31-46, this strategy is applicable in a pentagonal sense:

1. The church should be truly "worldly" in its ministry and terms of commission and omission in the null curricular aspects of its teaching ministry following the right model of religion. The focus of the church should be outwards, it has a mission of making an impact in the world; desirably, "The church must never return to the days when its reason for being is to be served by its membership" (Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson 2003:423). Accordingly, the church needs the world because it lives and ministers in the world; the church would drift into irrelevance if it denies the fact of its involvement in the world (Kunhiyop 2008:99). The church should not and cannot withdraw itself from the world, having been called by Christ from the world and sent into the world to be immersed in its life, yet without being tainted by it, to transform it. The church should be "teaching to change lives" (Hendricks 1987:Cover Page) in all ramifications of human well-being. Christ is ever calling the church to be "holy-worldly", a term originated by Alec Vidler (Vidler 1957:Chapter 5) and emphasised by John Stott

(Stott 1992:242-245). This double-identity of the church is more effective when the church has mastered the art of double listening: listening to the Word and also listening to the world; the world is groaning not just because of sin, but also because of hunger, thirst, lack of clothes, sickness, lack of security, lack of social justice, and being in prison to so many issues that challenge the quality of life and life expectancy. These issues should no longer be left in the null curricular domain in all teaching processes wherever Christians are called to serve, with Nigeria as a case in point. It is time for practical Christians in the educational system to disengage themselves from the religious and act developmentally as people who have understood the teaching of Jesus, the Master Teacher. Acting in furtherance of human and social development is a key feature in the testimony of the church as salt and light of the world (Kunhiyop 2012:169).

2. The church in contexts with similarities to Nigeria should replace "religion" as it currently is with "humanity" in its ministry and terms of commission and omission, in the null curricular aspects of its teaching ministry, and in line with the right model of religion. A way to be religious in fact is not to be religious in sight, but to be religious in deed. Religion should not be the motivator or evidence of being on the way to heaven; rather making human life better on earth should attract confirmation from heaven. Consequently, while eternal life comes only through fully trusting in Christ's salvation by grace (John 3:16, 14:6: Ephesians 2:8-10), evidence of having it is not enshrined in the religious, but in the developmental via working to make the life of everyone (Christians and non-Christians) better.
3. The divide between the religious and the secular should be removed in a manner consequential to the null curriculum, when it comes to educating for human development, under the right model of religion. This divide can be removed if the sovereignty of God over both the "secular" and the "sacred" is recognised and affirmed in teaching; Timothy Palmer notes that it is wrong not to make this acknowledgement (2015:38). This deduction is considered applicable to both religious and non-religious courses in schools in Nigeria. Christians in general, but Christian teachers in particular, need to function as de-secularised citizens of heaven engaged in Christ's ambassadorial services on earth in whatever assignments they do in

schools. It is in functioning as people of the world in a transformational sense of human development, that the identity of Christians as people of the Book is revealed.

4. Christians should see the future in present reality in educating for human development, and in null curricular terms of the teaching and learning process in educational institutions, under the right model of religion. Let God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. It is God's will for people to have a better life now. The future is here already and can be experienced right here in Africa. The possibility of experiencing God's kingdom on earth now, via sustainable human development, should be emphasised in curriculum delivery, while matters of heaven beyond death should be allowed to be taken over by the null curriculum.
5. Theological schools should be involved in training and deploying world-class Christians for ministry in the world, through a system that engages the right model of religion towards reasonably making it possible for the null curriculum to be achieved in human development terms, in the practical realities of everyday theology at the grassroots level. World-class Christians are the only "fully alive" people in the world and are on the steering of human development wherever they are located on the planet (Warren 2002:189); they are not limited to (or even imprisoned in) the church, their identity is found in the world of human needs. Let the church in Africa release people to go out into the world in line with the Great Commission of Jesus, to model the life of heaven while on earth. Accordingly, Christian presence in the life of people in the world should be stressed in the curriculum of theological schools, while Christian presence in the church can be left to the null curriculum.

Conclusion

In concluding this exercise of synthesising the right and left models of teaching in the null curriculum, a three-point consideration is made as a way of pruning religion from education towards development in Nigeria. This is in line with the three-point purpose of this study.

1. The first purpose of the study focused on engaging the exegetical consequence of Matthew 25:31-46 in a manner applicable to identifying and synthesising the right and left models of teaching in the curriculum, as a model of (and also as a bridge to) integrating education and human development, without religion constituting itself as an obstacle to the desired development. In line with this purpose, religious bodies (the church especially) should create the right background for the right model of teaching to take place in schools whenever and wherever Christians are called by God to serve in the teaching-learning endeavour. This background is not created when churches are so occupied with the religious at the expense of the developmental; doing so leads to a situation whereby the church becomes an obstacle to development.

   Churches, especially in the context of developmental absence in Nigeria, should be seen at the forefront of providing means of livelihood to people in the community in which the church is located; churches need to be involved in water and sanitation projects, establishing community health facilities, providing houses for free or at very low cost, supplying of clothes to those in need as deliberate plan, and fighting social injustice, for the benefit of all. If the church encourages the prioritisation of these activities outside the school system, there is hope that members of the church would also stress such activities in the academic circle, thereby de-marginalising the null curriculum from the mainstream of the teaching-learning process. It is worrisome to observe cases where the church appears to be focused on money and not meeting the needs of people inside and outside the church; as a non-profit people-oriented service agency the church is not a commercial establishment, it should, therefore, be de-commercialised.
2. The second purpose of the study focused on examining the left model of teaching in connection to the null curriculum, as a step designed to prune religion in cases where it is considered as an obstacle of consequence to achieving the reality of integrating education and human development in Africa. To further achieve this purpose, it is in order for course guides, schemes of work, lesson plans, and other tools of teaching-learning processes to be subjected to null curricular test

before implementation in schools with any public symbol of religion (church, mosque, religious group, religious courses, religious programs, and other public exhibitions of religiosity). These tools should either pass or fail the test in three key areas: concern for the quality of life of people (addressing hunger, thirst, clothes, and sickness on point), concern for life expectancy in terms of general security and welfare of people (addressing hunger, sickness, prison and realities of social justice, and the welfare of the stranger), concern for improving means of livelihood of people (addressing economic affairs that encourage the production of food, water supply, housing, clothes and physical comfort, the establishment of effective community-based medical facilities, the welfare of prisoners, the down-trodden, extremely poor, and derelicts of the society on point), and concern for education that leads to development by bringing human developmental matters from the periphery of the curriculum to the centre of the teaching-learning planning and delivery process.

3. The third purpose of the study focused on strategising to engage the right model of teaching in the context of the applicability of the null curriculum, in a manner that puts religion in proper balance in terms of consolidating education and human development in Africa. Five strategies have already been proposed. First strategy: Christians called to teach or learn in schools should not be worldly, but should be "holy-worldly" with a double identity that also encapsulates listening to the Word and listening to the world, the evidence of which should be any teaching planning and delivery. Second strategy: a way to be religious in fact as a teacher or student in school, is not to be religious in public practice, but to be religious in deed via equipping learners to be effective agents of human development both locally and globally. Strategy three: it is in functioning as people of the world in a transformational sense of human development, that the religious identity of Christian teachers and students as people of the Book should be revealed in schools and other learning communities. Strategy four: the possibility of experiencing God's kingdom, better life, and the future right now, via sustainable human development, should be underscored in the overt curriculum and learning facilitation, while matters of Elysium should be allowed to be taken over by the null curriculum. Fifth strategy: theological schools in Africa

and other contexts of under-development, should tilt their teaching-learning processes towards addressing the practical realities of everyday theology at the grassroots level, thereby extracting existential matters of human development from the null curriculum and placing them in the mainstream of the entire theological education curriculum.

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Deacon as model of ministry within urban locations

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Abstract

This article will investigate the deacon as minister with liturgical and social service responsibilities as interlocuter of more effective urbanisation. We will draw from the Early Church's diaconal ministry descriptions. This elicits the question, what can the interactionist ministry of the deacon contribute to effective ministry in times of crisis? On the assumption that the deacon is both involved in the sacramental ministry of the liturgy of the Last Supper and provider of social services, what kind of diaconal ministry is suited for urbanisation and the subsequent crisis such as the displacement of people and redefining of spaces? While we used the ecumenical church as the conception of church, the Anglican church will be used as a springboard to embed the ministry of the deacon in a concrete and particular context. After a conceptual analysis of the main terminologies and its effects on the development of notions of the deaconate, we will contend that the deacon as interlocuter contributes to a broader model of urbanization. The intersection between spiritual (liturgy) and social responsibility (material). The different communities will be used to indicate markers from the ministry of the diaconate for a more effective ministry in urban contexts.

Introduction

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa has in recent times revived the ministry of the deacon. More prominent space has been given to diaconal ministry within the three-fold ministry of Bishop, Priest, and Deacon. Since the Lambeth Conference resolution of 1968, the deacon has become more than "an inferior office" (Lambeth Conference 1968). This article will investigate the deacon as minister with liturgical and social service responsibilities as interlocuter of more effective urbanisation. We will draw from the Early Church's diaconal ministry approaches. The Early Church combined liturgical ministry with social responsibilities without neglecting either of the ministries. This elicits the question, what can the interactionist ministry of the deacon contribute to effective ministry in times of crisis? On the assumption that the deacon is involved in both the sacramental ministry of the liturgy of the Last Supper and provision of social services, what kind of diaconal ministry is suited for urbanisation and the subsequent crisis such as the displacement of people and redefining of spaces? To understand the main arguments and perspectives of the two modes of diaconal ministry – liturgy and service – we will conduct a literature review, paying special attention to the ecumenical church. The Anglican Church will be used as a springboard to embed the ministry of the deacon in a concrete and particular context. We will also do a conceptual analysis of the main terminologies and its effects on the development of notions of the deaconate. Finally, we will suggest the deacon as interlocuter within two interactionist phenomena. The intersection between spiritual (liturgy) and social responsibility (material) and the different communities will be used to indicate markers from the ministry of the diaconate for a more effective ministry in urban contexts.

A community-oriented approach to urbanization with the deacon as interlocutor will have the following characteristics. The community assumes that tradition as a fluid and not static phenomenon takes seriously the history of the community. The particularity of the community includes the context and how current environment impacts of the wellbeing of the community. This emphasis on the p[articular and not the universal ensures that regeneration is critically engaged with. The persons within the community are relational and

urbanization needs to reflect on the impact of so-called development for the residents and the environment.

Conceptualising urbanisation, urban ministry, and diaconate

"Urbanisation" is a contested concept with different descriptions, usages, and meanings. Business or financial institutions view urbanisation as an attempt to revitalise economies, modernise trade centres, and advance architecture. For the residents of urban areas, urbanisation might result in the rise of cost of living and possible displacement. Terms such as "urban renewal", "urban development", "urban revitalisation", "urban reconstruction", or even "urban renaissance" are used to describe a similar meaning to the upgrading of urban areas that have undergone some form of decay or degrading. Closely associated to these terms is the concept of "gentrification" which is a process of the development of urban areas through capitalist or neo-capitalist means at the expense of the poor. "The most well-known examples in South Africa are in Cape Town in neighbourhoods such as Woodstock, Salt River and the Bo-Kaap" (De Beer 2018:1-2). Areas such as Walmer Estate and Zonnebloem are fast becoming areas of gentrification with the houses of residents who have resided there for generations increasing at an alarming rate. These areas are attracting national and international investors because of their proximity to the city centre and the breath-taking scenery of the surrounding mountains and beaches of Cape Town. Despite the economic and environmental potential, South African cities like Cape Town have two kinds of communities. The one community is made up of wealthy people and institutions and the other consists of the marginalised and peripheral small business. The former community seeks to improve their own livelihoods by upscaling and modernising and the latter struggles for survival against an ever-increasing bureaucratic and technocratic system. Headley (2018:1) refers to these two opposing communities as "two faces to the city of Cape Town". Most know of "the face of the fun, beautiful 'world class' city with Table Mountain, great restaurants, and beautiful beaches". However, the "unseen face of the city" houses a large proportion of the city's population, especially the "marginalised communities, overcrowded townships and underserviced informal settlements".

By “urban ministry” we refer to the response of the churches to the growing urbanisation of South African cities. The National Planning Commission predicted an unprecedented growth in the urban areas of South Africa. The towns and cities of the country “are now home to more than 60% of the national population and account for 80 percent of economic activity … with these percentages to increase”. With the rising unemployment of youth, growing poverty levels, and the lack of adequate growth of infrastructure, the Commission predicts that by 2025 the urban spaces would have increased and become overpopulated, poverty will soar, and the environment will be more polluted and socially vulnerable (National Planning Commission, n.d., in Swart and de Beer 2014:1).

Urban ministry is concerned with the renewal or development of the urban areas. Urban ministry is about the presence of the church in various forms in the lives of the residents as well as the different economic or social processes, activities, and policies. It is particularly concerned with the approaches to renewal and development and the consequences for the people affected by urbanisation. Ministry can take various forms. Ribbens & De Beer (2017) identified three rituals of African urban Christianity in their research on urbanisation in the City of Tshwane. In terms of *prayer*, they conclude,

> The churches we encountered in the city of Tshwane are praying churches. Prayer is an everyday performance action. During the focus group and World Café conversations, when we asked how the church is responding to the happening in the city and how the church is innovating, prayer was repeatedly mentioned (Ribbens & De Beer 2017:8).

In the City of Cape Town, the Anglican Cathedral bells at specific times and the other mainline churches’ daily worship services are similar occasions of prayer for the city and its people.

The *Bible* or *the Word of God* is another means of change, conversion, or transformation within the context of urban spaces. The reciting of Scripture does not only provide knowledge about the importance of the ritual of reading Scripture for the first Christian communities, but it provides the narratives of God’s salvific work, Jesus’ redemptive acts, and the Holy Spirit’s sanctification

of the marginalised, the weak, outcasts and lowly. According to Ribbens and De Beer (2017:9), the churches that participated in their research attest to the role of the Bible in "personal morality", "interpersonal and familial relationships", and "advocacy work". James (2015:49) rightly propounds that reflection on the biblical texts through the lens of urbanisation and reading the urban contexts through biblical reflection draws a deeper level of consciousness about themes such as justice, restoration, reconciliation, lamentation, and hope. Bible reading in relation to the particular urban contexts draws the readers into the world of the first century Christians who had to overcome displacements, identity reformulations, and marginalisation.

Churches in the city and surrounding urban areas are spaces of renewal, sustenance, restoration, and reconciliation. Church buildings are symbols of hope and those who withdraw to it during worship services connect the healing and restoration of the Christian tradition with the ever-increasing changes of the urban places and processes. Worship is the connection of the world of the secular and the encounter with the sacred through adoration and awareness of God. Saliers (2014) asserts that,

> Worship is a revelatory activity. Broadly conceived, worship is the human response to the mystery of God's being and self-communication. Whether communal (liturgical) or individual (devotional), worship is not a theory about God and the world, but a set of practices, experiences, and fundamental dispositions toward what is deemed most sacred.

Ribbens and De Beer (2017) observed that during their World Café and focus groups, *worship* was the third experience that the co-researchers affirmed along with prayer and the Bible. Singing as empowerment amongst the youth was particularly relevant against the social and economic deprivation of the young people. Youth choirs and other creative liturgical acts are innovations that the church uses to involve young people in their own resistance against social ills such drug abuse, unemployment, generational gaps, and cultural shifts. Worship, and in particular music, both in terms of types and application, is a determining factor for their choice of church. The youth

> [S]ifted through a self-directed approval system on song selection, local choruses, hymn book, instrumentation or some amalgamation … Not only does the practiced ritual of song influence decisions about why, where and how a person joins a church, it also developed what churches perceived as negative and positive forms of competition with other churches (Ribbens & De Beer 2017:9-10).

Worship develops from the experiences of the contexts. The procession of the gospel from the congregation to the preacher symbolises that the Word finds meaning in the experiences of the congregation to the preacher who then communicates the meaning of the particular experiences of the congregation through the interpretation and application of the Scripture. This is a bottom-up approach from which the experiences of the people become the lens for understanding Scripture in light of the urban experiences. Saliers (2014:297) contends that worship will progress to the interconnection between service and worship, liturgy and action, Saliers asserts that;

> 'love of God and love of neighbour' justice and prayer, scripture and worship. Worship is the connection between the gathering in adoration of God and sending into the world to serve.

The conclusion prayer at the end of the Anglican liturgy of the Eucharist demonstrates this unbroken connection of worship and service,

> Father almighty we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice in Jesus Christ out Lord. Send us out into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory (Anglican Prayer Book 1989:129).

This threefold urban ministry of prayer, Scripture and worship reflects the broad contribution that the church makes to urban spaces and the regeneration of these spaces. Prayer, Scripture, and worship provides spiritual capital to those who reside and those who work within the confines of urban spaces. Persons within urban surroundings are able to reflect on the challenges resulting from urbanisation. The displacement of people and alienation of small-scale businesses from the technocratic and competitive environment of

regenerated urban settings gives rise to serious questions about the meaning of life in fluctuating (fluxuating) circumstances and fluid identities. The spiritual capital of the church is an important resource for development.

A fourth element of ministry is one that we refer to as the lived spiritual experience of the displaced. Spiritual lived experience is not just interpreted situations or actions of people, but is the meaning that is given to the actual experiences of people. It is not experience that is interpreted by a third party, but its authenticity is measured by the meaning that a person gives to their own experiences. This is possible through the telling of narratives. Lived spiritual experience is the meaning that people give to their experiences through the narratives of their lives and how their narratives are aligned with the narrative of Jesus Christ. Lived spiritual experience is the particular experience of a group of people who finds meaning in their urban experience or the experience of urbanisation through their own narratives and that of Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection.

Spiritual experiences are the context embedded in urbanisation and the results of the regeneration of urban areas or cities. The context of the urban spaces and displacements are the fourth element within the interconnected ministry in urban settings. The experience of loss of community, familial relationships, identity, sense of self-development and friendships are the circumstances and realities of the people who reside within the regenerative or urban spaces. These lived experiences are not only secular but within a country such as South Africa with an overwhelming Christian population, the sacred and secular intertwine so that experiences take on a spiritual dimension. Or at the very least, the secular is closely connected with the spiritual so that meaning-making includes a spiritual hermeneutic.

> The boundary dissolves between so-called church activity and everyday life and ordinary practices. Smith's social imagery and Gornik's observation identify the essentiality of bodily expression and everydayness (Ribbens and De Beer 2017:8).

Our contribution to urban ministry lies in the deacon as the invisible bridge or faded boundary that fuses the secular and the spiritual. The deacon plays a

role that causes the continuum of the lived experience as spiritual lived experiences.

Our contention is that ministry in the form of prayer, Scripture, and worship does not adequately address the neo-liberal and materialistic emphasis of urbanisation. What is needed is an urban ministry that contributes to a more wholistic approach to urbanisation. We contend that the ministry of the diaconate is more effective for a more inclusive approach to urbanisation. The diaconate addresses the shortcomings of the broad ministry of prayer, Scripture, and worship, and keeps in tension the liturgical and social responsibility ministries. The ministry of the diaconate engages with the narrow approach to urbanisation and the top-down approach of the church's ministry towards urban regeneration.

Diaconia, diaconal ecclesiology and deacon

The terms "diaconia", "diaconal church" and "deacon" are interrelated, and a clearer conceptualisation of deacon is subject to an analysis of the other two terms. Diaconia as the overarching term for all social responsibility ministry of the church is itself a contested one with varied and multiple meanings. The varied meanings and use of the term diaconia do not lend itself to a precise definition. Even when the term is taken from the Greek it is not confined to a narrow, specific definition (Nordstokke 2009:6). The term is also highly contested. The overemphasis of aid from the North to the South or from Northern Europe to other parts of the world came under severe criticism from the South. From the 1980s the shift was towards the ecclesial nature and the works of justice, inequality, and poverty (Nordstokke 2012:188).

The term diaconia can be traced back to the New Testament usage which refers to service or ministry and a particular reference to the ministry of the deacon. The word also refers specifically to acts and functions of "intermediary agents and messengers". In the Pauline letters Paul refers to himself as a "servant" or "messenger bearer" or "ambassador" which carries the same connotation as the deacon (Christensen 2019:42-43). The ministry or acts of diaconia are providing for the needy and homeless, looking after the widows, tending to the sick, and serving the poor (Christensen 2019:43). The Early Church served the poor, practiced hospitality, and visited the sick, which is

sometimes viewed as one of the reasons for the rapid and vast expansion of the church in its early inception (World Council of Churches 2017:18).

> Under the leadership of St Lawrence, known as 'the defender of the poor', the deacons in Rome had developed an extensive charitable outreach by the middle of the 3rd century. During the time of Emperor Constantine, who granted the Church public recognition, the first church hospitals were established. St Basil (+379) built a famous hospital in Caesarea in Cappadocia; it 'had the dimensions of a city; St Fabiola (+399) founded a hospital in Rome (World Council of Churches 2017).

This period of the first few centuries is the most significant period of the deacons and later also the deaconesses. Texts such as the *Didache* chapter 15, the *First Letter of Clement* around the year 100, *The Shepherd of Hermas,* and *Apostolic Constitutions* from the 4th century all attest to the prominence of the deacon. The ministry of the deacon is both liturgical (*Didache* and *1 Clement*) and includes social responsibility, such as visiting the sick and widowers (*The Shepherd of Hermas* and *Apostolic Constitutions*) (in Christensen 2019:44).

These two notions dominated the ministry of the deacon even into the period of the Reformation. Reformers such as Luther and Calvin supported the order of the deacon, and Calvin even used the Early Church's model of widows working for the church as a structure for deaconesses. We find a good example in the work of Katharina Zell of Strasbourg who organised the care of refugees arriving in the city.

> 'we ought to exercise and practice toward one another our office (commended to us by God), the ministry and office of care and love'. Regarding the role of women in the wider reformation movement, it is worth mentioning that the Mennonites were one of the first to include both deacons and deaconesses in their communities (Christensen 2019:48-49).

In the mainline churches such as The Anglican Church in Southern Africa, the diaconate has reclaimed its position within the three-fold ministry of Bishop, Priest and Deacon. In many dioceses the deacon has become a permanent

order which signifies the break from the transition status of the diaconate. A similar shift has taken place within the Roman Catholic Church with the association of caritas with diaconia (Klaasen 2020:123). There is also an emergence of contemporary concepts such as *ubuntu* (Dietrich 2019), *empowerment* and (Nordstokke 2012), that gives meaning to diaconia. Knoetze (2019:158-159) has also formulated a relational diaconal ecclesiology which emphasises the function of the church according to a Trinitarian perspective. These contributions indicate the contributions to the ministry and office of deacon.

The diaconal ministry has many aspects, and throughout the history of the Christian church the ministry has been shaped by the different contexts and circumstances of the spaces and places where the churches responded to urbanisation. The deacon has developed into a specialised ministry and in many denominations social work, chaplaincy, medical workers, and community leaders form part of the group of qualified occupations that are involved in diaconal ministry.

There is a clear connection of the issues that are involved in urbanisation and diaconal ministry. Social responsibility, human capital, reconfiguration of spaces, destabilising of fixed identities and the material value or devalue of residency are some of the overlapping issues of urbanisation and the ministry of the diaconate. Our interest lies with the contribution that diaconal ministry and the diaconate in particular can make to a more wholistic approach to the renewing of urban places and persons. How can the diaconate foster a dialogue between urbanisation and the affected people that become marginalised and alienated in their own spaces which they have occupied for generations? The interconnectedness of the three terms – diaconal, deacon, and diaconal ecclesiology – will form the broad understanding of the ministry of the deacon. In this sense, the deacon becomes an interlocutor between the sacred (spiritual) and the secular (material). It connects both into a whole and not a dichotomy.

Diaconate – interlocuter of wholistic urbanisation

Urban ministry is becoming more relevant as the urban areas are experiencing regeneration. We will use the term “regeneration of the urban” as it reflects

the kind of urbanisation that should take place in South Africa. De Beer (2018) describes *regeneration* as the attempt to upgrade and restore hurtful communities in ways that are self-determining, personally responsible, and generationally sensitive. Regeneration differs from gentrification which is economic and prosperity driven. Gentrification is based on the agendas of the middle class and those with materialist wealth at the expense of the poor and marginalised who generally make up the residents of the urban areas. Regeneration takes the agency and experiences of the poor as the starting point for any kind of renewal or development. De Beer finds the definition of Roberts (2000) a more inclusive one than the classical narrow economic. Roberts defines urban regeneration as

> … comprehensive and integrated vision and action which seek to resolve urban problems and bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area, that has been subject to change or offers opportunities for improvement.

De Beer revised Roberts' broad definition making it more practical and specific,

> Comprehensive and integrated vision and action which seek to address urban challenges in changing or deteriorating urban neighbourhoods, bringing about lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental conditions of an area, through broad-based collaborative approaches, building on local assets and resources, focusing on improvement and integration without displacement, optimizing benefits for local people and institutions, and facilitating radical social inclusion (De Beer 2018:2-3).

Firstly, the definition espoused by De Beer takes into consideration the traditional space allocation and the occupation of the urban spaces. Secondly, De Beer also considers the African worldview and how the land relates to personhood and identity within the cosmology of material and spirit interlinks. Thirdly, De Beer takes seriously the human capital of the residents and how agency of the marginalised becomes the centre. Fourthly, the definition includes the interconnectedness of persons, institutions, and the environment,

and how these relate to the common good. It is within this more inclusive approach of urbanisation that we seek to contribute. The deacon as interlocutor might be a theological contribution to the debate about urbanisation.

"Interlocutor" is defined as "as one who takes part in dialogue or conversation" and "a man in the middle of the line in a minstrel show who questions the end men and acts as leader" (Merriam Webster Dictionary, n.d.). The interlocutor is a powerful symbol who engages and encourages dialogue between different parties. In the second definition, the interlocutor occupies a powerful position that connects different parties while engaging in the goal of the dialogue. The interlocutor keeps differences together by securing the involvement of different persons or groups for the end.

Liturgy and social responsibility

The deaconate has a history of primary involvement in the social responsibility of the church and the liturgy of the church. The Early Church did not make a distinction between the liturgical ministry and the social engagement of the deacon. Deacons were involved in the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist and along with the bishops they were responsible for the preparation and distribution of the bread and wine. The Holy Eucharist, the centre of the life of the congregation, was the ministerial function of the deacon. In the *Didache,* the Holy Eucharist is listed immediately after the instruction to appoint deacons "worthy of the Lord". First Clement also mentions the liturgical role of bishops and deacons for the functioning of the church. Coupled with the liturgical role is the mentioning of the social role of the deacons. The rich are encouraged to provide for the poor and the poor are reminded that God provides for their needs. Just like 1 Clement and the Didache, Bishop Ignatius also emphasised the role of the deacon within the Early Church. He refers to the deacons as "fellow servants", implying that deacons follow the example of Jesus and bishops who serve the communities without prejudice. The Shephard of Hermas affirms the tradition as passing down ministry. Like the apostles, bishops, and teachers, deacons also take care of the orphans and widows, and their agency is consecrated by the church. The Apostolic Fathers sum up the dual ministry of deacons as follows:

> [To] assist the bishop in many different ways: to carry messages, to travel about, to serve, in doing home visits, minister to the sick, in celebrating Eucharist, helping at baptism and saying prayers. For instance, after the Eucharist the deacon must pray for the whole Church and the peace of the universe (Christensen 2019:44-45).

This prayer is done publicly by the deacon at the end of the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord" and the people respond "In the name of Christ. Amen" (Anglian Prayer Book 1989:129).

Within the Early Church's ministry of the deacon is the intersection of the liturgy and social responsibilities. This intersection is kept in tension by the deacon who plays a leading role in the preparation and leading of the liturgy. The deacon leads the synaxis, the prayers, reads the gospel, assists at the Lord's table, and commissions the people to exercise agency in the world in the name of Christ. The deacon also comes to the liturgy with the needs of the world and the needs are embedded in the liturgical movement from suffering to healing. This movement from outside to inside and then to the outside is kept in creative tension by the deacon who is actively involved in the lived experiences of the people and the holiness of the saving grace of God.

It is this movement from urbanisation and its effects on communities to the hope of healing and restoring that is led by the deacon. The distinctive role of the deacon is connecting the social work and responsibility with the spiritual. The regeneration or urbanisation of urban spaces is not only a social, political, or economic process. It is a spiritual process with a spiritual dimension. The deacon brings to housing projects, expansion of business infrastructure, technology and buildings, the spiritual needs and spiritual capital that economic and materialistic approaches to urbanisation neglects. As interlocutor, the deacon adds to the technical and human skills the ritual and symbolic meanings of the spaces that undergird the social cohesion and cultural dimensions of the people. For example, land is a sacred entity that forms a part of the identity of people. The deacon as servant of the church plays an important role in the sacrilege of the land and can play an important role in an approach to land development that recognised the sanctity of the land.

Whereas urbanisation or gentrification divides, forcibly removes, splits into centre and margins, spirituality unites and shares responsibility for the common good. Spirituality that is rooted in the Trinitarian God of Christians acknowledges differences but does not divide for the sake of prosperity of one group over the other or one person over another person. Dietrich (2014) quotes Tsele's (2002: 53-55) notion of charitable acts as a united act by both the wealthy and the poor:

> God is charitable to his entire creation. Society as whole needs to be made more charitable. We must resist turning charity into a word, an undertaking viewed with suspicion. However, the ultimate objective of diakonia is restorative: it aims to restore the dignity of the poor. In doing so diakonia unites the giver and the receiver, and leaves neither of them unchanged. Thus, it is liberating and transforming.

When regeneration of urban spaces includes the spiritual dimension of personhood, then the process of renewal and development does not only become more wholistic than materialistic profit-driven methods, but the value of the material and human capital is seen for what it really is. The interconnectedness of the persons who reside in urban spaces and the buildings, environment, and non-living beings become more than the exchange of commodities. The deacon's dual role in the liturgy and the community becomes one of a deeper sense of regeneration. It is not just about visiting the sick, providing for those in need and assisting the bishop at the liturgy, it involves the affirmation and blessing of the agency of all the persons affected by urbanisation. There is a strong resistance against treating those at the margins as insignificant for diaconal ministry. Those at the margins are not to be viewed as recipients of aid or good deeds from those in the centre. The margins are spaces of holiness, places of sanctuary, and persons of agency.

> The world may tend to see the margins as places of disgrace and powerlessness; however, the biblical witness points towards God who is always present in the struggles of those unjustly pushed to the margins of society. It gives several accounts of God's attention and caring love to people in situations of oppression and consequent deprivation. God hears the cry of the oppressed and

> responds by sustaining and accompanying them in their journey towards liberation (Exodus 3:7-8). This is the *diakonia* of God: a *diakonia* of liberation as well as of restoring dignity, and ensuring justice and peace (World Council of Churches 2013:106-107).

When the persons affected by regeneration are viewed from a transcended space as created in the *imago Dei,* then personhood is much more than the biological and psychological make-up of people. The *imago Dei* is both being and doing. The agency of the residence is as substantial as the biological development. Persons have gifts and talents that are part of their identity and if their gifts and talents are suppressed by professional skills and superior technical abilities, the part of their identity is ignored in processes that have detrimental effects for them. The deacon who usually is from the community, or who has strong ties with the community, symbolised the identity of the community, and by exercising the calling as "servant" or "messenger" holds within the liturgy the identity of the community as the image of God.

Community-oriented ministry

Whilst the diaconate is not desirable to do effective urbanisation on its own, the deacon is in a position to contribute to a more inclusive socially cohesive approach to regeneration. The deacon connects different communities. De Beer (2018) propounds that regeneration processes are completely monopolised from above by policymakers, the wealthy, the powerful, and those with self-interests. He further asserts that within the South African contexts of urbanisation, there are no alternative examples. His "from above and outside" approach is an attempt to counter the top-down approach (2018:2).

After a critical discussion about market- or entrepreneur-led regeneration and university-led regeneration, and pointing out their serious limitations, De Beer (2018) proffers a faith-based urban regeneration that considers a broad collaboration that takes a variety of resources and agents in a all-encompassing collaborative approach. He identifies three resources for consideration, namely:

> [A]n urban spirituality; a theoretical understanding of (urban) regeneration as integral liberation and transformation; and the employment and mobilisation of socio-spiritual capital (De Beer 2018:2-9).

This approach, as proposed by De Beer, takes the agency of the residents seriously, and like the diaconate, criticises the neglect of the skills and talents of the residents. The approach also adds the neglected socio-spiritual skills of the people. De Beer includes moral authority, property ownership, human resources and gifts, inherent networks and relationships, and vocation as spiritual capital. These are significant and valuable skills. We would like to add the specific gift of the deacon as interlocuter or messenger or servant. This skill or gift keeps the different contributions of the variety of agents in a creative tension that leads to a common good. The approach also takes into consideration the tradition or history of the community that becomes a fostering force in the direction and shape of the vision of project and process.

Our own developing model of regeneration or urbanisation is a community-driven approach in which the deacon plays the role of interlocuter. The community becomes the centre of power and invites others into its circle. It is only through a community of lived experiences that real bottom-up, or wholistic or inclusive urbanisation can take place. The deacon, having deep roots in the community, with specialised skills facilitates the broadening of the community. Such a community can be modelled on the Eucharistic community as an open-ended narrative. The Eucharist is a narrative of a particular community who is welcoming, engaging, mutually enriching, and reciprocal. The deacon's role in the liturgy of the Eucharist is to prepare and distribute the transformed elements of bread and wine into symbols of the saving body of Jesus Christ. The deacon welcomes all to participate and receive this transformed material elements as consecrated sacraments. The Anglican Catechism describes the ministry of the deacon as

> [T]o represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments (Anglican Prayer Book 1989:434).

A community as open-ended narrative has three dimensions. The tradition of such a community is important for the present and future development. The tradition is not fixed but it engages with the past and the present. By tradition we refer to the

> [T]he furniture of the mind that is shared by the community and which makes their conversation possible. That is to say, tradition is the shared language that makes communication possible, or more accurately. It is the shared understanding of language that makes communication possible. Because words take their meaning from context and from the way they are used historically, a particular tradition can be understood then as the shared cultural understanding that binds a community together (Lucie-Smith 2007:4).

In other words, tradition is not absolute and fixed, but through constructive dialogue, the past finds meaning in the present through dialogue and a deeper sense of understanding. Dialogue between the Early Church community and the urban community takes on the life-giving nature of an organism and not fixed structures.

The community is also particular and concrete. The community has meaning in the urban contexts with unique situations, lifestyles, relationships, values and skills. These characteristics become assets that can be beneficial for effective urbanisation and development of urban areas. These assets can be regarded as soft skills that take on the nature of social and spiritual rather than technical skills. This does not mean that the community is closed to other persons or communities. The community is open for interaction with different kinds of communities as long as the basis of interaction and dialogue is reciprocal, mutually enriching, and a moral power relation. It is worthwhile highlighting the limitations of national initiatives such as The National Development Plan and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (2013). Notwithstanding the good intensions and efforts of these two initiatives to develop an extensive consultative process for development, there are serious limitations. Swart and De Beer (2014) identify the extent to which the use of technocrats and bureaucrats were used at the expense of the residents and communities affected by such efforts of development. Despite their efforts to

consult with communities, the details of such consultations were lacking or simply out of the reach of ordinary citizens, especially the communities of urban and city spaces. The vision and strategy of the initiatives is typically a top-down or "from above" approach (2014:3).

The particularity of the community affirms the value of the community for its substance and its function that it plays in regeneration. The context of the community identifies the skills and talents that can be beneficial for the upliftment and progress of the particular community and the other which is generally regarded as the stranger or outsider by big business conglomerates and those at the top of the pyramid. With regard to the particularity of the community of this developing model, the community is open ended and welcomes differences as intersections of growth and progress.

The deacon as servant and messenger connects different communities by proclamation of the Word and dismissing of the gathered community into the urban community. The deacon as reader and preacher of the gospel proclaims the Word of God from the context of the community. The symbolic procession from the middle of the church to the pulpit is a confirmation of different communities that come together and draw capital from each other. The deacon also connects the different communities by pointing all people to the ultimate end of salvation for all. Both the Eucharist and the dismissal are commands to exercise agency of justice and peace.

The community is made up of relational persons. To be created in the *imago Dei* means that the relational nature of God is inherently the essence of what it means to be a person in community. Many urbanisation processes are either liberal or neo-liberal, individualistic, and materialistic. In these processes the dignity and value of personhood is lost for progress sake. The end goal of such processes is maximum profit for the most competitive individuals and technological and industrial agents. My notion of a community urbanisation process is that the relationships of persons with each other, other living beings, and the environment is reciprocal.

For an understanding of this we draw from the theological anthropology of the doctrines of the *imago Dei* (Catholic) and "The likeness of God" (Eastern Orthodox). With regard to the latter, what it means to be human emerges in

the ontology of personhood. Zizioulus, the Eastern Orthodox patriarch, explains that personhood from the perspective of ekstasis refers to something or someone that transcended towards communion. It is a movement from the narrow wholeness of the self towards the other as whole making (Zizioulus 1975:408, cited in Micallef 2019:228). In terms of the former, Horan challenges the absolute uniqueness of the human being and their culmination of creation that has been the sole theological anthropology of the Catholic tradition. Horan (2019:138) pushes for a theological anthropology that rejects essentialism and depersonalisation for a relationality, dignity, and value-laden personhood.

Residents of urban areas are in a kind of relationship with each other and the environment in such a way that the people do not exploit each other or the environment for their selfish progress. Their relationship is of such a nature that each are created as good, and all creation is equal before God. The environment is not created for the domination, exploitation, or stewardship of persons. In contrast, the environment is created by God as God's own and should be nurtured and cared for by persons. Persons are created and called by God. The creation of persons is not separated from their vocation as carers of God creation.

The relationship of persons, other living beings, and the environment is not of a marginalisation, alienation, or domination kind. Relationships foster mutually enriching and reciprocal growth. Persons are not absolutely unique but through relationships engage in facilitation of differences for the maturation of all creation. Different skills, resources, gifts, talents, and abilities are drawn from all creation in an effort to care for creation, especially the displaced, marginalised, and deprived persons.

The specific ministry of care for the marginalised, sick, excluded, poor and exploited combined with the liturgical ministry of sacraments and proclamation can play a major role to affirm the all-inclusive creation of God. The deacon can present both the material and spiritual capital before God and the community for the benefit of all creation. The deacon holds the vision of mutual enrichment and reciprocal growth before God in the intercessory prayers.

Conclusion

We have engaged in a critical discussion with some of the primary sources of foremost South African scholars about theological perspectives of urban ministry and urbanisation. De Beer, Swart, Ribbens, Headley, and James make significant contributions to the discourse of urban ministry and their contributions included faith communities, theological education, the Bible, faith-based organisations and, more significantly, conceptualisations of urbanisation. These scholars represent some of the most up to date and innovative contributions in the discipline.

We have contributed by assessing the ministry of the deacon or the diaconate for effective urbanisation. The conceptualisation of the three interlinking terms of diaconal, deacon and diaconal ecclesiology points towards an intersectional movement of liturgy and social responsibility as found in the Early Church's notions of the ministry of the deacon. The Reformation and twentieth century notions of diaconia which is prominent in the ecumenical movement follows a similar line as that of the Early Church.

The final part of our contribution is to apply the ministry of the deacon as interlocuter to urbanisation and the effects it has on the community and their lived experience. The deacon as interlocuter is embedded in both the liturgy and social ministry. As interlocuter, the deacon adds a spiritual dimension to the urbanisation process. The deacon also connects different communities within a context of open-endedness. These two spaces of intersection transcend the narrow materialistic and profit orientation of liberal and neo-liberal urbanisation processes. The interlocuter challenges the displacement and marginalisation of local communities as a result of technocratic and bureaucratic development systems as exclusive and dislodging of social cohesive communities.

We also realise that our developing community-oriented model is in its infancy stage and does not engage the technical aspects of urbanisation in any detail. Our future research will analyse existing processes of urbanisation from the technical and technological and how the ministry of the deacon can constructively and critically contribute to the skills needed to engage urbanisation processes more broadly.

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Children in the Gospel of Luke

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the teachings and ministry of Jesus towards children in the Gospel according to Luke. This article will try to discover what the Gospel of Luke teaches about child theology. The research was done through exegesis and analysis of selected scriptures from the Gospel according to Luke about children and the teachings and ministry of Jesus towards children. Major commentaries, dictionaries and child-related books were used to develop this research. Previous studies on children and childhood have focused on the metaphoric expression of children in the Gospels. Children are considered as a means to teach adults about discipleship. However, this research has identified that children are part of the body of Christ and equally valued as adults. Thus, adults should know that welcoming children are welcoming Jesus and they should follow the teachings and ministry of Jesus towards children. This study has identified that Jesus is the friend of the outcast, such as children. The value of this article is theoretical, to add knowledge to the believing community about Jesus's teaching and ministry towards children. Practically, this article will present a guide based on the teachings of Jesus so that adults may welcome and serve children, considering them as part of the body who have equal value as the adults.

Introduction

This article focuses on the exegesis of texts related to children and childhood in the Gospel according to Luke. Thus, it will present an exposition of Jesus's interactions with children and his view of childhood as portrayed in the Gospel according to Luke. The objective of the article is to identify and formulate

perspectives from the Gospel of Luke about children and childhood, which can give insight into what believers' attitudes towards children ought to be. These perspectives can help the Christian community, parents and denominations to elevate the status of children in the life and ministry practices of their local churches.

The Gospel of Luke forms, with the Gospels according to Mark and Matthew, the Synoptic Gospels. These three gospels have much in common with each other (Muddiman and Barton 2010:134; Grobbelaar 2012:88). However, the Gospel according to Luke includes many episodes which are exclusive to it, such as the birth narratives of John and Jesus (Luke 1:5-2:52). The lengthy section (9:51-19:27) about Jesus'ss ministry in Galilee and on his way to Jerusalem covers ten chapters that make it in many ways different from the other gospels (Walvoord and Zuck 2000:np). Moreover, Jesus draws a lesson from the game children played (Luke 7:31-35) and also teaches his disciples that their disposition towards God is affirmed by the care given or not given to children (Luke 9:46-48; 18:15-17). Luke also emphasises the universal message of the Gospel more than the other gospels, focusing in this process on women and children and their faith (Knight 2005:4).

Although the presence of children among Jesus's followers is not recorded independently because of the low status of children in the social structure of that time, Luke's narrative reveals their persistent presence as part of the community who were following Jesus (Bunge 2001:44).

Jesus and Children

Luke mentioned Jesus in relation to children in the following passages:

- Jesus raised a widow's son from death (Luke 7:11-17);
- Jesus healed the 12-year-old daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue (Luke 8:41-42, 49-56);
- Jesus healed a boy with an evil spirit (Luke 9:37-43);
- Jesus refers to children in his teaching as illustrations of entering the kingdom of God and turns the service of children into a sign of greatness in the kingdom of God (Luke 9:46-48).

All of the above-mentioned narratives form part of Jesus's ministry in Galilee to indicate that children were included in the ministry of Jesus right from the beginning.

Jesus also welcomed the little children (Luke 18:15-17). This passage is the only interaction of Jesus with children that occurs in Jesus's journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:44), where he will suffer and finally be crucified. It seems that Jesus wanted his followers to keep in mind that they should keep on accepting the little ones, the children.

The researcher will attend to these texts in more detail in section 4.

The Terms 'Child' and 'Children' in Gospel According to Luke

Children and childhood are social concepts that may overlap and fluctuate in the mind and imaginations of people (Green 2013:111). Therefore, it is important to attend to the different terminologies Luke used regarding children. The terms 'child' and 'children' are mentioned in various parts of the Gospel of Luke to signify different things. The Greek terms used for a child in the Gospel according to Luke, are the following (Guthrie 1990:65; Zodhiates (ed) 1991:176; Barton 1992:100-103; Fortress 2005:1; McNeil 2005:1; Danker 2009:74; Utley 2011:272)

- brephe (βρέφη)
- paidion (παιδίον)
- pais (παις)
- tekna (τέκνα)

These concepts are explained in the following paragraphs.

Brephe (βρέφη)

The term *brephe* is mentioned eight times in the New Testament in which six of them are in Luke. In ancient Greek literature, *brephe* is used to describe both human and animal babies. (Schenker 2006:np; Allen 2016:71, 74) The term is used in Luke to refer to unborn babies and infants (Luke 1:41, 44) and an older infant in Luke 2:12, 16; and then again when people bring infants to Jesus so

he might touch them in Luke 18.15 (Zodhiates (ed) 1991:1698; Danker 2009:74; Utley 2011:272). *Brephe* is also defined as a newborn baby or a very small child, baby or infant (Vine 1985:np; Danker 2000:34). Luke probably uses *brephe* to stress the dependent condition of children.

Paidion (παιδίον)

Paidion refers to children from a very young age up to the age of seven years (Danker 2000:1411; Fortress 2005:1). The term *paidion* is used more often in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:59, 2:21, 40) than the other terms mentioned when referring to a newborn child (Schenker 2006:np; Green 2013:111). At the time when Jesus was teaching on prayer, he used parents and children *(paidia)* in his teaching as an object lesson (Luke 11:7). *Paidia* is also used for the demon-possessed boy who was freed by Jesus (Luke 9:38, 42), seeing him as a little child (Betsworth 2015:np).

Pais (παις)

Pais refers to a young person normally below the age of puberty although it is sometimes used to denote someone who is young, a servant and one's own immediate offspring (Danker 2000:1412; Schenker 2006:np). Hippocrates labels *pais* as the second stage of development just after *paidion* and therefore, applies it to children from seven to fourteen years old (Fortress 2005:1; Zodhiates 1991:1744; Vine 1985:np). *Pais* can also refer to a child age range from a newborn to the time of youth (Danker 2009:263; Betsworth 2015:np). Luke, when mentioning the boy Jesus, attending the Passover with his parents (Luke 2:41-51), used the Greek term *pais* because Jesus was 12 years old. Furthermore, Jairus's daughter (Luke 8:51, 54), a 12-year-old girl, is also referred to using the word *pais.*

Teknon / tekna (τέκνον / τεκνα)

Teknon refers to children in general, figuratively or literally, mostly interpreted as related to descent (Fortress 2005:1; Schenker 2006:np). In Luke 3:8 John the Baptist used the term children *(tekna)* to indicate genuine descendants of Abraham. Jesus used children *(tekna)* in his teaching in Luke 7:32 to refer to the generation of his time and in Luke 7:35 children *(tekna)* are described figuratively as followers of wisdom (Allen 2016:73, Vine 1985:np). Luke (2:48) also addressed Mary calling the child Jesus *tekna* (Zodhiates (ed) 1991:1761). In addition, Luke used *teknon* when speaking about Elizabeth and Zachariah,

mentioning that they had no child (Luke 1:7). *Tekna* is also used in Jesus's teaching on forsaking everything for the sake of the kingdom of God (Luke 14:26 and 18:29). When the Sadducees asked Jesus about marrying a brother's wife after his death without having a child in Luke 20:9, the term *tekna* is used.

All these Greek terms mentioned above, except *tekna,* are used in the Gospel of Luke to refer to non-adult children.

Interpretation of passages about children

This section will focus on the interpretation of different passages which mention children in the Gospel according to Luke. The literary context where the words child and children occur shows that Luke was concerned with the marginalised in society such as children, the poor and outcasts (Utley 2011:2; Moessner 2005:149).

The researcher will start to examine the first two chapters of the Gospel to discover what the infancy narratives about Jesus and John the Baptist, and Jesus as a 12-year-old in the temple disclose. Then the only son and daughter mentioned in Luke 8:40-56 and 9:37-43 will be examined. The passages on the child in the midst of the disciples stated in Luke 9:46-48 and the bringing of the children mentioned in Luke 18:15-17 will also be examined.

Although Luke does not mention children directly in every part of his book, the presence of children is evident throughout Jesus's adult ministry at homes of various people. Jesus's ministry at Simon's home (Luke 4:38-41), Martha and Mary's home (Luke 10:38-42), in Jesus's teaching about prayer (Luke 11:5-7), and the visit to Zacchaeus's home (19:1-10) are some of the passages that may imply the presence of children as part of the community. The researcher will not discuss these texts, but the view of the possible presence of children in these passages may be an important fact to take into consideration in trying to discern Luke and Jesus's views of children.

Luke 1 and 2

The first two chapters of Luke contain unique information about the birth of the Messiah and John the Baptist (Richards 2015:41). The birth of the two

babies and the joy that several individuals experienced are stated in this section (Luke 1:46-55, 68-79; 2:14; 29, 32).

The structure of the first two chapters of the gospel according to Luke is: Prologue (Luke 1:1-4); Annunciations of the two miraculous births (1:5-56); and the births of the two children (1:56-2:52). The prologue to Luke's gospel (Luke 1:1-4) deals with the importance of the events the author is describing and establishing a guide for his work. It also shows Luke's ability to gather information from other writers and his own investigation to transfer knowledge to others (Parsons et al. 2010, 1). Bovon (2002:1) and Parsons et al. (2010:16) state that Luke's reference to preceding writers and his own effort to gather the real story about Jesus, claim to be a narrative with a didactic purpose.

The rest (Luke 1:5–2:52) is organised into two sections focusing on John the Baptist and Jesus as children: the annunciations (Luke 1:5-56) and their births (Luke 1:56–2:52). Each part closes with a complementary episode: the visitation, (1:39-56), and the second part with the boy Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:41-52) (Parsons 2015: 39). This shows that there is a similarity of structure present in these two parts. Constable (2005:20) opined that this similar structure of the birth narratives of John the Baptist and Jesus enables comparison between the two boys. The similarity of the structure can be presented as follows: Introduction of the parents (Luke 1:5-7; 1:26-27); the appearance of an angel (Luke 1:8-23; 1:28-30); giving of a sign (Luke 1:18-20; 1:34-38); and pregnancy of a childless woman (Luke 1:24-25; 1:42).

The stories of the two miraculous births are marked with prophetic and angelic witnesses and the joy that several individuals expressed, including the joy of the unborn John who leaps at the coming of the pregnant Mary (Luke 1:41-44, 46-55, 2:14, 29-32). Children are used by God to accomplish His eternal purpose to save humanity. Utley (2011:5) confirms this idea saying that the arrival of John and Jesus shows a new beginning in salvation history and the fulfilment of God's promise to save humanity. That is why Jesus is mentioned as the promised Messiah in the words of Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:34-35). The prophecy of the angel Gabriel about John the Baptist and Jesus'ss life and ministry showed that children are important and that God has a plan for their

lives. The first mention of children in the Gospel of Luke is “no children” (Luke 1:7).

The Greek term used in connection with the conception and birth of the two miraculous births, John and Jesus, is *brephe*, a term used to refer to unborn babies and infants as indicated above. After the angel announced Mary’s conception, she went to Zachariah’s home to visit Elizabeth. At that moment, the child within Elizabeth leapt and then she shouted out in joy. The child is referred to with the Greek term *brephos* (1:41, 44). It also signifies an older infant (Luke 2:12, 16) and the infant John just after birth and at his circumcision (Luke 1:59, 66, 76, 80). In the announcement of Jesus’s birth to the shepherds, Luke again uses the word *brephos* (2:12.16). This shows that even infants who were not counted and considered as equal members of the community were accepted by the adults. They were also mentioned as a means of joy for the adults (Luke 1:58).

Unlike Matthew, Mark and John, Luke’s first section contains birth and infancy narratives. Luke mentioned children in his first section to emphasise the value of children. Allen (2016:343) affirms that although the Mediterranean context does not consider children important, Luke mentioned children in chapters 1 and 2 to show that God has fulfilled his promise to his people using children. Therefore, Luke’s focus on pregnancy and babies was to show that God is also concerned with the babies in the womb and after birth. Luke also wants to show that although both babies did not know anything about their future, God knows and speaks to their parents about their future and how he will use them. Jesus’s birth in a manger may represent children who are from poor families but are also considered as of equal value as any child from a socially high status.

In general, the narrative about the birth of the two babies seems to show that even babies are important to God and are welcomed by God.

Jesus at the age of twelve (Luke 2:41–51)

The story about the boy Jesus at the age of twelve attending the Passover with his parents in Jerusalem and visiting the Temple (Luke 2:41–51) is unique to Luke. Luke connects the childhood story of Jesus with a much older custom linked to the commandment to go up to the central holy place for the three

pilgrimage festivals (Exodus 23:14-17; 34:18-23 and Deuteronomy 16:1, 9-10, 16-17). Jesus and his parents travelled to the festival city as part of a procession of pilgrims, including children, journeying from their homes to Jerusalem. After the Passover festivities, while Mary and Joseph make their way back to their home in Nazareth, the 12-year-old Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. It seems that Luke mentioned it to disclose Jesus's insight, as a child, of his special relationship with God (Oden and Just 2003:53; Trites 2006:63).

Luke used *paidion* to describe Jesus as a little child under seven years (Luke 2:40) and *pais* as a 12-year-old child attending the Passover with his parents in Jerusalem (Schenker 2006:np). This shows that Jesus was part of the group that attended the festival (Luke 2:41). Jesus, in both periods, as *paidion and pais,* was revealed in the temple (Luke 2:41-51).

Luke's inclusion of the summaries in Luke 2:40 and 2:52 shows that Jesus's uncommon wisdom may display his divine qualities, which marked him as the fulfilment of Israel's hopes and the saviour of the world (Franklin 2001:145). This is the only incident from Jesus's boyhood that is described in the Bible.

Luke's emphasis in chapters 1 and 2 seems to be on Jesus's and John the Baptist's birth and their mission that shows children are a valuable part of the community. Moreover, they were present in the temple and among the adults who were observing the feast. Jesus's wisdom and his awareness are also mentioned to show that children were present in the public and religious sphere. Therefore, Jesus's reception by Anna and Simeon as an infant, and by the teachers and elders at the temple at age of twelve, invokes an expectation of general acceptance.

Luke 8:40-56

Luke 8 is divided into two major parts: teachings and miracles (Walvoord and Zuck 2000:np). It can be divided as follows:

- Jesus's teachings about various responses to his ministry – 8:1-21
- Jesus's ministry through a series of miracles – 8:22-56

Luke 8:40-56 narrates the stories of Jairus requesting healing for his daughter and a woman who has suffered from chronic bleeding and sought healing from

Jesus. Jesus was urgently called to heal the dying 12-year-old daughter (*pais*) of Jairus, a synagogue leader (Danker 2009:263). On his way to Jairus's home, Luke tells another story about a woman who had been suffering from bleeding for 12 years (Luke 8:43-49). Luke mentioned the age of the girl at the beginning to show the audience the connection between the girl and the woman (Garland 2011:371; Carroll 2012:198). The girl has been alive for as long as the woman has been ill (8:43). The 12-year-old daughter and the woman whose haemorrhage had proven incurable for 12 years were both desperate. The two connected through their common experience of sickness and social isolation (Kernaghan 2007:108). Jesus addresses the woman as 'daughter' (v 37) and the girl as 'my child' (v 53).

The desperate woman touched Jesus (8:45-46). Jesus was not annoyed about the woman's touch although she had made him unclean in the eyes of the law (Leviticus 15:25-30). As she touched the edge of his cloak, she was instantly healed. Reaching out to Jesus and touching his cloak was an act of faith (Ulrich 2001:40). Maybe she heard about all the miraculous healings Jesus did. She came with some expectation to Jesus. She trusted Jesus to heal her. And Jesus did. Luke inserted the story during Jesus's journey to Jairus's house to show Jesus's compassion for the lowly, the poor, the sick, and the marginalised people in the society (Garland 2011:371).

Then, while Jesus was still on his way to Jairus's house a person came from the house of Jairus and informed them that the child had died. Thus, there is no need for Jairus to bother the teacher anymore. However, Jesus, ignoring what they said, assured Jairus that it was not the end and continued his journey to Jairus's house. The 12-year-old Jewish girl was a young lady of marriageable age. However, she was apparently going to die just as she was about to begin another life. Although from a human viewpoint, there was no hope of healing the child, Jesus valued the child and went to heal her.

Seeking to save the desperate girl who was not able to approach him, calling her 'my child' and informing her family to give her something to eat shows Jesus's love and heart of compassion for her. Jesus has as much concern for the children as He has for the adults and He was also compelled to act out of compassion for her desperate father because she was his only daughter. With

this miracle, Luke indicated that children have a place equal to that of adults in the kingdom.

The other synoptic gospels similarly narrate this story. However, Matthew's account differs from Luke and Mark by omitting the instruction to her parents to give her something to eat. Mark has added the injunction 'not to tell anyone' (O'Grady 2007:71). Luke alone wrote that the girl was Jairus's only (Gr. *monogenes*) daughter (Luke 8:42). The use of 'only daughter' shows the daughter is the only hope of her father to maintain the family line (Philips 2005:141; Spencer 2019:229). Her loss would be painful to Jairus because he would have no offspring and she was already nearing the age at which she can give life to others.

Luke used the Greek term *'pais'* to refer to the 12-year-old girl to show that she is dependent on her parents and not able to help herself. And although the culture around does not count children as part of the covenant community, Jesus has visited and healed her (Edwards 2015:258). The girl was accepted by the messiah and included as part of his covenant community.

Luke 9:1-62

Luke 9 covers stories that are part of the third and fourth parts of the structure of the Gospel according to Luke. Luke 9:1-50 forms part of the third part in Luke's structure, Jesus's ministry in Galilee, focusing on the teaching of His disciples. In Luke 9:51 the fourth part of Luke's structure, Jesus's journey to Jerusalem, starts. Luke 9:1-50 includes two separate stories about children: the healing of the demon-possessed boy (Luke 9:37-43) and the child mentioned as the least in the story of Jesus's teaching about greatness (Luke 9:46-48).

Luke 9:37-43

Luke 9:37 states that a crowd was following Jesus. According to verse 38, a man called on Jesus to heal his son. Verse 39 describes the son as possessed by a demon. The man was desperate because the disciples could not help his son. They failed to cast the demon out of him. Therefore, he calls on Jesus to help his son. He is the father's only hope. His son's condition was extremely critical. This is emphasised by Luke stating in verse 42 that the boy was thrown to the ground, suffering convulsions when approaching Jesus.

In addition, the boy's father might have experienced much distress and lost hope after the disciples failed to cast the demons out of him. However, Jesus who always brings help and deliverance to suffering people, responded with concern and healed the boy and restored him to his father (Luke 9:42). Jesus's answer, focusing on describing the boy's symptoms that emphasise the severity of his case (Luke 9:39), shows his concern for the child.

The term used to refer to the demon-possessed boy who was freed by Jesus (Luke 9:38, 42) is *paidia* (Betsworth 2015:np). Thus, the child is under seven years old. This little child was recognised by God and restored to health by Jesus as a valued member of the community. The boy has been stigmatised by society. This stigma could arise from the clean and unclean issues of the Jewish community and the honour and shame culture of Roman antiquity (Allen 2016:192). However, Luke wants to indicate the boy's inclusion in his community after Jesus had liberated him from this stigma.

Luke did not identify the boy's condition as epilepsy, as Matthew did (Mt 17:15) because he probably wanted his readers to understand clearly that his convulsions resulted from demonic influence (Luke 9:42) and not mere sickness. Luke described the demon's action in the boy with the phrase "threw him to the ground" to show the severity of the case, which is not included in Matthew (17:15-16) and Mark (9:18). The conversation between Christ and the father of the boy about the boy's disorder mentioned by Matthew (Mt 17:14-20) is not mentioned in Luke (Gooding 2013:175). The necessity and possibility of faith stated by Mark (Mk 9:21-24) are also not mentioned by Luke. This suggests that Luke's concern was more on the severity of the case and Jesus's concern and action to heal the demon-possessed boy than on their conversation. Jesus was compassionate to the desperate boy and his hopeless father because the boy was his only son.

Only Luke records that the boy was his father's only son (Gk, *monogenēs*) and the father's appeal was based upon this fact (Luke 9:38). The "only son" here is a reality that reminds us of earlier accounts (Luke 7:12 and 8:42) of an only child. It emphasises that the son is the only hope of his father for offspring. If the son dies the family line will not be maintained (Green 1997:388; Edwards 2015:2). Only Luke states that when the boy was cured Christ gave the boy back to his father (Luke 9:42). This shows Jesus's concern and compassion

towards the child as well as to the father and his needs. Only Luke recorded the impact of Jesus's miracle on the crowds: "they were all amazed at the majesty of God" (Luke 9:43). Yes, the majesty of God was revealed in Jesus's concern for a little boy, a demon-possessed boy, stigmatised and excluded by the community, but included in Jesus's ministry (Phillips 2005:233). In this, Jesus again showed that his kingdom values differ from the values of the Jewish people and of the surrounding Mediterranean culture (Balla 2003, 102; Allen 2016, 343). Although children were not important in their world, Jesus demonstrates here how important all the children, even the stigmatised, are in his kingdom. With the healing of this boy, Jesus in essence challenged the traditional views of children in the first century Mediterranean world in a radical way (Grobbelaar 2012:19).

Luke 9:46-48

Luke 9:46-48 describes the narrative about the argument about 'who is the greatest' which arose among the disciples during Jesus's journey to Jerusalem. Evans and Porter (2000:158) suggested that perhaps the competition between the disciples was created due to the failure of the nine to cast out the demon (Luke 9:40) and the three who went on the mountain with Jesus (Luke 9:28). It seems that the disciples failed to understand Jesus's announcement about his death (Luke 9:44). Perhaps, they were captive to the societal norms of their day, in which one only gains status and power at the expense of another (Green 1997:388). Thus, they became more concerned with greatness in the sense of position and prestige for themselves (Luke 9:46).

This pericope must be interpreted in the light of the socio-cultural context of the first-century Mediterranean world where children and their concerns were marginalised in favour of the adult agenda (Balla 2003, 102; Rhodin 2011:16)). Garland (2011:404) and Allen (2016:100) affirm that in the first-century Mediterranean world children were treated as equal to slaves, subject to abuse, with very little status and protection under Jewish law. However, the text should be read based on what Jesus tried to communicate to his disciples, so that it may be clearly understood. The attitude of the disciples likely comes from the Jewish tradition. Carroll (2001:122-123) stated it as follows:

> Childhood in itself was regarded as a stage of immaturity, ignorance and deficient reason; therefore, education played a critical role in molding persons for adulthood. Evidently educational practices routinely employed severe discipline, both verbal and physical. Voices of moderation and restraint can also be heard. Plutarch advocated a balance between sharp rebuke and praise, and Quintilian goes even further, commending praise for good work and opposing harsh physical treatment as an educational practice. The place of children within early Judaism, as in the broader Hellenistic and Roman social worlds, is marked by ambiguity and ambivalence. As we would expect, the Christian scriptures also reflect these cultural patterns.

Jesus, knowing their inner thoughts, took a little child *(paidion*), had him stand by his side, and exhorts his disciples to welcome little children *(ta paidia)* (Spencer 2019:251). The word 'receive' (Luke 9:48) can be interpreted as welcoming and respecting the person and showing respect for the person (Green 1997:392). The phrase 'in my name' (Luke 9:48) means following my example. To receive 'in my name' may also mean to recognise the child's relationship with and identification through Jesus as a follower of Jesus (Parsons 2015:159).

Jesus identifies himself with children. The implication is that when children come to a person, it is Jesus and God that come into the life of that person (Spencer 2019:259). To ignore, not welcoming the child, is to ignore Jesus, to ignore God because accepting children is accepting Jesus and God the Father. In other words, the attitude they show towards children is the same as their attitude towards Jesus and the Father. France (2013: 172) affirms this view saying that "to welcome does not only mean to be nice to children but taking seriously and indeed giving priority to those whom one may be tempted to despise or ignore."

In the story, Jesus said: "whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me." And "for whoever is least among you all is the greatest" (Luke 9:48). These sayings are unique to Luke. Luke's message focuses on the attitude and action of Jesus in accepting, including children among the adults and respecting them (Parsons 2015:159). That is why Luke has omitted what

Matthew and Mark have stated about becoming like the child in behaviour. Hendriksen (2002:519) affirms that Luke's focus is on the attitude of Jesus towards children, which is different from Matthew and Mark who mentioned children as models to the adults.

Mark mentions the real child first and then moves directly to urge the disciples to welcome "one such child" (Mk 9:37). Similarly, Matthew focuses at first on the real child and then turns to use the child as a metaphoric example by exhorting the disciples to follow. But Luke makes the presence of the child as a real individual previously present among Jesus's disciples (Carroll 2012:225). This shows that Luke's emphasis is on Jesus's solidarity with the child, and the disciples were supposed to do the same.

Both Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus put a child among the disciples, while in Luke Jesus placed the child by his side. Luke's mentioning 'the child was by Jesus's side' is a demonstration of Jesus's friendship with the little child much more than in Matthew and Mark (Bailey 1995:63; Nolland 1993:570; Berryman 2009:14). For Luke, the child is there as one person among the adult followers of Jesus and an example of the least to the disciples (Parsons 2015:159). This shows that Jesus identifies himself with children, who are to be treated as Jesus's representative by the adults. In a broader sense Jesus meant that instead of seeking status for themselves, His disciples should give their attention to the needs of people who have no status, people like children. Because when the disciples minister to a child with no status, they visibly show that they welcome Jesus and God the Father into their lives (Carroll 2012:225).

In this section, Luke wants to show his readers that this child, and by extension all other children, are already understood to be a part of the Kingdom and that they are valued children of God. Contrary to the status of children in the first-century Mediterranean world, Jesus raised the status of children among his followers and showed equal respect and honour to them.

Luke 18:15-17

This section is presented as part of Jesus's journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:44) and focuses on the story that emphasises receiving the kingdom as a child (Luke 18:17).

In Luke 19:1-43, Luke mentioned the widow who was looking for justice (:1-8), the tax collector (:10-14), the child (:15-17), and the poor (:22) as examples of the little ones (Carson and Moo 2009, 221). Jesus, who would be mocked, insulted, flogged and finally killed (:32-33), and the blind man (:43) are also examples of the little ones. All of them are part of those who are not accepted by the Jewish community (Craddock 1990:212; Constable 2005:212). The story of the child is placed in between two stories of the little ones: the tax collector (Luke 18:10-14) and the poor (Luke 18:18-25). Luke expands 'receiving the kingdom as a child' (Luke 18:17) to include other outcasts such as the widow, the tax collector, the poor and the blind to show that Jesus is concerned about the little ones (Craddock 1990:212). By doing this Luke wants to teach his audience to accept children and those who are socially rejected, just as Jesus did to these babies.

The terms used for children in this passage are *brephos,* which means infants (KJV) or babies (NIV), and *paidion* for children under age seven (Fortress 2005:1; Danker 2009:74). Thus, the children here were under age seven, most probably even babies, whose social position were marginal in the first-century Graeco-Roman world (Carroll 2001:127). Although *brephe* refers to infants or little children, the most dependent state of human existence that requires their mothers' care, Jesus accepted or welcomed even the most vulnerable ones by saying "Let the little children *(brephe)* come to me …" (Luke 18:15-17). It seems that the *brephe* and *paidion* brought to Jesus shows that most probably infants and little children were among the crowd following Jesus (Jeffrey 2012:218). Moreover, Luke emphasised that even the infant *(brephe)* is welcomed and accepted by God and the term *brephe* seems to recall Jesus's infancy narrative (Luke 2:12, 16) which identifies him with babies and children.

The background to the story appears to be the practice of bringing children to the elders or scribes for a prayer of blessing upon them on the evening of the Day of Atonement (Marshall 1987:682; Bunge 2001:37; Hendriksen 2002:829). Children were brought, probably by their parents or close relative, so that Jesus might touch them for healing and blessing with the hope to protect them from evil and preserve their lives (Garland 2011:728). The attitude of the disciples towards children seems to be affected by the ancient Near Eastern view of children (Green 1997:392). Although Jesus warned the disciples not to reject children (9:48), they made the same mistake here. By rebuking and

sending the children away, the disciples did not understand what Jesus had taught them in the section discussed above. As a result, they did not want Jesus to be bothered by infants. However, Jesus ordered the disciples to allow the little ones to come to Him (Luke 18:16) and exhorts them not to hinder them for the kingdom of God belongs to the little ones (Morris 1992:291).

In the Graeco-Roman world, a man did not touch children, but Jesus did (Clark 2002: 239; Carroll 2008:182). Touch implies that Jesus would place his hands on the children and bless them, which is an action the apostles should imitate (Parsons 2015:267). Jesus taught his disciples to welcome children because welcoming children means welcoming God (Luke 9:46-48). God is coming into the disciples' life through children. If they do not receive, welcome, greet a child, they are not welcoming God in their life. In this passage Jesus models behaviour in the kingdom of God, which is to receive children who are the least in the society. The term "least" refers to the status of children in the eyes of the world: Children had no status in the surrounding culture (Garland 2011:404). However, Jesus urged the disciples to welcome children and to receive them as part of the community following Jesus, for they are the important ones in the kingdom of God.

The parallel passages in the other synoptic gospels are found in Matthew 19:13-15 and Mark 10:13-16. Luke seems to parallel the Marcan text more closely than Matthew. In relation to the story stated in Luke 18, all the synoptic gospels have similar ideas and much in common (Clark 2002:239):

- People wanted Jesus to touch children;
- The disciples tried to prevent them from coming to Jesus;
- Jesus exhorts the disciples to let children come to him;
- He compares receiving the kingdom to receiving a child;
- He allowed children in his presence or touched them. Jesus's touching of children is an act of welcoming or receiving, which the disciples were supposed to imitate because welcoming extended to children becomes a welcome extended to God.

The pronouncement about receiving the kingdom like a child in Luke 18:17 and Mark 10:15 is omitted by Matthew. Matthew mentioned the issue of causing

the little ones to sin (Matthew 18:5) which is not mentioned in either Mark or Luke.

Luke used the word 'infants' (*brephe*) in 18:15 for the children, whereas both Matthew and Mark have a different word for children (*paidia*) which is used for older children (Guthrie 1990:65; Zodhiates 1991:1761; Barton 1992:103). Luke uses *brephe* to stress the dependent condition of these children who were not considered as fully human and valuable in the ancient world (Constable 2005:211). Luke may also have used the word *brephe* to emphasise the contrast between Jesus's attitude towards children and the disregard for children in the ancient world, including Judaism (Kodell 1987:425; Utley 2011:272).

Blenkinsopp (1997:66-67) said that in the ancient world children were socially equal to slaves, with very few rights, not protected under many Jewish laws and subject to abuse. That is why Luke used the term "touch", while Matthew and Mark explained it in greater detail by expanding it to the following: "laying his hands on" and "praying" by Matthew, and "laying his hands on" and "blessing them" by Mark. It seems that Luke focuses on 'touch', which is directly related to his message that shows blessings, welcoming and showing love to children (Jeffrey 2012:218).

Summary of the Theological Meaning of the Passages

Luke mentions "child" and "children" many times to show that children are important and equally valued as the adults in God's kingdom. Luke's account of the celebration of John and Jesus's births, their infancies and circumcision, and Passover celebrations shows the welcoming and inclusion of children as part of the covenantal community (Luke 1 & 2). Jesus's presence in the temple and his discussion with the teachers (Luke 2:36) also show that children are an important part of the kingdom of God and the community at large.

Luke's message shows that the kingdom belongs to children, the little ones (Luke 18:16). Luke also described Jesus as the friend and defender of children who identified Himself with them by bringing them by his side, touching them, and healing them (Luke 9:42; 8:55), as a sign of welcoming them in his kingdom, regardless of their age (Luke 9:48; 18:15-17). Grassi (1992:904)

confirms that the Gospel of Luke could well be called the "Gospel of 'little children'" because it teaches us those infants are welcomed by Jesus and included as equals to adults in the kingdom of God.

Moreover, children in Luke are present as the least in the community and humility is seen through associating with the least in the society (Luke 9:48). To enter into the kingdom of God one must receive the child (the least) rather than oppose or hinder them from coming to Jesus (Luke 18:16-17). Welcoming children is taken as an outcome of following Jesus (Luke 9:48); thus, those who do not welcome children cannot claim that they are following Jesus. Jensen (2005:130) and Clark (2002:238) confirm that Jesus's teaching to his disciples affirms that welcoming children reflects one's disposition towards God because receiving children means receiving Jesus and the Father (Luke 9:48).

Therefore, as presented in Luke's interpretation, Jesus is a friend of children who assigns significance to children and cares for them as valuable beings, equal with adults. Berryman (2009:184) and Utley (2011:272) affirm that Jesus gives a prominent place to children, accepts them as valuable, and identifies them with the kingdom in his ministry and wants his followers to follow his attitude and actions regarding children.

In a broader sense, Luke's Gospel emphasises Jesus's love and care for those whom the Jewish leaders neglected and never even noticed such as children, women, widows and sinners. Thus, adults who accept the message of Jesus are instructed to be friends of children, to welcome them and care for them so they may honour Jesus. Darrell (1996:281) and Betsworth (2015:np) affirm that adults are directed to welcome children just as Jesus loved, protected, accepted, and respected them as equal to adults, despite their low status and powerlessness.

Luke's gospel presents the following patterns of the kingdom of God which followers of Jesus should follow so that they may honour God:

To welcome children - Luke 1 and 2; 9:47-50; 18:15-17;

To include children as part of Jesus's followers – Luke 9:48; 18:15-17;

To show love and give care for children, even to the infants – Luke 9:42; 55; 18:15-17;

To be humble and accept the least such as children, for the kingdom of God belongs to them – Luke 9:48; 18:16;

To accept that children are fully human and valuable and should be respected as equal to adults – Luke 9:48; 18:17;

To welcome and respect, in a broader sense, all the little ones, the outcasts and children in the society and the community of believers, as Jesus accepted them – Luke 9:48. Thus, failing to welcome children implies the rejection of Jesus and God.

To have a high view of children, as illustrated by Jesus, as God's representatives amongst us.

Guidelines for Practical Implications

The purpose of this article is to examine what Luke stated in his Gospel about Jesus's attitude towards and teachings regarding children. The outcome shows that Jesus has welcomed, loved and cured children just as He did to adults. He also taught his followers to do the same. Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest." (Luke 9:48) This shows that adults, as true followers of Jesus, are called to welcome children and include them in the kingdom of God. Bunge (2001:24) affirms that all parents, the church, and the state play a significant role in protecting, raising and educating children.

Therefore, adults should know their responsibilities and obligations towards children in welcoming them and respecting their emotions, as Luke has stated in his gospel about Jesus's attitude and teaching regarding children.

The following are guidelines for the church, parents, mentors and the believing community at large based on Jesus's attitude and teachings regarding children as identified in the Gospel according to Luke.

The Church

The Church has a responsibility to nurture and protect children. However, today the church has abdicated its role of caring for and protecting children (Greener and Oladipo 2013:70).

In Africa, the neglect and abuse of children are due to the harsh and negative attitude of adults towards children, as is confirmed in many African proverbs (Grobbelaar 2016, 87). Thus, the church should work to bring change in the attitude of adults towards children and protect them from all forms of abuse and exploitation (ACPF 2016: 3, 7) in conformity with the biblical standard as seen in the teaching and ministry of Jesus.

Traditionally, children have been largely ignored in most of the church's ministries (Greener and Oladipo 2013:128). We may say children are welcome and free to participate in the church but this is far removed from the practice in most of the churches (McConnel et al. 2007:243). Therefore, the church should know her responsibility to train and equip parents on how to nurture and lead children following the examples of parents in the Gospel of Luke who brought their children to Jesus, for blessings and seeking healing (Luke 8:41, 9:38–39, 18:15). The church should also select mentors who are gifted, mature and compassionate ministers who are willing to serve children and prepare them for effective ministry through training and developing good characteristics by following the model of Jesus. Moreover, the church should make an impact in the community including the government where children are not given proper care and protection because to welcome and love children may require to more directly challenge the violence affecting children and the social and political forces that marginalise them.

Parents

Parents are primarily responsible for nurturing and caring for their children, who are given to them by God for a reason (Brewster 2010:np). What parents teach or fail to teach their children in the privacy of their homes will someday have public consequences. As parents who were concerned about their children and brought them to Jesus for blessing and healing (Luke 8:54–56; 9:42; 18:15–16), today's parents should also give care and protection to their children regularly. In this way, children can be welcomed, protected, saved and nurtured in their spiritual life at home.

Luke also emphasised the inclusion of children, as part of their family, in the kingdom of God by describing the celebrations of the birth of Jesus and John the Baptist (Luke 1 and 2). Therefore, parents should nurture, protect and guide their children. Parents may tend to use physical punishment as a means to teach, guide and nurture children. However, parents are supposed to discipline their children properly in a humble spirit without humiliating and hurting them, for that makes them feel unloved and weird (Kostenberger 2010:104).

Mentors

Mentors play a vital role, next to parents, in the process of nurturing children. Children need well-trained mentors because they need much care, for mostly they are restless and easily hurt. Thus, mentors should equip themselves so that they may follow Jesus's attitude and teaching regarding children because teaching children includes patience, being sensitive, living an exemplary life in love and praying for them.

Moreover, mentors should also work creatively and cooperatively with parents and the church for the well-being of children.

The believing community

We are to love, help, and protect children who are the symbol of all who are weak, helpless and dependent. In doing so, we serve Him and His Father as well (Philips 2005:151). Every adult is directly or indirectly involved in a child's life whether parents, family, neighbourhoods, school or society (White 2008:11). The believing community's social life is where children should enjoy being members of God's family. Luke used the stories of children to remind his readers and all believing communities today of their responsibility to welcome the marginalised children into their midst through giving care and hospitability to them and identifying with them. In his interaction with children, Jesus taught his disciples a new way of viewing children in contrast to the surrounding Mediterranean cultures where adults had a very low view of children (Fortress 2005:18, 19; Allen 2016, 25).

Moreover, besides giving care and protection, adults must take care not to be stumbling blocks or obstacles for them. Jesus strictly rebuked those who let children stumble or hinder them from coming to Him (Luke 18:15-17). Thus, to

be a friend and defender of children, adults should follow the teaching, attitudes and practice of Jesus towards children and act accordingly. If adults learn to be humble and accept children as Jesus did (Luke 9:48) they glorify God and can create a welcoming world for children.

Strategies

To implement the guidelines stated above and influence adults to change the common views about children to be more in accordance with Jesus's view of children as expressed in the Gospel of Luke, possible strategies are necessary.

The key possible strategies are stated as follows:

Creating awareness

Speaking clearly and freely on behalf of children and families is one of the best means to create awareness. The church is the primary body responsible to acknowledge the theological importance of children and their rightful place as members of the believing community and beyond (McConnel et al. 2007:243). The church should also create awareness in the government and the community at large about their part in enhancing children's well-being and helping them to achieve a better life. This can be done, through training, discussions and workshops.

Teaching/Training

The church has the responsibility to equip parents, mentors and the believing community. This can be done through teachings on how to welcome, love, give care and protect children by following the example of Jesus, so that adults may change their attitude towards children. In teaching the believing community, ethical issues concerning children should be considered. The church should also teach children how to respect the authority of their parents and grow healthy as good citizens in their country and faithful ministers in the kingdom of God (Grobbelaar 2016:207).

Establishing and strengthening children's ministry

The church should accept that children are valuable, but also vulnerable. To help children feel welcome and included in the church's ministry, as part of the kingdom of God, the church has to establish a children's ministry. The local

churches that have already started children's ministries should also be strengthened so that children may be welcomed, nurtured and protected. The children's ministry may include Sunday school and children counselling.

Evangelism

Families are primarily responsible to evangelise, instruct and guide their children in the ways of the Lord (Stinson and Paul 2011:126). The church is also responsible to reach children with the good news of salvation. By rebuking those who prevent children from coming to Him (Luke 18:16), Jesus made it clear that his disciples and the church today, must work hard to bring children to Christ, so that they may be nurtured. Historically evangelical churches emphasised adult and youth evangelism, but the children have very often been neglected (Robin and Naomi 2011, 20). Thus, adults should prepare and work hard to evangelise children.

Children's worship programs

Children's worship is an important tool for welcoming children and nurturing their spiritual lives. It helps them to worship the Lord freely, to hear His Word, pray and serve Him, for they are not too young to begin working for Him now. Thus, the church should establish children's worship programs and a committee to run the program. There is also a need to minister to the adult members of the church through drama, music, testimony and sharing the Word of God. Thus, church leaders should encourage and help children to serve adults in providing them with such opportunities.

Developing teaching materials

The church should develop its own teaching material for children. Developing teaching materials should be one of the strategies to welcome children of all age groups and including them in ministry as part of the kingdom of God. Furthermore, the department should develop mentors' guides and training material. This can be done in cooperation with Bible schools or by forming a team that can develop teaching materials for children.

Including courses in the curriculum of Bible schools/ theological colleges

Bible schools must plan and work hard, to include child-related teachings, as one of the possible strategies to change the attitudes and practices of adults.

This can be done by offering child-related courses in their curriculum so that they may equip pastors and lay-ministers at diploma, undergraduate and graduate levels. Moreover, the church can also provide seminars, workshops and panel discussions on child-related matters by inviting instructors from Bible schools so that the believing community can be well-equipped.

Prayer

The New Testament church frequently interceded on behalf of various individuals, and the purpose was for Christian growth (Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:10-11), for effective pastors (2 Timothy 1:3-7) and effective mission work (Matthew 9:38; Ephesians 6:19-20). Similarly, church leaders need to establish a prayer group for children's ministry before they start anything. Even if the church already has a children's ministry, prayer is essential for the church to have God's guidance and provisions for the needed expenses for the ministry. Moreover, the church should encourage parents to pray for the well-being of their children

Conclusion

The status and place of children in the teaching and ministry of Jesus as expressed in the Gospel according to Luke were discussed thoroughly. Thus, in conclusion, some theological perspectives on children were formulated. From these formulated perspectives, it became clear that although children were considered as the least in the community, welcoming children, the ones of low status, is equated with welcoming Jesus and God. Moreover, children in Luke exemplify his emphasis on the gracious mercy of God toward the poor, the weak and the marginalised.

This article has identified, formulated and discussed recommendations for developing a new praxis with children. It was done with the belief that it would create an awareness of children and their needs in the church and beyond and would assist in starting to make changes in the community. Therefore, much attention was given to formulating guidelines and strategies to change both the thinking about and the praxis with children.

To sum up: The low view of children among adults may be addressed by accepting the high value of children expressed by Jesus. The study also

provides clear biblical perspectives on children and children's ministry useful to parents, mentors and the believing community at large. Thus, the study clearly indicates that children's ministries can be enhanced, if the believing community welcomes children by creating a loving and caring environment for them.

Finally, I believe that where the findings of this study are implemented, beneficial changes in the attitudes and views of the believing community towards children and childhood will take place.

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Improving church-parent-partnership in ministry to preschoolers in the Nigerian context

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Abstract

Many people see the spiritual nurturing of children and preschoolers as the responsibility of the church, but God gave the assignment to parents. The church is to serve as a help to parents in achieving their God-given responsibility. Both in homes and churches in Nigeria, there is inadvertent neglect of preschoolers in terms of the use of substandard means of care and other areas. Families and churches need to improve in hygiene, provision of space, water, snacks, teacher-child ratio, parent-teacher meetings and guidelines for the care of preschoolers. In this paper, the authors focus on this important but less emphasised assignment of the synergy of parents and the church regarding the spiritual development of preschoolers as they weave together findings from library research and both physical and virtual focus groups to achieve this feat.

Introduction

For many years in Christendom, especially in Nigeria, the church has taken over the responsibility of spiritual nurture and the upbringing of children from their families. This is an aberration because God's commands to teach and nurture children are given to parents. Both in the Old and New Testaments, the command is given to parents and the immediate family to teach, nurture, impact, impress God's love and his ways on children (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:4-9; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). God's commands state, "Teach them to your children and their children after them" (Deuteronomy 4: 9c) and in Deuteronomy 6:4-7:

> Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them in your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Parents have a mandate to first know, love, revere and obey God and then to pass this on to their children – to be taught and caught through the way they live and relate with God every day, all the time. The *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) and other passages on spiritual and all-around nurturing of children are domiciled in the home. Logically and socially speaking also, the home is the first place of socialisation, growth, spiritual experience and all life experiences. It is thus out of order for the church to try to take on the spiritual assignment of nurturing preschoolers and to 'do her own thing' while parents and the family 'do their own thing'. Since the responsibility for spiritual nurture is given *first* to the biological family as led by the parents, the family of faith should play her role of equipping parents for their divine assignment instead of taking the responsibility off parents.

For effective ministry to preschoolers, there ought to be a partnership between the parents (home) and the church. While many churches have picked up tremendously in recent years in the care of children and teenagers, preschoolers have not received sufficient attention. Preschoolers are created in God's image, they are God's heritage and also part of the world Jesus came to save. It is expedient that they are trained in the Way of the Lord. This paper addresses the neglect of preschoolers by parents and the Church, and the roles parents and the Church have to play, each with their own responsibility in improving the ministry to preschoolers.

Methodology and respondents

This research combined library research, observation and the use of both face to face and online focus groups. Churches represented in focus groups are 22 in all. They represent churches that are well established with many years of existence to show for it, churches that have been recently organised, churches that have an established long-standing ministry to children and churches that

are up and coming, established from the year 2000 on. One church is in Ekiti State, one in the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), two in Lagos State, two in Osun State and thirteen in Oyo State. The larger number in Oyo State (13 churches) are in Ogbomoso where the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary – the oldest degree-granting institution in West Africa – is domiciled. Ogbomoso has more Baptist churches than many other towns and is often referred to as the 'Jerusalem of the Baptists' in Nigeria. It has a good blend of churches that are closer to traditional society, those that are town-like churches and a few mega-churches as found in some larger cities. Like Ado-Ekiti, which is the capital of Ekiti State, Ibadan is the capital of Oyo State and three churches among the represented churches in the focus groups are located in Ibadan. While the numbers may seem small, it is clear to the writers, one of whom has served as Director of Christian Education of the Nigerian Baptist Convention and thus, travelled to most states in Nigeria, observed and interacted with their children's ministries, that the feedback is quite representative of ministry to preschoolers in the Nigerian Baptist Convention as at 2020.

The churches that respondents in focus groups reported on are: First Baptist Church, Ado Ekiti in Ekiti State, Faith Baptist Church, First Baptist Church, Adegbayi, Polytechnic Baptist Church, Apete all in Ibadan, Peace Baptist Church, Oluponna/Iwo, Bowen University Chapel, Iwo, both in Osun State, Christ Baptist Church, Gbagada, and the Agape Community Baptist Church, Surulere, both in Lagos, First Baptist Church, Garki-Abuja, Antioch Baptist Church, Ayegun Baptist Church, AyoOluwa Baptist Church, High School Area, Grace Baptist Church, Ibukun-Oluwa Baptist Church, Ife Pipe Baptist Church, Olodanbon Baptist Church, Owode Baptist Church, Peniel Baptist Church, Baby Area, Smith International Baptist Academy Chapel, Riverside Baptist Church, Igbo Agbonyin, Taraa Baptist Church, and Victory Baptist Church, Isale General - all in Ogbomoso. The respondents consisted of students in the Faculty of Education, The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso at Bachelors, Master of Divinity and Post Graduate levels, graduates from the same Faculty serving in various areas of the educational ministry of the church and church members involved in Children's ministry in their respective churches. All respondents had undergone some level of training which exposed them to ideals and principles in children's ministry and therefore they were able to

objectively report on ministry to preschoolers in the church bodies they represented.

Positioning

The neglect

The neglect of preschoolers is not new. In New Testament days, parents brought their (little) children to Jesus to pray for them and lay his hands on them to bless them. His well-meaning disciples felt their Master needed rest and did not need the noise and dirt of these small creatures. Jesus however showed they were as important as the adults who were around Him. Jesus said, “Let little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” Mathew 19:14. This was Jesus’s response to those who were debarring children and their parents from getting to Him. “With those words, and his subsequent actions, Jesus Christ elevated early childhood to a position of respect and importance” (Wilson 1991:222). Jesus placed a high value on children and meeting their needs as we see in His reaction when asked to help a child, ways He interacted with children, and things He said about them. For instance, Hall states that He ‘interrupted ministry’ to attend to Jairus’s daughter (1980:23), although the ministry to Jairus’s daughter should not be seen as an interruption but rather part of Jesus’s ministry itself.

In terms of education and early child care, several writers have expressed concern about the state of neglect where preschoolers are concerned. Gwang-Jo Kim and Mami Umayahara (2010) researched early child care services in Asia–Pacific. Their purpose in research was to assess the extent of achieving the Asia-Pacific region’s first goal of Education for All, “expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children” and marginalised groups as well as the under-threes. They discovered that particularly, South Asia, has the world’s highest proportion of children aged five and under, suffering from stunting. The challenge still exists in 2020. The church needs to rise to this need to help parents in their God-given assignment of rearing preschoolers as “the first two years of life (and we say beyond that) dare not be neglected or slighted in the church program” (Wilson 1986:84).

Sometimes the neglect of preschoolers is not outright abandonment, but the use of substandard, hurriedly thrown together shoddy and poorly prepared materials, methods and facilities to reach them. Joellen Lewsader and James Elicker researched various unlicensed child care facilities in the State of Indiana, United States of America and realised the number of such facilities is growing and have a greater tendency to not treat preschoolers well (2015:67):

> There are no unified child care quality standards across the 50 states, nor even within a single state. Currently, all of the states license most child care centers, yet there are still multiple types of licensing exemptions for programs, ranging from church-sponsored centers, to half-day preschool programs, to government-run centers, to those operated by a university or college.

Lewsader and Elicker are not alone in this concern and not only the USA has this problem. Even where there are rules and regulations in Nigeria such as the Oyo State Ministry of Education's benchmark (2010), the availability of such and its upholding is questionable. Where the church is concerned, these writers are not aware of any regulatory bodies checking what is provided in terms of child care in the Nigerian church, let alone concerning the care of preschoolers. While the average pastor may fast and pray, study the Bible and commentaries to prepare for preaching to adults, many a preschool worker in church (and at home) just makes sure there are snacks and sometimes toys for the preschoolers and they feel that everything is fine. This observation was confirmed in the focus groups held both face to face and virtually. Almost all churches had some form of physical provisions for their children, but not all knew how to handle the care of children professionally.

Neglect of preschoolers extends outside the four walls of the church. Writing on the high cost of neglect, Blackwell (1983:113) states,

> Many times as workers with children we tend to concentrate on the children already in our Bible teaching setting and become complacent about our responsibilities for those outside this setting. We glibly say that we are reaching most of our

possibilities when actually the number of children (preschoolers) to be reached grows every year.

Christians have a responsibility to reach both preschoolers who are brought to church and those who are not in church because their parents have not yet found faith in Christ. By reaching parents and teaching them to raise their preschoolers to a life of faith by providing a Christ-centred, Godly environment, the church will do a better job of fulfilling the Great Commission.

The Nigerian Context

Nigeria is a multicultural nation with over 520 living dialects[37]. As the nation is blessed in terms of natural resources, likewise she is endowed with multicultural experiences and creative people. The Nigerian context is a blend of the traditional, the colonial, post-colonial and current. Sometimes it seems the lines of demarcation are fine but at other times, it is quite difficult to draw the demarcation between the past and present in terms of the Nigerian context. Certainly, the past impinges on the present and the future. However, with the world becoming a global village, with the influences of other cultures and traditions, at some points, it is a bit difficult to categorise some practices as being truly exclusively 'Nigerian'.

Every Nigerian culture has an avalanche of good things to draw from as well as things to get rid of from the Christian perspective. In all Nigerian cultures, though in varying shades depending on whether they are single or multiple births,[38] male or female, children are considered a blessing. The place of preschoolers in the Nigerian context is very similar to Hall's description of preschoolers in the Jewish context (1980:22-23):

[37] Seven dialects in Nigeria are reportedly extinct out of 527

[38] For instance, while in Yoruba land, multiple births - beginning with twins and on to triplets, quadruplets and so on were seen as a major blessing, for the people of Calabar, until Mary Slessor stopped the killing of twins, the belief was different. In some Nigerian societies while females could inherit, serve as regents and take on other leadership positions, in others, they were totally relegated to the background. Likewise, the social class a baby was born into determined whether the parents would celebrate with pomp and pageantry or hide the 'blessing' of the baby lest it spelt doom for them.

> Children were important in Jewish societies – owing from the name they were given which were meaningful and showed joy of parents, circumstances of birth or prayer for the quality of life the child was to live; they were protected, had better quality of life than some other societies at the time but the society was not child-centred… The Bible speaks frequently of the obligation of parents to love and provide for children, but nothing about the "rights" of children to expect or demand things.

In many Nigerian cultures, babies are also given names to show their importance, circumstances surrounding their birth, prayers and prophecies parents and family have in mind for the infant. In Nigerian traditional society also, it was more of privileges than 'rights' where children are concerned. Preschoolers were more seen than heard, yet they were to be properly cared for as dependent members of society. There are many proverbs about the role of the elderly in caring for the very young such as '*Agba kii wa loja kori omo tuntun wo*' literally meaning that, with the presence of elders in the market when a baby is mounted on the back, the baby's head will not be allowed to become unstable at the back of the one carrying the baby. The elderly in society would always ensure infants were properly cared for by mothers and other caregivers.

Another such proverb is that one person gives birth to the child but the whole village raises the child. Child care in Nigerian traditional society was communal and not individualistic. All adults are responsible to teach the young child the values of society and correct the child when they err. "In many Nigerian ethnic groups, the education of children is a community responsibility. For example, in the Igbo culture, the training of children is the work of both men and women, within the family and outside it… It is not strange to see a man disciplining a child who is not his own" (Embassy of The People's Republic of China in The Federal Republic of Nigeria 2015).

In the traditional Nigerian society, the way to ensure compliance to social, spiritual and other norms was to instil fear. This has continued to date where some adults feel it is acceptable to tell lies to a preschooler to ensure compliance – lies that are rooted in fear such as a masquerade coming to pick

the child, police around the corner to catch them and at times even medical personnel and ministers of the gospel are among the 'terrorists' used to instil fear of punishment in the unruly preschooler or to catch the disobedient. Obedience is therefore often based more on fear than on love.

Preschoolers were not expected in traditional society to work for pay but once they could understand simple commands, they were given household chores and they were expected to join parents and family on the family farm or in the family business. Infants were subtly derided in songs (lullabies) used to pacify them for just eating and having round tummies but not working.

Abemu mi, ko ro'ko,
Abemu mi, ko r'odo.
Bo ba ji, a gb'obe kanna;
a jeba tan a s'ekun rogodo;
Omo oloro to n je'yin awo…

(Meaning: My dear Abemu (the baby) neither goes to the farm or the river to assist others. She only sleeps, warms stew/soup, eats and has a round tummy. She enjoys the riches of the land/parents, eating the egg of guinea fowls'). Both in the traditional society and currently, Nigerian children are taught to do chores and to work (Embassy of The People's Republic of China in The Federal Republic of Nigeria 2015):

> As children, many Nigerians learn that laziness is not acceptable; everyone is expected to contribute. When children reach the age of about four or five, they often are expected to start performing a share of the household duties… These tasks help the children learn how to become productive members of their family and community.

In current Nigerian society also, preschoolers are taught generally to assist with sales where parents are traders, to do household chores like fetching water, sweeping, picking refuse/litter and so on. The assumption in the Nigerian context is that the preschooler does not know anything and has to be taught all that society expects of them. They are seen as a blank slate who needs to have the right values written on them to become the civil person

society expects them to become. The Nigerian traditional milieu puts the responsibility on the shoulder of the immediate family assisted by the whole village or society. The ill-mannered child is a disgrace to the whole village but first and foremost an indication of lack of home training from the compound to which the child belongs.

The Need

As a result of ignorance, many parents, families and churches are not properly playing their roles in the care of preschoolers. They assume all that preschoolers need are the lower needs in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs – food, clothing, shelter and safety. They forget that these are just basic needs and demotivators, not the motivators the average human being needs to produce maximally – as Maslow advocates. Every human being needs these basic things and more. Meanwhile, even these basic needs which seem to be met leave much to be desired. Only two of the twenty-two churches have provision for separate mats or mattresses for children to sleep on and beddings are not changed immediately after a child uses them before using them for another child. Potable water as provided for preschoolers in some instances are from questionable sources if put under the microscope of academic and World Health Organisation standards. Toys are hardly disinfected but used week after week. Shared space is more common than space set apart for preschoolers, the ratio of caregivers to preschoolers leaves much to be desired. These basic things are not yet in shape and so, it is difficult to emphasise the lacuna where higher needs are concerned. There is the need to begin from lower needs and improve on the ministry to preschoolers.

While Maslow's hierarchy provides a great springboard, it is not sufficient as it does not address the whole *imago Dei* – the image of God in man. The search for God and His will and love is innate and needs to be provided for. Many parents, families and the church fail in providing this for preschoolers because they do not understand the needs and the peculiarities of these children. Meanwhile, everyone involved in Christian ministry from the home front to the church needs a constant reminder that 'the ministry is to people' (Wilson 1991:219). It is the task of Christian educators to orientate parents and the church to rise to their duties as touching the preschoolers in their care.

Preschoolers

Preschool years are the early years in the life of a child from birth to age five or six. During this period, internationally, children are expected *not* to have begun primary (elementary) school and as such, belong to preschool age. The preschool years are the early years of life and thus, also referred to as early childhood. Children within this age range are referred to as preschoolers.

Preschoolers are further divided into infants, toddlers and beginners. The term 'infant' is used to refer to a child during the first twelve months of their lives (Wilson 1986:84) while 'toddler' describes the child who is thirteen to twenty-four months of age (89). The name comes from the child's attempt to walk, which is not yet steady as the child toddles. Three-year-olds are often referred to along with two-year-olds as twos and threes while older preschoolers (beginners) are children between four and six years of age. Each of the categories has its peculiarities and these must be understood by parents and caregivers if their needs would be properly met.

While there are general characteristics for each group of preschoolers, parents and the church must remember that each child has their unique characteristics as well. There is something different and unique about each child as God has taken time to knit each of them as individuals in their mother's womb. No two human beings are exactly alike. As David rightly observed and sang in Psalm 139:14-15, humans are not mass-produced but each is intricately woven by the tender hands of the loving heavenly Father. However, characteristics that cut across the various stages of life and growth process of preschoolers and theories of psychologists help understand preschoolers better.

Psychology on preschoolers

In his research on children's cognitive development, Jean Piaget identified four sequential stages through which every individual progresses in cognitive development and the first two stages address preschoolers. Piaget's sensorimotor stage begins at birth and lasts till the child is about two years old, thus spanning infancy and toddlerhood. Children's thinking at this stage involves seeing, hearing, moving, touching, tasting and so on. The stage marks a transitional stage from a biological to a psychological being.

Writing on Erikson's stages of Psychosocial development, McLeod (2018) states,

> If the care the infant receives is consistent, predictable and reliable, they will develop a sense of trust which will carry with them to other relationships, and they will be able to feel secure even when threatened… If the care has been inconsistent, unpredictable and unreliable, then the infant may develop a sense of mistrust, suspicion, and anxiety. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of hope… Failing to acquire the virtue of hope will lead to the development of fear.

Gene Getz & Wallace Getz (1986), citing Christian psychologist James R. Dolby, also state that during the first year, the child learns whether the world is cruel or comfortable, they learn that they are a separate entity apart from the world of stimuli outside them. This year is the foundation on which all personality rests. They quickly explain that in coming to Christ, Christ changes people and things, but the impact of the first year of life is still strong in the individual. The early years of life are crucial because those are the years when children learn to decide whether the world is wicked or kind. As Psychologist Erik Erikson (McLeod 2018) noted in the first and second of his eight stages of psychosocial development; preschoolers learn through their experiences with adults whether to trust or mistrust and how to be autonomous or live in shame and doubt:

> Autonomy versus shame and doubt is the second stage of Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. This stage occurs between the ages of 18 months to approximately 3 years. According to Erikson, children at this stage are focused on developing a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence…
>
> If children in this stage are encouraged and supported in their increased independence, they become more confident and secure in their own ability to survive in the world. If children are criticized, overly controlled, or not given the opportunity to assert themselves, they begin to feel inadequate in their ability

to survive, and may then become overly dependent upon others, lack self-esteem, and feel a sense of shame or doubt in their abilities.

Parents and church workers need to be guided to help preschoolers develop autonomy instead of shame and doubt.

Parents and the church: current ministry and improving in ministry to preschoolers

The improvement of the ministry to preschoolers is first and foremost the responsibility of parents, but the church is not to fold her arms either. "Christian education is a two-way street. The home needs the church, but also it is true that the church needs the home" (Getz and Getz 1986:589-590). Both need to work together more than ever before to ensure that ministry to preschoolers improves and thrives by making the home the starting point, providing the needs of preschoolers regularly and promptly, being inclusive of preschoolers in church plans, programmes and provisions and many other things as explained below.

Start from the Home

Preschoolers can learn about God's love and this must start from home. Charity still begins at home. All adults and especially parents need to realize that preschoolers are not too young to have spiritual experiences. "Parents have a significant, irreplaceable role in nurturing their children in the things of God" (Getz and Getz 1986:588). This irreplaceable role as foundation layers and trailblazers must be consciously fulfilled. Parents should monitor all aspects of their children's development. As parents make provision for preschoolers' physical wellbeing, they should also pay attention to their spiritual development (Choun and Lawson 1993). "God's Word must be in the head and heart of the preschooler for it to be useful in their hand" (Ayo-Obiremi 2016:119).

Parents set the Pace

In Deuteronomy 6:5-6, Moses instructed parents to love God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their strength and impress God's

commandment upon their children, talking about them at home, along the road, when they lie down and when they get up. As such, parents need more than head knowledge about the Bible. Effective teaching in the home must involve more than a period of instruction and the Word of God must permeate the total atmosphere of the home (Getz and Getz 1986). Beyond knowing and quoting scripture, parents must be good examples of Christian truth and virtue and make use of every opportunity to teach their children in the way of the Lord.

Regular Care

The spiritual development of preschoolers begins with good physical care by parents and caregivers in church. Since preschoolers learn best through their senses and the care they receive, it behoves parents and the church to give them the best care possible. It is through lovingly meeting the physical needs of infants that parents and the church minister to them (Wilson 1986:89). Nigerian parents and caregivers must not see their care of preschoolers as mere routine. They should see it as a service to God. They should hum, "speak in simple short sentences", sing "simple songs and rhymes, soothing tunes" There is no need for 'baby talk' or for songs that subtly or outrightly rebuke the infant for not working. Rather, they should sing songs of reassurance of God's love and the love they have for the infant. Care for preschoolers must be regular and predictable, as observed in line with Erikson's discovery. Caregivers must not withhold food, drink or care from preschoolers on any grounds lest they teach them to mistrust. The old wives' myths that paying attention to a crying infant or carrying them when they cry will make them possessive, greedy and clingy must not be adhered to.

With regards to Erikson's second stage of autonomy versus shame and guilt, many parents and churches in Nigeria have a lot to learn to be better caregivers to preschoolers. Often, parents and caregivers are in a hurry, deny preschoolers their freedom, punish them and do not allow preschoolers to exercise their autonomy when they refuse to 'cooperate' with adults as expected (McLeod 2018):

> For example, rather than put on a child's clothes, a supportive parent should have the patience to allow the child to try until they succeed or ask for assistance. So, … parents need to

> encourage the child to become more independent while at the same time protecting the child so that constant failure is avoided.
>
> Erikson states it is critical that parents allow their children to explore the limits of their abilities within an encouraging environment which is tolerant of failure. A delicate balance is required from the parent. They must try not to do everything for the child, but if the child fails at a particular task they must not criticize the child for failures and accidents… The aim has to be "self-control without a loss of self-esteem"

Parents and caregivers need to remember the foregoing, particularly when preparing for church, social functions, during toilet training and other developmental tasks of the preschooler.

Appropriate Lessons

Current day Nigeria seems to have an invisible force pushing parents and establishments to rush the lives of the children. Babies are rushed off to school, toddlers rushed to run and not just walk and especially schools rush the educational steps so they can boast of the youngest, most brilliant products. As soon as children can speak, they are taught ABC and 123. When muscle skills are not yet developed, they are rushed to hold tiny pencils and write. Parents tend to see it as a pride that their 3-year-old is writing. There are lots of dangers in rushing children through early childhood.

Unfortunately, the rush carries over into spiritual matters also. Rather than introducing them to spiritual exercises beyond their age, preschoolers should be provided with a rich, warm, loving and captivating environment that is supportive of their learning priorities and pacing. In addition to Piaget's submission on cognitive development, Rudolf Steiner in his Waldorf method for early childhood advocates that a child should not be taught intellectually until the intellect has matured at the onset of puberty (Ogletree 1997:48). These writers are not against teaching spiritual values and concepts, but rather advocate that such should be done at the age level of the target learners. Preschoolers should be shown love and taught concrete things that relate to faith in the simplest language they can understand.

Church Provisions for Preschoolers

The church is not only an opportunity for adults to experience the love of God but also an opportunity for children to grow in the love of Christ. The church needs to provide properly for preschoolers in terms of environment/space, equipment, potable water, healthy snacks, programmes/opportunities, trained workers, parent-worker/teacher meetings, and so on. A church that wants to take after the "New Testament church in every regard must care about and provide for even the youngest individual who comes through its door" (Wilson 1991:221).

Provision of Proper Environment and Space

In terms of meeting the physical needs of the preschoolers, it was discovered, during this research, that all of the churches studied have some sort of provision on the ground. While two churches have up to two separate rooms for preschoolers, eight have physical space for preschoolers alone. Most of the others have a space they share with other children and two others have plans for the future. Both parents at home and caregivers in churches should provide free space for preschoolers as research has shown that preschoolers need space and that they learn a lot through their environment. The Ministry of Education of Oyo State, Nigeria must have also realised the need for adequate space as they have a benchmark of a minimum of 7m x 4m x 3m as classroom size and 9m x 15m space for a playground, recreational facilities and future expansion for the establishment of nursery schools (Oyo State Government Ministry of Education 2010:7-8). Since young children require more space in which to grow and learn than adults, their needs must become a priority for the church (Choun and Lawson 1993:300).

Wilson (1986:89) rightly observes,

> The church wanting to minister to parents as well as infants must do its utmost to provide clean, responsible, efficient, friendly, and loving service to infants and their parents. Such a church is making an investment in lives. No other investment has such rewarding or eternal dividends!

Not only infants but all preschoolers are ministered to when the environment is clean and friendly and they are treated with love and acceptance as they should be. Beginning with the surroundings, a preschooler can tell if they are welcome. Rudolf Steiner, a renowned early childhood philosopher propounded the Waldorf method and in it, he educated readers that infants and young children are entirely given over to their physical surroundings. They absorb the world primarily through their senses and respond in the most active mode of knowing i.e., imitation (Barnes 1991:52). The top priority in a preschool programme and the church setting should be to provide a healthy, loving family environment. This will reinforce the young child's sense of trust and independence, recognise the child's needs for self-awareness, confidence, self-expression and self-appreciation (Flanagan 1991:127).

Writing on Early Childhood Centres making the most of indoor space for children's wellbeing and physical activity, Ole Johan Sando (2019) corroborates the need for clean space: "Physical environments supportive of physical active play are beneficial and … dominating the indoor space with tables should be avoided" (506). Where preschoolers have free space to play, they tend to feel freer, safer and tend to be more at home. Preschoolers are better ministered to when given space for free play and creative interaction.

When the environment is right, preschoolers will feel free to learn using their senses and exploring, for children have the innate creative ability to learn, and given the right environment they will learn. Adults at home and church need to provide the right emotional and physical environment and learn how to handle the preschooler with care. Maria Montessori "Italian physician, educator, philosopher, humanitarian & devout Catholic … best known for her philosophy and the Montessori method of education of children from birth to adolescence" (Chacko 2009:78), states that "Yet the child, like all other human beings, has a personality of his own. He carries within him the beauty and dignity of the creative spirit… so that his soul which is pure and very sensitive requires our most delicate care. Man does not live by bread alone even in his infancy" (79).

Blackwell contributed to this discussion many years before Chacko. She lends her voice to the role of the adult concerning a well-prepared environment. "A preschooler who is allowed and encouraged to use his senses, muscles and

imagination to explore the world around him has a basis for sound teaching experiences. . . . He responds when he is encouraged to explore, to do, and be gently led into areas that are unknown to him so that his learning may expand. Adults who touch his life should always be in the role of an encourager rather than one who stifles" (1983:75). In addition to the lack of space provision in some cases, in many more cases, many a Nigerian parent and church caregiver do not allow preschoolers to explore because they see it as too much stress for them. They want 'peace and quiet' and so, use electronic media and various types of screens to keep preschoolers occupied. There is a danger of raising children addicted to the screen. Using the screen as a babysitter (nanny) and caregiver must stop.

Provision of water

The provision of water was discovered to be as varied as the churches studied. Seventy per cent of the churches were discovered to provide water fetched from a generally agreed-upon local source – a borehole, a tap or general source of 'potable' water. While this is commendable and in line with the Oyo State government benchmark of tap, borehole or deep well (2010:9) as sources of potable water, there is a need to go a step further both in homes and in the church to treat water for preschoolers by filtering it through local means like using new clean handkerchiefs as one of the churches was reported to do, boiling the water, using a factory-made filter or buying water that is certified potable like about five of the other churches were said to do. In some churches, the water is truly potable but all children share cups. For such cases, even if in the homes, utensils are shared as part of Nigerian communal life; the fact that the preschoolers are from different families must be taken into consideration. More so, some diseases are spread through sharing cups, cutlery and other items for food and drink. Post-COVID-19, internationally, care must be taken not to share utensils that can lead to the spreading of germs.

Two of the churches studied have taken care of this challenge by having dispensers and disposable cups. This may be a bit expensive for lower-income earning areas though. Another way out is to have plastic or any other type of unbreakable, (possibly stackable) cups for the children and to provide potable water in a keg or a bucket that has a tap so preschoolers can operate it on their

own. An open bucket or drum for everyone to dip their cups in is not hygienic either. Where cups are provided generally, the preschool/children workers should label the cups with masking tape and help preschoolers learn to read their respective names or the first key letters of their names so they can pick their cup from a tray or container without mistaking it for another preschooler's cup. Three churches were found to have each child bring their own water bottles from home. These were mainly churches in academic campuses and big cities. Where this option is adopted, the church will need to have some extra water provision for visitors and preschoolers whose caregivers forget theirs at home. These are just some ways of dealing with the health hazards involved where drinking water is concerned. Parents and churches should creatively deal with the problem.

Provision of Snacks

The provision of snacks by churches studied is commendable. Every church had some form of provision of snacks. While about sixty per cent of the churches provide the snacks from the church purse, others have a roster. In one church on the university campus, the children's workers contribute money to buy snacks, while for others, in addition, parents who have just had a baby, are celebrating a birth date in the family or some other occasion supply biscuits and drinks for preschoolers. Other churches depend solely on celebrants, donors or lovers of children while in four churches, children were reported to bring their own snacks. Sales of snacks to preschoolers served the dual role of a financial business for the Woman's Missionary Union and provision of snacks for the children in two churches while in another church, it was an individual who brought snacks for sale.

Our recommendations are: The provision of snacks should continue but rather than wait for someone to have a celebration, there should be a clear plan for snacks for preschoolers as some of the churches already have, but with the added dimension of deliberately planning for healthy snacks – not the cheapest, most available but a sacrificially well-planned affordable healthy snack time for children both during church programmes and in cases where there is a church school. While it is good that the preschoolers are remembered, giving a child biscuits and carbonated drinks merely to keep them quiet and pacified as some do is the beginning of teaching wrong

priorities in life and may become a foundation for impulse eating when upset – and even for obesity. Preschoolers require healthy balanced meals that help their growth.

Caution should be taken where snacks are sold lest the financial benefits override the care for the preschoolers. Churches should be careful lest the business opportunity beclouds their vision from proper care of their preschoolers. Rather than encourage a feeling of social stratification of those who can afford snacks and those who cannot, our attitude should be, in the words of Lim (2017:31):

> Those of us who are wealthier should be challenged to give more in terms of higher percentage to the poor, compared to those who are poorer, so that everyone in the family has a fair share of resources. In this family, all barriers that serve to divide us—the social-economic, geographical and ethnic boundaries—are removed through Paul's economic principles.

This is the true picture of the expectation from a New Testament church.

Budgetary Provisions

It is observed that many churches do not have a special budget for preschoolers. This needs to change. Whether as a separate budgetary item or as a sub-item under the provision for children, preschoolers' particular needs have to be budgeted for. Preschoolers' care must go beyond the provision of snacks and carbonated drinks. The church must remember that preschoolers' learning should happen in a variety of ways – visual, verbal, active involvement, media techniques, and so on – not just listening to a teacher. They must be well equipped to enhance their learning. Church members can also be involved in raising funds to equip preschoolers' places of worship. Preschoolers' physical needs, materials for teaching them, training of their caregivers and workers among them, parent-caregiver meetings, parents training and other things need to be properly provided for.

Provision of materials

All of the churches studied had some kind of provision of materials for preschoolers. While some had pictures that stayed on the walls perpetually, others had them well stowed away where teachers could get needed ones for use. Two of the churches did not have any provision for toys. One church has the children bring their toys from home and take them back while the remaining nineteen churches have toys for preschoolers. This shows the provision of toys and teaching materials is not unacceptable. However, the toys are sufficient in some places but inadequate in others. For improvement in this area, parents and workers should provide toys for preschoolers in keeping with their age, developmental growth, spiritual relevance and the locality. Play is the number one business of the child and directed play should be a priority. Parents and churches should ensure toys are sanitised regularly and are in good shape so as not to injure preschoolers. Teaching aids should also be varied and not the same ones used all the time. They should match the lesson on each occasion. Preschoolers should not be taught by rote.

While only three churches have separate toilet provisions for preschoolers, another three have toilets only children use but others do not. One church had their preschoolers urinate right outside the room and when the wind blew later, it blew the stench of urine inside. Churches need to provide more hygienic toileting facilities for preschoolers. While the benchmark of separate toilets for male and female children at a ratio of one toilet to ten preschoolers and one toilet to five teachers (Oyo State Government Ministry of Education 2010) may seem a tall order, churches should attempt to improve by providing more hygienic toilet facilities.

Sleep Provisions

Many churches in the study that had provision for sleep for children had a general provision. While the big general mat or mattress is the Nigerian style, parents and church caregivers need to learn and get used to 'separate sleeping and resting, even for siblings, (because it) reduces the spread of disease from one child to another' (American Academy of Pediatrics 2012):

> Although children freely interact and can contaminate each other while awake, reducing the transmission of infectious disease agents on large airborne droplets during sleep periods will reduce the dose of such agents to which the child is exposed overall…
>
> Because respiratory infections are transmitted by large droplets of respiratory secretions, a minimum distance of three feet should be maintained between cots, cribs, sleeping bags, beds, mats, or pads used for resting or sleeping… If the room used for sleeping cannot accommodate three feet of spacing between children, it is recommended for caregivers/teachers to space children as far as possible from one another and/or alternate children head to feet…
>
> From time to time, children drool, spit up, or spread other body fluids on their sleeping surfaces. Using cleanable, waterproof, nonabsorbent rest equipment enables the staff to wash and sanitize the sleeping surfaces.

None of the respondents was aware of the detailed safety precautions described above. Parents and church caregivers need to be educated on the need to separate sleeping preschoolers – even twins! The recent global experience with COVID 19 makes this all the more important. Where individual cots, mats, mattresses and beddings cannot be afforded, parents can be saddled with the responsibility of providing mats/mattresses (and beddings) for their children to use in church, to be taken home regularly for washing/cleaning according to specification and the church can provide for visitors and new children. This will raise the standard of hygiene in Nigerian churches.

Provision of Trained Workers

The training of workers who work with preschoolers is very important. Matters raised in the foregoing and other matters need to be properly taught and imbibed by workers with preschoolers. They need to understand preschoolers, how they learn, standards of how to care for them, the ideal look and atmosphere of physical and emotional environments, what curriculum to use

and how to apply it; methods and materials for ministry to preschoolers, among other things. The Baptist denomination has multiple opportunities for training children's workers at Church, Association, Conference, Regional and Convention levels. The dimension that needs to be added is a greater emphasis on details on how to minister to preschoolers and the synergy expected between the home and the church.

Besides the need for appropriately trained workers, the ratio of workers to preschoolers is a very crucial area to examine. From the research done in the churches, while one church has no standard children's ministry, only seven church informants could provide the ratios as follow: one teacher to four preschoolers (3 churches), one teacher to five preschoolers (2 churches), one to six preschoolers and one teacher to 15 preschoolers respectively. On a different note; due to the many teachers in the chapel where students in the higher institution take care of the preschoolers, they have more teachers than others, and so serve on a roster basis. None of the other respondents knew the exact number of preschoolers among the children in the churches they represented but gave ratios of one to five, one to six, one to seven, one to fifteen, one to twenty and so on as the ratio of children's workers to the total number of children. The fact that there are teachers and other helpers is commendable. Those who have a ratio of one to four or one to five are also commendable.

However, there is the tendency to reduce adequate care when the ratio of preschoolers to teachers and caregivers is too high. Though writing on preschool centres, the submission by Schachner et al. (2016) is still apt:

> Appropriate teacher-child ratios are one of the main aspects of a high-quality early childhood program. Studies show that lower class sizes and smaller teacher-child ratios may improve child outcomes, help reduce behavior problems, lower rates of special education placements, reduce teacher stress, and improve the teacher's experience.

Just as in preschool centres, so it is for the church setting. The problem of an inadequate number of teachers/workers per preschooler is not limited to Nigeria or the church setting. One of the main findings in the 2019 North

American Child Care Benchmark Report is that 57% of respondents have less staff employed than they need (Himama 2019). Lewsader and Elicker (2015) also discovered inadequate staffing in unlicensed early childhood facilities. The widespread and international nature of the problem does not however absolve the church of the need to improve on what she has.

Schachner et al. (2016) explain that the teacher-child ratio depends on class size. Thus, the first step is to determine the class size. Churches need to know how many children they have on role in the preschool section. Not all churches have an attendance register. It is important to have records that include names, ages, parents' names, phone numbers, physical address, allergies, feeding patterns, and other necessary details that will help in the care of preschoolers. There should be adequate knowledge of the number of preschoolers in each group. There should be a regular check of who is present to follow up on their growth, relate with families and follow up on absentees. The number on the role also helps determine the teacher-preschooler ratio that is ideal.

The ratio given by Oyo State Government for nursery schools is one caregiver to ten pupils and ideally not more than thirty pupils in a class (2010:9). Furthermore, the ratio for preschool centres and home care centres as given by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) can serve as a reliable guide. For those beginning at preschool centres, i.e., children from birth to three years, the suggested ratio is one teacher to four children. For three-year-olds, the recommended class size is not to exceed 17 and the suggested number of teachers is no less than two while for ages four and five, the suggested ratio is a maximum of 20 children in a class with no less than four adult caregivers – two teachers and two helpers. That gives a ratio of one to five.

For family childcare, the recommendation of NAEYC as cited by Schachner et al. (2016) is one child care provider to 4 toddlers and infants with no more than 2 of them under the age of 18 months and one child care provider to a maximum group size of 6 children with no more than 2 children under the age of two. These numbers are inclusive of the children of the caregiver within the age range if they are also around. Here, many child care services and church provisions for preschoolers leave much to be desired. Parents, caregivers and

church workers need to be educated on these ratios and deliberate attempts need to be employed to see to it that they are adhered to.

Open Church Doors

Any time the church doors are open, preschoolers must not be left out. Part of laying a good spiritual foundation for children is to allow them to have opportunities to worship with the adults (Chromey 1991:174). Children (including preschoolers) should be involved in both being ministered to and using their talents and gifts to bless the body of Christ. Some churches destroy the beauty of *koinonia* or fellowship by not allowing children to speak, touch musical instruments or participate in any part of church life (Ayo-Obiremi 2016:120). This is wrong, for, as young as they are, the voice of the preschoolers should also be heard in the church. There should be regular opportunities for intergenerational worship with the adults where they see adults model worship and they are also involved. Programmes like Sunday School, Bible Study, Holiday Bible School, discipleship lifestyle, missions emphasis, social events, picnics, retreats, revivals, night vigils and so on must be planned in such a way that there is either a preschooler's section or the preschooler is adequately provided for in the programme planned for adult and youth members of the church.

Special Church Provision for Preschoolers

Other ministry opportunities purposefully for preschoolers include prenatal ministry, cradle roll ministry, after school care ministry and mother's day out. Prenatal ministry is a ministry to unborn babies through their parents. A prenatal ministry can develop a bond between young parents and the church (Ashcraft 1991:111). As the expectant mother is being ministered to, the unborn child is indirectly being ministered to as well.

Cradle roll ministry is ministry to families with infants and toddlers. The cradle roll ministry goes into homes and also makes provision at the church for the care of infants and toddlers (Wilson 1991:231). The after-school care ministry aims to provide quality care for children after school, especially for children of parents who work outside the home and may not come back from work by the time the school closes. Parents in the workforce often require care for their

preschool-aged children and before and after school care for their school-age youngsters (Choun and Lawson 1993:251). Mothers' day out is a day set aside to give mothers with preschoolers free time and rest time while preschoolers are being lovingly cared for by the church for free or at an affordable token fee.

The alert local church can do much to support and aid parents in their role of child training by providing training for parents on how to rear their children, providing the home with a programme of Christian education that supplements and supports parents in their task of nurture and by providing a programme of Christian education that incorporates biblical principles of child nurture. Furthermore, churches can provide husband and wife teams who can function like parents to the preschoolers as children should have experiences that are like a close-knit family and not be lost in the crowd (Getz and Getz 1986:588).

Where the church has provisions as stated above, parents should cooperate with teachers and children's workers in all areas, including discipline. Parents should encourage their children to be part of a Christian education programme by taking them to church for programmes on time, talking about the importance of church programmes, encouraging children to prepare for church meetings and lessons, encouraging Bible reading and scripture memorization. They should also encourage the workers who minister to children, among other things.

Parent-Church Caregiver Meetings

In working together to care for and minister to pre-schoolers, parents and church workers need to have times when they meet. From the research done in the focus group discussions, only one church had formal parent-teacher meetings and it was held only twice in a particular year and annually thereafter for a short time. It was not sustained after the children's pastor left for another church. Others have informal discussions with parents – one on one – but mostly when there is a challenge or something that needs to be corrected in the preschooler's life rather than a regular communication of the content of learning, how to understand and care for the preschooler and such matters.

Though her book was published in 1958 and focused on the kindergarten as a church-school plan Dillard (1958:132-141) has useful information on the church and parents working together. The 'teachers' in the church need to prayerfully plan and think through the kinds of meetings that can help parents understand their preschoolers better and the methods to employ for each meeting. Options include lectures, discussion, films, observation, and individual conferences, among others. Such meetings need to be publicized ahead of time, parents carried along, and they need to be made worth the time parents and church workers invest in it. There should be specific discussions to help parents improve on the care of their preschoolers and some of the things discussed above may be included.

Conclusion

There is no better time to take the teaching of God to children (and especially preschoolers) more seriously than at this time of the life and existence of the world, nation, church and family. Ministry to preschoolers is a divine assignment given to parents and the home which has to be done in partnership with the church. Parents and the church should work together to lovingly provide for preschoolers physically, emotionally and spiritually by providing for their cognitive, physical, spiritual and all-round development. Parents should constantly remember that the care of their preschoolers is their divine assignment and the church should remember she is Christ's body who should equip, strengthen and support parents in this assignment.

Beyond physical provisions of food, shelter and safety, preschoolers should be given an enabling emotional environment both at home and in the church where they are safe to express their feelings with adults to guide them. They need to be trained by parents and church workers to be the social beings that God made them – sharing toys and utensils in love, yet recognising individual differences and the need for healthcare. While some Nigerian cultural values and practices are okay for the care of preschoolers, others need to be re-examined in the light of scripture, educational exposure and health principles.

There is a need to improve on care for and ministry to preschoolers in terms of the understanding that the command is to parents originally, in terms of the provision of adequate healthy food and water, an appropriate ratio of

caregivers to preschoolers, toilet facilities, sleeping provisions that are healthy, age-appropriate teaching and in many other areas. Each home and each church need to evaluate their current situation and improve on ministry to their preschoolers – beginning with the parents and being supported by the church. Christian educators should help parents and the church understand their respective roles, train them, have meetings with them and provide the needed curriculum, materials and methods that will help them. Churches, through their Education Ministry, need to agree on a benchmark for preschool ministry so all preschoolers will benefit from quality care. When all work together, the goal of Christian education in respect to ministering to preschoolers will improve and the family and church could be said to have obeyed Christ's instruction to let the little children come.

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"Lived religion" in youth ministry: a pragmatic reflection from Nigeria

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Abstract

Lived religion is a reflection on the influence of religion on how people live their daily lives in the community, school, society, and other religious and social institutions. This paper investigates the practice of lived religion within the Nigeria youth ministry. Praxis entails what people do daily, oriented and guided by action, and not just theoretical knowledge or the dogma of a religious tradition or rituals. In investigating the youth ministry praxis in Africa (with a focus on the Nigerian context), this paper engages with Gregg and Scholefield, and Osmer's pragmatic theological task, because the framework is action guided, thus investigates what youth ministry is actually doing among African youth.

Introduction

Compared to dogmatic religion, lived religion is a multidimensional religious practice that creates a multi-religious society and a community with different forms of religious praxis. Harvey (2013:192), Ammerman (2007:229) and Pace (2007:37) note that lived religion can be studied and lived as a practice of religion that invites the religious cross-fertilisation of different religious traditions. Gregg and Scholefield's exploration of lived religion shows that lived religion can also be studied as a contemporary religious syncretism – the

synchrony of religious worldviews to give a common understanding (Gregg & Scholefield 2015:2). In this regard, Beyers (2010:2), and Gregg and Scholefield (2015:13) contend that lived religion can also be considered as comparative or interreligious dialogue/theology. Gregg and Scholefield (2015:7), Pace (2007:37), and Beyers (2010:8) argue that a religious organisation or affiliation can be investigated using the lens of lived religion to understand the religion. This paper seeks to investigate how Christian youth ministry is viewed through the lens of lived religion in the everydayness of Nigerian youth.

The crux of this paper is to argue for lived religion as an overriding praxis in church youth ministry. Roeland and Ganzevoort (2014:91, 93) situate, and we infer: praxis is the domain of lived religion. Entailing that, praxis is primarily concerned with what people do rather than focusing on theological dogma of religious institutions.

Although not undermining the cogent significance of theological dogma and doctrine for youth ministry in Africa, and especially in Nigeria, this paper argues for an action-guided and pro-activeness in youth ministry that touches the practical, everydayness of the young people in Nigeria.

In the current context of a pluralised religious society in which religious traditions and organisations are seeking followers and attempting to be understood by the non-adherent sphere of the populace, the actions of the followers inform the populace's view of what each religious tradition and organisation believes. This speaks to the methodologies of how the theology of Christian youth ministry should touch the everyday life of religious believers and followers. Among the four methodologies proposed to invite the praxis of action-guided Christian ministries are operant theology, espoused theology, normative theology, and formal theology. According to Cameron et al (2010:16) "operant theology" is the theology that is seen in the practical lives of people before it is formally reflected on. This implies that the action carried out by religious followers define the essence of their religion. Max Weber (1958:181), who was a renowned sociologist in the early twentieth century, argues that a religious organisation can lose its religious and ethical meaning if the followers of that religion exhibit what he calls "mundane passion". According to Weber (1958:181) it means that the mundaneness of passion is exhibited when the religious-spiritual values of religious followers do not

transcend the theoretical ideology. In contemporary parlance a religion is viewed to be mundane if the followers who claim allegiance to such a religion do not practically walk (and work) the talk.

In response to Weber, Ammerman (2007:4) argues that, for religious traditions not to be viewed as mundane in the twenty-first century, religion will have to be an everyday practice in people's lives, just like "science, capitalism, politics are pervasive and powerful in the everyday lives of ever-expanding layers of the world's population. Christian youth ministry will be viewed as significant or insignificant to the youth depending on how the practice of its everydayness is felt and experienced by the youth. If youth ministry is merely theoretical, then the chances are that it will become a religious tradition that is not meaningful to the everyday needs of the Nigerian youth.

In their reasoning on why religious traditions and organisations in the Christian faith (like Christian youth ministry) should not be merely theoretical and dogmatic, Gregg and Scholefield (2015:14) note that, "for centuries, theological discourse and dogma dominated approaches, and of course this is still important, but in recent times, lived religion gets more credence to people than reported or represented religion". The lived religion of religious institutions and organisations should be practically lived in everyday life and be meaningful to people.

Christian youth ministry in Nigeria and Africa is not a mere theoretical youth organisation, but a Christian organisation that infiltrates the everyday lives of the youth. Weber (2015:1) argued that youth ministry in Africa has been for decades of positive influence in the life of young people through different Para-church organizations. Additionally, youth ministry, as we have experienced it and in which we have been involved in Nigeria for over a decade, initiates practical measures of influencing the youth through approach like caretaking, and discipleship as an integral fibre of its praxis (Chiroma 2015:73). That is, youth ministry care likes offering students scholarship to further their studies and connects them with older people in society to source jobs for the youth, especially because unemployment is a major problem among Nigerian youth (Osakwe 2013:4).

Youth ministry in Abuja[39], Nigeria is a paradigm of caregiving as an approach in action-guided youth ministry. The caregiving of the Christian lived religion is a practice that endears youth ministry to the general populace of Nigerian youth. Care in ministry is fundamental as a field of practice that invites a variety of actors (Roeland and Ganzevoort 2014:94). In Nigeria, youth ministry are active actors in administering care as a practice in ministry to young people. Elucidating the argument by Roeland and Ganzevoort, Ononogbu and Chiroma (2018:49) add that youth ministry in Nigeria must move beyond programs to embrace care-giving that will empower young people to live out their faith in all facets of their lives.

Theoretical and theological framework

The theoretical framework for this article is as argued by Gregg and Scholefield 2015:14). Arguing for a framework in understanding lived religion, they note that:

> For centuries, theological discourse and dogma dominated approaches, and of course this is still important, but in recent times, lived religion of religion get more credence to people than reported or represented religion.

The point is that religion of religious institutions and organisations should not be merely theoretical but practically lived-in everyday life, and thus provide existential meaning to people. To explicate a framework for lived religion, Gregg and Scholefield (2015:1) penned an experience of their first year undergraduate Religious Studies student notes that, "it is most important to have an understanding of religion through the eyes of its followers- it helps us learn why they follow a particular tradition, and they live their lives"

The theological framework for this article is as promoted by Richard R. Osmer. Osmer (2008: iv) offers a practical approach in engaging religion. This pragmatic task focuses on the development of action-guiding models and rules of art (open-ended guidelines about how to carry out some form of Christian praxis) (Osmer 2005; 2008). The pragmatic task involves determining action-

[39] Abuja is the Federal Capital City (FCT) of Nigeria.

guided strategies that will influence situations in ways that are desirable and entering into reflective conversation with "talk back" emerging when the strategies are enacted. This implies that in the pragmatic task, the religious practitioner needs to be skilful in appropriating strategies that are effective to the everydayness of the community. Beyond preaching, teaching and administrative skills, the practitioner also needs to take into cognisance the congregational system and relational context.

In this article, lived religion is understood as an action-guided, performed, and experienced religion that is lived out by individuals who practice the religion. That is, the practitioners, communities, and religious organization speak volumes through their actions as to how the religion will be viewed and understood.

Youth-centric ministry in Africa

Africa has more people aged younger than 20 than anywhere else in the world, and the continent's population is set to double to two billion by 2050. With about 200 million people aged between 15 and 24, Africa can be said to have the youngest population in the world. Nigeria, as an African country, is estimated to have a population of 400 million persons by 2050, of which the larger populace will be youth. This reality is set to provide both challenges and opportunities for the church and youth ministries in Africa (The Economist: 2020, IASYM, 2015: 2012). For Felix Kariba[40], the African population in 2055 will be 1.4b. Of this population, 60% will be young people under the age of 25 (2020). In the Nigerian context, the total population of the country stands at a staggering 170 million. According to Salami (2011:28), youth between the ages of 18 and 35 years make up more than half of the Nigerian populace.

These staggering statistics give rise to the question: to what extent will religion as lived out through youth ministry appeal to African youth if the lens through which to view religion is praxis? By praxis here it means a combination of action and reflection that moves one to action. To this, Osmer (2008: iv) argues for

[40] Felix Kariba is an African Urban Development resource person with City Compliance. He is resourced in research around population growth and urban (and rural) development in Africa countries.

the pragmatic task that is action guided. This article argues for the lived religion of caregiving, as epitomised in Jesus' practical earthly ministry for salvific purposes.

Jackson (2016:37) cautions that this projected populace is most likely to appreciate religion through the care-giving practice of religious youth ministry followers (disciples), rather than through indoctrination with religious dogma. Thus, discipleship is crucial in the sustainability of youth ministry that administers care to young people (Nel 2017:2). Andrew root (2020:28) shares the experience of caregiving in youth ministry in his article, "Youth ministry isn't about fun", when he narrated the care for a young person who was hospitalized, and how that informs his argument that youth ministry isn't for fun alone. Youth ministry transcends fun and offers care to young people. This is why youth ministry in Africa must take seriously the need to impact or influence the everyday lives of the youth. The reason for this is that the youth, at this estimated population demography, are actors in the Church, in society and in their social world of influence.

What constitutes the reality of religion in the lives of young people in Abuja, Nigeria is not the profession of statements or allegiance to rules and regulations; rather, what constitutes religion to people is the practice of care followed by the followers of or subscribers to that religion (Ammerman 2007:v). According to Bandura (1975:5), young people learn best through modelling, hence young people best embrace religious practice when they see them put into action by trusted adults. This means that religion is understood by young people on the basis of the everyday lives of the followers, and not just the institutionalisation of the denomination (churches or worship centres) or religious beliefs, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Taoism, to mention but a few.

Religion in Africa

An African understanding of religion is multi-dimensional because African scholars share different opinions on the constituents of religion but agree that religion is an integral part of the lives of Africans. According to Beyers (2010:1), Opoku (1993:79), and Turaki (1999:124), Africans understand religion as both transcendent and earthly. Religion as transcendence denotes that religion

gives allegiance to a supreme [G/g]od, who is understood by the followers to be the source of life and whose wish, desire and regulations inform the traditions and rituals performed by those religious followers. Religion as earthly practice and way of life brings to bear that it is human beings who glean from the source of life (transcendence) to practise religion; it is human beings who practise and experience religion. Thus, the traditions and rituals revealed by the transcendent being are meaningful only if the followers practise them. Religion therefore is an everyday experience in the lives of traditional Africans.

Another salient understanding of religion in Beyers' (2010:7) proposition is that "religion is an effort by humans to search for meaning, to understand reality and place themselves in a relationship with reality". This suggests that, for an African, religion should be practical and real, tangible, and practicable leading to abundant life. This makes lived religion a potentially viable aspect of any religion in Africa. Beyer (2010:7) elucidates further that, "from an African perspective, religion emphasises the human effort to systematise, in society, the continuation of a religious experience relevant to a specific context". In Africa, religion is fundamentally experiential rather than theoretical or explained dogmatically. In this sense, the people of Africa patronise any religion whose followers act out their values and beliefs. If Christian youth ministry is going to be relevant to religious and non-religious people in Africa, it must proactively live out, on a daily basis, its beliefs, and convictions. However, an emphasis on beliefs and convictions can be argumentative and sometimes dangerous to society because of religious extremist groups like Boko Haram and ISIS, which live according to their religious beliefs and convictions.

The following paragraphs discuss three ways of religious formulation, as propounded by Gregg and Scholefield (2015:7).

Formulating lived religion

Gregg and Scholefield (2015:7) articulate three ways of formulating religion. Religion can be reported, it can be represented, and it can be lived.

Reported religion

Over decades and centuries, reported religion has formed and shaped the understanding of religious traditions and arguments. Gregg and Scholefield (2015:7) argue that reported religion has been the basis and standard of religious traditions for a long time throughout history. I could not agree more with Gregg and Scholefield (2015:7) that reported religion has been the basis for understanding religion, except that reported religion could not have been the standard for understanding every religion. The reason for this is that the sources of reported religion are religious textbooks, Holy Scriptures, commentaries on religion, and articles in magazines. These sources can be a basis for understanding a religion because they document the dogma, and traditions of the religion. Sources of religious standards are the supreme and superlative documents that the religion upholds. For the Christian religion it is the Bible, for the Muslim religion it is the Quran, for Judaism it is the Torah.

Reported religion is oral and passed down from one generation sometimes. It is the traditions that are merely inscribed in the written word. These written words are not harmful or painful since a religious follower is not living them out or practising them. They are just written codes of religious chauvinism or dogma. These written codes can be interpreted and explained by the followers to suit individual or corporate interests as represented by religion, thus necessitating moving beyond the written codes into practice. To this end, Gregg and Scholefield (2015:8) caution, and we infer, that, although there is a need for religious followers to go beyond the understanding of religion as provided in textbooks, and in the case of Christianity, the Holy Bible, this does not imply the negation of religious textbooks, because religious textbooks contain the historical, contextual dogmatism of that religion.

Represented religion

Represented religion is the way and manner in which religious followers present their religious tradition. This presentation is done through talking, book publications, evangelistic outreaches, preaching and sermonising, sharing religious tracts and newsletters, and oratory speeches. It connotes that represented religion is how the followers of a particular religion present the articles of faith of their religious institutions.

Religious followers present their religion as part of their own identity through documented and oral media. Gregg and Scholefield (2015:9) argue that represented religion shows how individual religious followers project their sense of identity. This entails that religious followers find their identity in their documented religious traditions and rituals. They derive identity from their representation of their religion.

Speaking of representing the identity of religious affiliation and institutions through different means, Nigerian youth are inclined to represent their religious identity in various ways. Adetiba (2014:32) argues that Nigerian youth have what he calls a *spirit of religion* He explains spirit of religion as being extremely overwhelmed with religious representation. This means that Nigerian youth show their religious identity (especially denominational affiliation) through labels and stickers on doors, offices, and cars, through their haircuts, the way they dress and their vocabulary, to mention a few. This could be the reason why Africans are represented as religious people, although the same cannot be said about their religious actions and everyday practices.

Lived religion

Lived religion is the aspect of any religion that is action guided, real and part of daily practice. Gregg and Scholefield (2015:7) argue that lived religion is beyond the reported and represented aspects of any religion because it entails practically helping and aiding people who need tangible influence. Harvey (2013:192) adds that lived religion comprises the actions undertaken by the religious followers of any religion. Therefore, lived religions are the practice of living out traditions that are reported and represented in religious narratives.

In another, related development, all three forms of religion are interrelated; lived religion is not in exclusivity as religious action. The lived religion of religious followers is reported in the dogma of that particular religion. The reported dogma in a religious book or document is represented in the lives of the religious followers. This happens as the religious followers live out, in actions (practice), the things written in the dogma of that religious tradition and beliefs. This theological turn from dogma to practice is echoed by Root (2013:22) when he argues for the theological turn relationship with young people through incarnation into their reality of concern. This suggests the

essence of lived religion that appreciates but extends beyond dogma and documents.

However, religion as the product of documents or textbooks; must help it adherents to active experience that is lived out in all spheres of life (Gregg & Scholefield 2015:12). This implies that, in lived religion, religious followership is not practised in reported and represented forms within the church building or temple. Therefore lived religions are practised in acts in everyday life among people (Harvey, 2013:188). Societies are informed of a religion's traditions and dogma by what they see the followers do in practice. Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) youth fellowship handbook records that the aims of the youth fellowship "is to present every man/woman perfect in Christ"[41]. As good and appealing as these ECWA and Baptist denominational objectives sound, if they do not translate into action, it will remain a reported religion that is insignificant to the youth of Nigeria.

Therefore, the relevance of youth ministry to African society and beyond is in what youth ministry does among people in that society. This relevance connects the youth ministry to the hidden, implicit, or lived life of the young people (Roeland and Ganzevoort 2014:100) Lived religion, however, poses the paradoxical challenge of outward actions that may not be consistent with inward thoughts. In Nigeria's language, this is called the tendency of carrying out *eye service*. It signals that outward actions may not be a true and genuine reflection of the state of the heart.

To curb, or at least reduce, the tendency of living out actions that may be inconsistent with the state of the heart, this paper suggests that lived religion employs what Thomas Edward Frank (2006:130) calls "theological methodologies", such as "reflective practice" in its ideology to aid living out actions that are in consonance with religious convictions and beliefs. In Frank's (2006:131) argument, reflective practices entail a methodology that encourages religious followers to stay passionate in doing or living out their religious traditions in action.

[41] ECWA Youth Fellowship Handbook, *ECWA Youth Fellowship Beliefs and Practices: Aims and Objectives*, 2010, 6.

Reflective practice is not peculiar to theological methodology. Gibbs (1988:2), in *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods,* argues for reflective practice as a methodology for improving reflective writing. Johns and Freshwater (2005:3) in their book *Transforming nursing through reflective practice,* and David (2004:44), in *A practical approach to promote reflective practice within nursing*, argue that reflective practice is a methodology in the nursing profession that promotes and transforms the care-giving acts of nursing. In John and Freshwater's words (2005:10), "reflection fosters a more sensitive and mindful approach to practice." Reflective practice enhances action-guided care-giving practice, as it aids the motivation behind the caregiving to the patient.

This paper lends voice to the arguments of Frank (2006), John and Freshman (2005), and David (2014) on reflective practice as a methodology that enhances the mindful practice of action-guided caregiving in lived religion, because reflective practice is an adaptable theological methodology that necessitates studying one's action and practice in order to improve the practice and keep the motivation of a lived religion in view.

Conclusion

Youth ministry needs to be lived out in actions that reflect the Christian religious tradition of caregiving in Africa (Nigerian context). The reason for this is that Christianity, just like other world religions, can be studied and defined by the lived-out actions of its religious followers. This means that people in youth ministry must go beyond what is reported and represented in textbooks on the religious tradition to living out the tradition of caregiving and entering into dialogue with the society in which they live.

Harvey (2013:177) reasons, "acted-out Christianity may be little different from other world religions, in the end. We can only see this when we recognize that Christianity, as other world religions, can also be studied and defined by the lived-out actions of people".

This paper has argued that the need of the hour in Nigeria, Africa is a religious tradition like care giving that is not abstract and removed from people's daily needs, struggles and challenges. Youth ministry in Nigeria offers solution to the

everydayness of people's lives by offering care giving as one cogent praxis that constitutes the objectives of youth ministry. Therefore, youth ministry that is not meeting the needs of the youth, and not practically helping and caring for them to solve, or at least assist in, their basic problems of care giving in regard to unemployment, poverty, and educational pursuits, stands the risk of being irrelevant to the youth. Youth ministry, just like other religious organisations and institutions, must go beyond only being reported or represented, to living and being active in people's daily lives.

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Veltman, N 2021, Review of *Ethnic Diversity, National Unity: Moral Pedagogies of Togetherness for Ethiopians:*, ed. by T A Teklu, *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 259-262

Review

Ethnic Diversity, National Unity: Moral Pedagogies of Togetherness for Ethiopians:
Teklu, Theodros A. (ed.), Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR: 2021, ISBN 9781725286351, 230 pp.
Review by Nathaniel Veltman[42]

Unity in the midst of diversity is a social and religious challenge around the world. In some contexts, this challenge is often magnified and exacerbated by political, economic and even religious realities. As a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic country, Ethiopia is no exception. Addressing the challenges of diversity and unity in Ethiopia is the aim of Theodros Teklu's recent edited volume, *Ethnic Diversity, National Unity,* with the goal of equipping leaders in both the church and society in the pursuit of unity across ethnic boundaries.

Reflective of the diverse context in which it is written, *Ethnic Diversity, National Unity* is a multi-disciplinary project aimed at producing a diverse foundation on which unity can be established and strengthened. The overarching goal of the book therefore is to "generat[e] Christian moral resources which can respond to [hostilities and humanitarian crises] and other similar situations by drawing on a wide range of disciplines. This multidisciplinary engagement is meant to buttress the task of interpreting ethnic diversity and ethnic relations within both contemporary and historical Ethiopia" To this end, the authors draw from historical, legal and political perspectives to provide a broad survey of the Ethiopian context and establish the diverse nature of Ethiopia's ethno-political environment. This is followed by exegetical and theological accounts of ethnic and personal identity in relationship to diversity, complemented by examples of cultural practices demonstrating moral ethics of togetherness. Even those with limited knowledge of Ethiopia or theology are expertly guided through the tumultuous

[42] (PhD Candidate, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Assistant Professor, Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, Ethiopia).

terrain of the contested spaces of nationality and ethnicity. Altogether, the volume presents various building blocks for the foundation of national unity among ethnic diversity in Ethiopia.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I provides a survey of the contours and nuances of the Ethiopian context. Here, Teklu highlights both historical and current dynamics of ethnic violence and the politics of "the hatred of an enemy", as conceptualized by Carl Schmitt and Achille Mbembe, that has intensified ethnic tensions in Ethiopia. As a way forward, Teklu highlights essential considerations for successful cohabitation that emphasize the transformation and reform of both political and social institutions. Alongside this top-down approach is a recognition of the importance of bottom-up transformation, in which religious institutions play a vital role. The following chapters address various "moral-reserves" from which such religions institutions can encourage this bottom-up transformation.

Part II revolves around the historical, legal and contemporary political environments of Ethiopia. Afework Hailu considers the challenges of writing Ethiopian history, highlighting methodological deficiencies in historical accounts of Ethiopia that accentuate ethno- and Ethio-nationalist biases. The result is a need for "a balanced approach in handling historical narratives" of Ethiopia and its people. Fasil Nahum broadens historical considerations of Ethiopian past towards the present with insights from a legal perspective. Here, too, the dynamics of ethnicity and diversity are at play within Ethiopia's constitution and ethnic-based federalism. Nahum ultimately calls for a balance between justice (legal) and reconciliation (extra-legal) and acknowledges the need for greater enforcement of justice in the current Ethiopian context to restore this balance after embracing an approach of reconciliation. These historical and legal perspectives are complemented by Sara Abdella Kedir's exposition of the interplay between "the practices of use of digital media, the practices of internet governance and those of the politics of ethnic identity" (94). Rather than providing an answer to the question of how Ethiopians can live together while embracing diverse ethnic loyalties, Kedir argues that any path forward must take seriously the digital spaces that Ethiopians occupy and attend to the moral signposts that illuminate these digital spaces.

Employing theological and biblical exegesis, Part III elucidates scriptural resources for unity and diversity. Daniel Assefa Kassaye (Abba) examines the importance of narratives in both the Old and New Testaments, demonstrating their use and relevance to understanding identity in relation to diversity and unity. He concludes that stillness and silence are necessary prerequisites for a deeper understanding of identity, unity and diversity. This analysis is accompanied by an ethnic reading of Paul and his epistle to the Galatians. Nebeyou Alemu articulates a "Christian" identity in Galatians and reads such through the lens of contemporary Ethiopian context, suggesting that Galatians can be read both spiritual (as it has traditionally been approached) and socially. Such a reading embraces the concrete realities of both the reader and the biblical context, producing moral resources for daily life in the midst of ethnic diversity and challenges to unity.

Finally, Part IV examines theological and cultural resources for togetherness through the lens of self and the other. Youdit Tariku Feyessa articulates "A *Perichoretic* Imagination of Moral Responsibility" by examining the "Ethnic Other" as the "Neighbor". Such an imagination joins together justice and love to serve as the well-spring of embracing the ethnic other and supplies "a model of repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and directing to a new beginning of hope for peaceful co-existence" (154). In the realm of politics, Samson Tadelle Demo engages Hans Urs van Balthasar's concept of *kenosis* to explicate the morality of *homo kenosus* as embodied in Christ. Here, too, Ethiopians (and all readers) are presented with a moral ethic that provides a challenge for alternative living and the tools for embracing such lifestyle. Opportunities abound for cultural practices to embody a moral ethic that bridges the chasm of ethnic division, and Setargew Kenaw explicates the rite of "footwashing" as such "as a symbol of epistemic and moral humility" (197). With such an example, readers are given insights into the ways that cultural practices, especially those embraced by religious-based educational institutions, can serve a medium through which Ethiopians can demonstrate love for one's neighbor across ethnic lines. Nishan Cheru Degaga draws all of this together a final chapter that expounds on the Christian moral responsibility to embrace the ethnic other. Through an examination of Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion & Embrace* and Emmanuel Katongole's *Mirror to the Church,* readers are afforded insights into the moral resources for a Christian responsibility of embracing the ethnic other.

The complex challenges of ethnic diversity and unity in Ethiopia presents multiple moral dilemmas for political leaders and citizens alike, both inside and outside the church. Encounters with such dilemmas raises the question of where to turn for resources in which to shape an adequate response. *Ethnic Diversity, National Unity* is an exceptional resource, presenting nuanced biblical, theological, philosophical, and cultural perspectives that can serve as tools for overcoming ethnic hatred and violence. It further opens the door to additional dialogue in the realms of economics and economic development (and potentially others), offering a framework for examining the moral responsibilities that animate such spheres. As such, this book stands as an important contribution to not only understanding the contemporary Ethiopian context, but also for laying the foundations for togetherness of Ethiopians. It may also further serve as a resource for establishing unity in other contexts wherein ethnic division abounds. Political and church leaders, pastors, and lay church members, in Ethiopia and beyond, will all benefit from the biblical, theological, philosophical, and cultural resources offered herein.

Hendriks, H J 2021, Review of *God of the Remnant; The Plight of Minority Ethnic Groups in Africa:*, by S B Agang, *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 263-265

Review

God of the Remnant; The Plight of Minority Ethnic Groups in Africa:
Agang, Sunday, HippoBooks: Bukuru, Plateau State, Nigeria: 2021, ISBN 9781839730580, 88p.
Review by Prof HJ (Jurgens) Hendriks[43]

Agang, General Editor of "African Public Theology" (HippoBooks, 2020), is not writing to a secluded academic guild. He is, however, writing theology that is contextual to the African continent and its people. Reading "God of the Remnant" reminded me of the way in which Jesus Christ taught the multitudes.

The book is about the plight of minorities, the struggle and pain that millions of our people are experiencing. The first paragraph of the preface is powerful. It is a testimony and it brings you into the orbit where the struggle takes place:

> "I know from my own experience that life is not easy as a member of a minority group in Africa. Your options are limited and you and your people are at the mercy of majorities who control all aspects of community life. Sometimes, your group is made the scapegoat for problems in the community. You may even endure severe persecution. At best, you may hope to be ignored, and you have resigned yourself to spare-tire status as a permanent second-class citizen."

Statistically, Africa may be the "most Christian continent", but the stark reality of suffering, poverty, corruption, ethnic violence and the worst possible leadership put a question mark behind "Christian." Hope vanish.

"God of the remnant" rekindles hope. It goes back to basics. It revisits human identity, covenant and the unconditional love of God that is there for all humans, irrespective of whatever may be the differences between us. In short

[43] University of Stellenbosch

clear strokes, like a master painter, the author takes one through biblical history and the world as we know it. It reminded me of the blind man whom Jesus healed. The eyes of the reader can suddenly see the patterns of history, the patterns repeated to this very day in the world and, sadly, in the church too. Once you are able to see, hope is rekindled.

The book explains the role of the remnant. The strength of the church never was in being a majority, not in numbers. The strength of the church is in being called and in setting out on a journey. It lies in being a blessing to the world and all its peoples. The remnant concept is explained by illustrating it in the lives of minorities. It started with Abraham and his family being called to the final illustration in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who, with twelve disciples and an undisclosed number of women changed the world.

Scripture functions throughout the book as the basic platform from which the ever-present pattern of the covenantal relationship, with its ups and downs, is portrayed. Through faith and obedience, a remnant always survived and returned to the promised land (OT) to the faith community that followed Christ (NT). One begins to understand the concept of a "promised land" that is more than an earthly abode.

The book also illustrates how paradise is lost, how exile happens, how power corrupts… the myriad ways of losing your way and ending in misery.

Thus, by looking at biblical and ecclesial history, one discerns how spiritually and existentially dangerous the power of being part of a majority is. The author could have illustrated this concept with the biblical principle that there is no peace without justice. There is no future without justice to all, to all minorities.

The book provides guidance for minorities. Hate and revenge do not lead to peace and justice. Here the author could make use of Desmond Tutu's "No future without forgiveness." (Tutu, Desmond M., 1999, No future without forgiveness, Doubleday, New York.)

One aspect of the book that I found particularly helpful was the emphasis on assumptions. We are not always aware of our assumptions. Quite often assumptions are not in line with the basic Christian values. Both ethnic

majorities and minorities have to scrutinize their assumptions. In this respect the author could have strengthened his argument if he emphasized the importance of crossing boundaries and listening to "the other." It is very difficult to recognize one's own assumptions if you grew up with it and never "crossed boundaries" to understand something of the plight of people on the other side. Jesus helped his disciples to deal with wrong assumptions by taking them to the other side.

"The God of the Remnant" is a most valuable contribution to the theological discourse of our continent. It is a testimony that the remnant's road is often the one less travelled … but it is following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

Addresses to order from:

- Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS), TCNN, PMB 2020, Bukuru 930008, Plateau State, Nigeria. https://www.actsnigeria.org

- Langham Publishing, PO Box 296, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA3 9WZ, UK. https://www.langhampublishing.org

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