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Embracing Pauline Mission Strategies for Effective Gospel Proclamation in Urban Contexts

Addison Ndzi Talla

INTRODUCTION

The command to preach the Gospel involves engaging diverse peoples everywhere (cf. Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Foremost among the individuals mentioned in the Bible whose impact stood out and serves as an example for many today is Apostle Paul. A careful study of his life and mission shows that he was largely involved in urban missions. This article considers strategies for executing the task of the Great Commission in urban areas with a focus on Paul's missionary efforts. After a brief look at Paul's life and background, it considers the dimensions of his mission endeavor and discusses its feasibility today. It is argued that Pauline methods, largely applied in urban contexts, should still be pursued today despite the increasing resistance to Gospel proclamation in urban centers.

PAUL THE URBAN MISSIONARY

Urban missions is a dimension of mission¹ which involves efforts of the church to proclaim and demonstrate the Gospel, confronting and surmounting challenges posed by urbanization. Urban dwellers are brought into the saving faith of the Gospel through Jesus Christ through proclamation and through demonstration, urban problems such as poverty, sickness, and injustice, are addressed. This means that in implementing the task of the Great Commission through urban mission strategy, the church seeks the restoration of the city.² Thus, urban missions encompasses the proclamation and the demonstration of the Kingdom of God.

1. Peter O. Atoyebi, "From Stagnation to Revitalization: A Study of Select Turnaround Churches in the Urban Context of Nairobi, Kenya" (Doctoral Thesis, North-West University, Kenya, 2010), 38.

2. *Ibid.*, 47-48.

Strategy is the overall plan, principles, or ways by which resources and opportunities are to be utilized in a task.³ The term "strategy" is sometimes

3. John M. Terry, Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson (ed.) *Missiology, An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998), 434.

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used interchangeably with methods, meaning the comprehensive and flexible body of tactics or actions, the detailed means by which God's people implement God's work. Strategy is the rationale upon which the enterprise rests.⁴ Kanagaraj defines strategy in relation to Christian mission as:

*A well-organized plan of action or policy to be followed in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and consolidating the believers in their faith. It implies an order or discipline with which the missionaries are to be led in order to accomplish their mission... the practical working out of the will of God within a cultural context because...all missiological decisions must somehow be rooted in theology and take into consideration the cultural context in which the mission is carried out.*⁵

To him, the word "strategy" carries with it ideas of design and goals. Also, "strategy" is practical as well as situated, given that it is to be exercised within a given context. Also, strategy in Christian mission has to be in line with the Word of God. Any strategy that goes contrary should not be employed in carrying out Christian mission.

An effective missionary enterprise may likely require more than one strategy, for one or more strategies can be employed to accomplish a certain task. Also, it is not guaranteed that the same strategy or strategies may work in every missionary endeavour. Strategy varies from place to place and from one missionary to another. It is the responsibility of missionaries or mission workers to determine the strategy or strategies which best suit the missions initiative. Mission Strategy therefore is the operation of one or more tactics or actions in the practice of missions.

There is not much information about the family of Paul except that he was born to Jewish parents from the tribe of Benjamin. This information is borne out of his own testimonies during his ministerial confrontations with fellow Jews. His Hebrew name was Saul. He was named after the most celebrated Benjamite of his time – Saul of Kish, the first king of Israel. Also, as a Roman citizen, he was required to have three other names, but only the last of his three Latin names (Paullus) was common, and which would later rhyme with the Greek name Paulos.⁶

Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia – a Roman province (cf. Acts 22:3); a city of great historical influence (cf. Acts 21:39). The exact time as at when his family settled in Tarsus is not known, but apparently, his family would have been one of the Jewish families that found solace in Cilician towns, notably Tarsus during the Seleucid ruthless rule in Palestine.⁷ Thus,

4. Ibid.

5. Jey J. Kanagaraj, "The Strategies of Paul the Missionary" retrieved from http://www.mhs.no/uploads/SNTS_2008_Kanagaraj.pdf. Accessed on 03/09/2024.

6. Gerald F. Hawthorne. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 681.

7. Merrill C. Teney & Steven Barabas. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Michigan: Zondervan Corporation, 1975),

he was born and brought up in an ancient and significant city with multiple cultures.⁸ This earned him his place among the elites of his day and he fully maximized the benefits thereof towards achieving his evangelistic goals.

Furthermore, his claim as a born Roman citizen implies that the rights of Roman citizenship would have been conferred on his parents for having done something very significant to the Roman government.⁹ Roman citizens, irrespective of race, enjoyed great measures of freedom and respect including that of fair hearings before trial and the possibility to appeal to Caesar. Paul maximized all these benefits during his gospel ministerial engagements as recorded in the book of Acts.

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Paul encountered Christ and got converted on one of his journeys to Damascus to persecute the church there. He transferred his extreme passion for Judaism to Christianity. This is evident in his ministerial exploits and writings, confirming his place among significant figures in the New Testament. Herbert Kane claims that Paul did for Christianity what Moses did for Judaism.¹⁰

Paul did many good things in the course of his ministry but his apostolic mission was to win the lost, teach the saved, and plant churches.¹¹ He is seen in the New Testament as a church planter. A church planter is one who starts a new church as an individual

863.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Herbert J. Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1976), 72.

11. Paul A. Beals. *A People for His Name: A Church-Based Missions Strategy* (California: William Carey Library, 1995), 23.

or within a group.¹² Paul is the biblical model for missions in this modern age.

PAULINE MISSIONARY STRATEGIES FOR THE CITY

Opinions vary as to whether Paul had a mission strategy or not. But a close examination of the life and ministry of Paul as recorded in the Bible, particularly in the Book of Acts reveals a flexible *modus operandi* developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and subject to His direction and control.¹³ These tactics stand out in the ministry practice of Paul and are worthy of note. The writer will discuss them within the periscope of chapter 13 to chapter 28 of Acts which contains a detailed record of Paul's three missionary journeys.

First, Paul mainly ministered in cities. He intentionally focused on urban missions. His strategy to make disciples began with evangelizing the cities and planting local churches in them.¹⁴ Ikechukwu Ugo recounts that as Paul went about his missionary journeys, he crossed the Mediterranean world, covering the Roman provinces, going from city to city with his message and establishing churches.¹⁵ Similarly, as Gene A. Getz observes, Paul viewed cities such as Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, Thessalonica, Macedonia, etc. as pivots from which the Gospel would spread to surrounding areas. For example, it is probable, as recorded in Acts 19, that those who came to Ephesus to do business and to worship in the temple of Diana were converted to Jesus Christ and returned to their hometowns spreading the Gospel as they went. This explains the founding of the six other churches in Asia mentioned in the Book of Revelation chapter 1 and verse 11.¹⁶

Second, Paul focused on those who were receptive to the Gospel. In Acts 16:12-13 Paul and his team arrived in Phillipi, a leading city of the district of Macedonia. They went to the riverside and spoke to some women who would listen to them. Lydia happened to respond and show that God was working in her, so they followed up with her and this resulted in the conversion of her whole household (v14, 15). God was already working in Lydia and the conversation drew her out as a "person of peace."¹⁷ By this means, Paul was able to plant house churches. This strategy is also evident in Acts 17:11-14 where it

is clearly stated that the Bereans were more receptive than the Thessalonians. In the cities Paul preached to both Jews and Gentiles who were receptive (cf. Acts 17:12), though in some cases the former was not so, therefore, he focused on the latter. Charles Arn views receptive people as "fertile soil" and terms the act of focusing evangelistic efforts on them as "selective evangelism."¹⁸ Urban missions should be selective. There are souls which are ripe for harvest and those who are not. Though one cannot tell beforehand, the only way to know is to engage in evangelism.

Third, Paul engaged in diverse approaches of proclaiming the Gospel. He was not rigid; he engaged in personal or one-on-one evangelism as well as mass evangelism. He preached in the synagogues, in marketplaces, in public squares, as well as in homes. In Thessalonica Paul preached in the synagogue on the Sabbaths and in the square during the week.¹⁹ By so doing he reached out to both Jews and Gentiles. Urban missions must not be stereotypical. The urban context is a multi-cultural context with various subcultures. Hence, a single approach to evangelism may have limited impact.

In addition, despite his approach to evangelism, Paul contextualized his message. When contextualizing, the message of the gospel does not change, but the method of presentation is altered.²⁰ The gospel is presented to fit the needs and aid the understanding of the audience. For instance, when Paul addressed Jewish monotheists in the synagogues, he began with the Old Testament.²¹ To the pagans of Lystra (cf. Acts 14), he presented the gospel differently from his approach to the Jews; making no special appeal to Scripture, but to nature, which reveals a supernatural Creator.²²

Paul used what was known by his audience to bring them to the unknown. He communicated through local languages such as Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew as the need arose. He understood the need to be flexible with respect to his audience – their culture and worldview as well as their beliefs. Paul's attitude to other religions permitted him to engage them in dialogue in which he eventually won them over. But the underlying factor was his life of integrity and faithfulness to biblical revelation which made his ministry relevant to receiving cultures.²³

Fourth, Paul planted house churches. He did not hesitate to enter the houses of city dwellers and uses these spaces as places of worship. The conversion of entire members of individuals' households is illustrated during his encounter with the Jailer (cf.

12. Evert Van De Poll & Joanne Appleton. *Church Planting in Europe: Connecting to Society, Learning from Experience* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), n.p.

13. Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 73.

14. Ikechukwu Ugo, "St. Paul's Church Planting Strategies as Revealed in Selected Passages in the Book of Acts" *Global Missiology*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (2012) retrieved from <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/714/1758>. Accessed on 10/09/2024.

15. Ibid.

16. Gene A. Getz. *The Walk: Growing into the Fullness of Christ* (Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2000), 7.

17. J. S. Shaw. "5 Ways to Start New Works (From Paul's Church Planting Strategy)" retrieved from www.vergenetwork.org. Accessed on 09/09/2024.

18. Charles Arn. Selective Evangelism retrieved from www.pastors.com/selective-evangelism/ Accessed on 07/09/2024.

19. Ronaldo Lidorio. "The Method of Paul for Church Planting" retrieved from www.churchplanting.com. Accessed on 09/09/2024.

20. Ugo

21. Ibid.

22. C. Peter Wagner, Win Arn & Elmer Towns, *Church Growth: State of the Art* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers 1986), 143.

23. S. Ademola Ishola. "Embracing and Releasing: Do Christians Ever Need to Abandon Their Cultures?" *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* Vol. XVII, No. 1 (June 2013), 143.

Acts 16:32-34), and the households of Crispus and Stephanas (cf. Acts 18:8).²⁴ Hence during the early years of Christianity, people met in homes. In urban centers where there is usually limited space, houses of converts are a good place to start a church plant pending availability of affordable public space to set up a church auditorium.

Fifth, while establishing the churches he planted, Paul developed strong Christian leadership via role modelling and equipping through discipleship and mentorship. Getz remarks that Paul assisted the churches to become mature both spiritually and administratively.²⁵ He spent an entire year in Antioch teaching the disciples; a year and six months in Corinth; and at least six months in Thessalonica; and a total of three years in Ephesus.²⁶ Effective urban missions that will ensure continuity require the development of leaders who will consolidate the work by nourishing new converts and raising other leaders.

This strategy is seen in Paul's discipleship of Timothy, Titus, and so on. Paul A. Beals reasons that this was surely why these men demonstrated leadership qualifications while the apostles were absent.²⁷ They had been groomed to have a sense of responsibility. The goal of missionary activity is to build responsible, reproducing believers so as to have responsible, reproducing churches.²⁸ By so doing continuity in missions is ensured.

It is reported that Paul probably started close to twenty churches himself, with many more born out of those by his apprentice leaders.²⁹ A clear evidence for the success of Paul's discipleship and mentorship is seen in the fact that the leaders he raised ultimately spread the Gospel and the whole Roman Empire surrendered to Christianity. This is because the churches were raised to spread the gospel rather than contain it.³⁰

Sixth, Paul's missionary effort was holistic. He was not only interested in preaching and teaching but also in meeting physical needs. Thus, he promoted a sense of *koinonia* among the churches that belonged to different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.³¹ He encouraged the members of these churches to share their economic resources with other churches that were in need. Divine salvation, which is for all human beings, is concerned with all aspects of human welfare - physical, spiritual, emotional, and psychological.³² Paul took poverty seriously. He was eager to remember and help the poor long before

the instruction to do so came from the apostles in Jerusalem (cf. Gal. 2:10).³³

Paul's attempt to help the poor had a long-term goal. That is, the collection was made not merely to meet the physical needs of the receiving churches, but particularly to bring spiritual unity and equality between the churches with Jewish background and those with the Gentile background (cf. Rom. 8:14).³⁴ On the part of the Jews, accepting gifts from the Gentile churches showed that they accepted them as members of God's family. Issues of social justice and racial inequality which are pronounced in urban areas were therefore addressed.

Seventh, Paul practiced partnership in missions. He was not a lone ranger. Though he was powerfully used by God (cf. Acts 19:11-12), he partnered with others such as Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, John Mark, etc. James L. Garret notes that about twenty fellow workers are mentioned in Acts and the Pauline epistles.³⁵ This shows that urban missions should be a collective effort; it brings together a variety of gifts and skills which are vital for a successful mission initiative. Co-workers such as Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete were Paul's "apostolic" delegates.³⁶ Besides, he maintained a good relationship with his home church in Jerusalem; making five visits there from Macedonia and Achaia.³⁷

Lastly, Paul engaged in tentmaking. In 1 Corinthians 9:6 Paul asks, "Are Barnabas and I the only ones who cannot refrain from working for a living? This suggests strongly that Paul raised funds for missions via tent making; only refraining from it to focus fully on preaching when he had support from the brethren (cf. Acts 18:5). The Apostle Paul stated three reasons for supplementing his support from churches through tentmaking: (1) To offer the gospel without charge (2 Corinthians 11:7-9); (2) To relieve the burden upon churches (2 Corinthians 12:14-16); (3) To be an example to others (Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 9; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).³⁸ Pauline missionary strategies have been presented and discussed differently with input from other scholars.

Roland Allen considers the social background of the world in which Paul ministered as he compares Paul's methods with current ones. He considers strategic points such as the position or character of the places in which Paul preached; He questions whether Paul's success was due to the existence of a special class of people to which he made a special appeal; and whether the great nuance between the moral, social, or religious condition of the provinces and these modern

24. Ugo

25. Getz, 3.

26. Ibid, 116.

27. Beals, 22.

28. Ibid.

29. Neil Cole. "How Many Churches did the Apostle Paul Start?" retrieved from <http://www.churchplanting.com>. Accessed on 04/09/2024.

30. Ed Stetzer. "Monday is for Missiology: Paul's Church Planting Strategy" retrieved from www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/january/. Accessed on 10/09/2024.

31. Kanagaraj, "The Strategies of Paul the Missionary"

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. James Leo Garret. *Systematic Theology, Volume 2, Second Edition: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 541.

36. Philip H. Towner. *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 106-108.

37. Garret, 540.

38. "Tentmaking/Business as Mission" retrieved from <http://www.biblicalministries.org/files/BMW%20Tentmaking-BAM%20Policy.pdf>. Accessed on 10/09/2024.

times render a comparison of Paul's work with the modern approach futile.³⁹

Allen's submission is that the nature of the places Paul preached were not different from today's world. The Greco-Roman culture was full of lofty philosophies. Knowledge was celebrated and reason exalted just like today. The classes of those Paul preached to were diverse. There were mixed classes in Paul's day as in the present day. He addressed the poor as well as the rich. He successfully ministered to both. Likewise, there were moral, social and religious issues such as homosexuality, incest, extortion, corruption, false ministers, etc. faced by Paul which confront urban missions today.

Another dimension considered by Allen is the argument that Paul was an exceptional man living in exceptional times, preaching under exceptional circumstances (his education and exposure), unlike any other.⁴⁰ To this Allen responds that (1) Paul's missionary method was not peculiar to Paul. Others were establishing churches at that time. (2) The modern day advent and advancement of technology gives Gospel ministers an advantage over Paul who had only the Old Testament in Greek. This advantage is in the form of the Bible (Old and New Testament) in hard and soft copy, the media, internet, diverse means of mobility, and so on. (3) Paul's example overshadows his advantages - an example the modern church should follow: despite the numerous challenges, he persistently fulfilled his calling.⁴¹

39. Roland Allen. *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2012), 1.

40. Ibid, 4.

41. Ibid.

CONCLUSION

This paper has considered Paul, his mission strategies, and their feasibility for urban missions in the twenty-first century. The writer is of the opinion that Pauline mission strategies are still relevant in carrying out the task of the Great Commission today. This is especially true in the African context, much like Paul's. However, one must note that not every strategy can work in every context today and not every strategy can be effectively utilized by every missionary. For example, a gospel minister who does not share a similar background with Paul may have limited options for engaging others and, therefore, a limited audience. The same applies to utilizing contemporary technologies such as the media and internet in implementing some strategies.



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Cognitive Dissonance in the Christian Church Today: When Lives and Failed Relationships Betray the Lack of Faith

- Results from a qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study

James D. Langteau and Kenneth D. Gossett

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this journal article is to report on the significant findings from a study exposing prevalent cognitive dissonance in Christian churches, and the negative impact it has on restored relationships within the Church and outside the Church in the community at large. The authors of this article also offer concrete suggestions to counter the apathy and superficiality. The authors conducted a qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study entitled: "Former Mentors' Perceptions of the Faith-Based Approach to Reducing Recidivism Implemented by the Marinette-Menominee Jail Outreach, Inc." In the study, we explored the impact of a faith-based approach to reduce recidivism. The conceptual frameworks guiding this study included the use of belief system theory and self-efficacy theory. Participants consisted of a convenience sample of 21 mentors of the Marinette-Menominee Jail Outreach. The setting was a Christian non-profit organization serving the Marinette and Menominee County Jails located in rural northeastern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Semi-structured interviews, surveys, and a focus group provided data to illuminate common themes. Data analysis included highlighting significant statements from volunteer mentors who engaged offenders to effect change. Through a thematic analysis, general themes emerged to examine the research questions under consideration, and to understand the construct of recidivism by using horizontalization clusters of meaning, and textual descriptions. All inmates had a story to tell: The importance of family and engagement or rejection by the church emerged as themes in this research. Comprehensive aftercare was crucial to reduce recidivism, yet often offenders return to prison because churches do not have the parishioner involvement required to effectively engage released offenders and offer a new environment to promote change. Many church members lack spiritual maturity, evidenced by apathy, complacency or fear. This study revealed that all 21 Christian mentors confidentially interviewed from 15 different churches and 8 different denominations unanimously indicated that the majority of members of their own churches refused to engage other people in evangelism or discipleship, either from fear or apathy, neither of which are biblically justifiable excuses. This unexpected finding was the most significant because of the implications for restored relationships within the Church and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

Former Mentors' Perceptions of the Faith-Based Approach to Reducing Recidivism Implemented by the Marinette-Menominee Jail Outreach, Inc, is a qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study completed by the authors (Langteau, 2014). The research was based on a phenomenological study that necessarily considered the lived experiences of those involved. The lived experience articulated the participants' feelings, emotions, and perceptions as they lived it, and not just the individual's reactions to the experience (Connelly, 2010, p. 127). By determining shared patterns, it helped improve understanding of anti-recidivism approaches that were effective. The research plan of the study included three processes: semistructured research questions for 21 randomly selected participants who were all mentors; surveys; and focus group discussions to understand the phenomenon under examination and their shared themes. The focus group consisted of a circuit court judge, an elected county sheriff, an elected state senator, a regional director of a national non-profit, and a tenured university professor.

In the process, the universally shared experiences of the 21 mentors also significantly uncovered the prevalence of cognitive dissonance across the broad spectrum of churches and denominations involved. Cognitive dissonance is defined as "the excessive mental stress and discomfort experienced by individuals who hold two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time (Craig, 2013, p. 91). In events where a disparity exists between an individual's claimed belief and their observed actions, their actions always betray their real conviction.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world, and inmates are being released from jails and prisons at unprecedented rates only to commit more crimes and be re-arrested. The U.S. prison population has increased by more than 460% while the numbers of offenders released on parole has increased by over 360% between 1980 and 2006 (Johnson, 2008, p. 2). The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reported that 2,266,800 incarcerated adults were in federal and state prisons and local county jails in 2010, and another 4,887,900 adults were on probation or parole in the U.S. at year-end 2010 (Glaze, 2011, p. 3).

The situation is both ineffective and untenable, demonstrated by the fact that with only 5% of the

world's population, the United States today has about 25% of the world's incarcerated people (Meiners, 2007, p. 23). Not only is this trend unsustainable, but the cycle of arresting and releasing offenders fails to address or correct the underlying causes of recidivism. "Over 60% of released offenders are re-arrested within three years, increasing the burden on society and cost to the government (Hall, 2009, p. 66]. So the cycle continues.

PROBLEM AND PURPOSE STATEMENT

The problem is the prison population in the United States has increased over 460% between 1980 and 2006 (Johnson, 2008, p. 2). Without an inmate's change of values, there is little likelihood of a change in behavior (Markway & Worsham, 2009, p. 99). Correctional officers release offenders from prison unchanged and without support structures, only to recommit crimes, create new victims, and then be re-arrested as the cycle continues (Le Blanc & Nolan, 2009). Over 60% of released offenders are rearrested within three years, creating a high cost to society in terms of new victims and a financial burden on cash-strapped government with limited corrections budgets (Hall, 2009 & Langan & Levin, 2002).

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to examine the impact of a faith-based approach to reducing recidivism for offenders involved in the Marinette-Menominee Jail Outreach, and to do so by examining the lived experiences of the volunteer mentors who worked with offenders in the context of a surrogate family. Recidivism is the re-arrest within three years of release from incarceration, which was the definition accepted for this study. The participants were asked interview questions to focus on the perceptions of volunteer mentors who engaged offenders through participation in the faith-based approach to reducing recidivism implemented by the Marinette-Menominee Jail Outreach organization. The purpose of the interview questions was to determine the impressions of what aspects of the approach were effective and what aspects were not effective in reducing recidivism based on the lived experiences of the participants.

Van Manen (2016) stated that phenomenological research and interview questions need to be formulated "from a posture of wonder (Van Manen, 2016). The researchers will be inquiring into experiences that have arisen in the daily life of the voluntary mentors; that is, in life worlds in which any ordinary experience may become important and extraordinary for an offender if approached from wondering and the phenomenological point of view. Thus, through phenomenology we can understand that day-to-day experiences are wondrous, and less simple than we initially think. Thus, the attitude of wonder is a fundamental necessity when framing the phenomenological research question (Ayala-Carabajo, 2017). In a good study, we almost always

begin in or pass through a phase of wonder. Wonder, according to Van Manen (2016) is a disposition that has, in turn, a dispositional effect: it both unsettles and moves us. Wonder should not be confused with delight, admiration, curiosity, fear, etc. Wonder, seen as an attitude, cannot appear automatically; and neither can it be artificially induced but may help us understand why certain strategies may be useful in reducing recidivism (Ayala-Carabajo, 2017; Van Manen, 2016). In the same way that imagination can be the spur to creating an artwork, our qualitative study can also begin with several questions that will be refined, redefined, etc. during the study. Feelings of wonder can prompt phenomenological questioning. In the space between wonder and phenomenological questioning, we hope to find knowledge, reflective skill, and intuition (Ayala Carabajo, 2017). Wondering may also mean that embracing the fact that things may also exist in a different way to the way they are which, assumes that there may be a distinction between appearance and reality (Beltrán, 1982, Waldenfels, 2017). This distinction between appearance and reality means that experiences can sometimes be shown through a lens and appearance that distorts them (this does not mean that they are not real).

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the lived experience of volunteer mentors when they are involved with offenders in the context of a surrogate family?

The Interview questions for this study were:

1. What do mentors perceive as the factors or beliefs that contribute to offenders re-arrests?
2. How have offenders gained mastery over their thoughts, emotions, beliefs and actions?
3. How has the greater faith community worked together or failed to work together to support offenders?
4. How have learning from and interacting with members of the Jail Outreach, in the context of surrogate families, impacted offenders' beliefs, thinking and behavior?

Importance of these Questions:

Recidivism is a serious problem with negative social and economic impacts on communities, and the majority of incarcerated people are repeat offenders. To know what mentors attribute to offenders, repeat arrest patterns would be valuable in determining the most useful approach to reduce it, and what would be useful for future research. It is also important to determine what if anything has changed with offenders, and how these factors contributed to breaking the cycle of recidivism. How has the greater faith community worked together or failed to work together to support offenders? If a comprehensive

approach is necessary, it is useful to know what aspects of broader faith organizations cooperating together have worked, and what aspects may not work in relations to impacting offenders. How have learning from and interacting with members of the Jail Outreach, in the context of surrogate families, impacted offenders' beliefs, thinking and behavior? It may be useful to determine how offenders' understanding of themselves and their environment may have been impacted by association.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study was grounded in the research of theorists who have studied human development and change, and had researched social learning. Festinger's theory on cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), Rokeach's belief system theory (Rokeach, 1960) and Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) have provided a broad conceptual foundation for this study. In addition, the Bible was a catalyst from which many of the principles incorporated in this theoretical framework have been instructive and applied.

- Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT)

Festinger (1957) stated that non-fitting relations among cognitions or thought patterns and how they generate a state of discomfort involving negative arousal, that motivates people to cope with this situation, typically by adjusting one cognition to the other. Dissonance was the term he used to refer to this state of discomfort. To stress the homeostatic nature of dissonance, he made a parallel with hunger: Deprived of food, people feel hungry and find a way to cope with their hunger. However, as if the same construct defined food deprivation and hunger, Festinger used the term dissonance for both the triggering relation and the state of discomfort that occur. Although CDT has been extensively revised, the original theory is still a central point of agreement and constitutes the core of the theory¹ (see Harmon-Jones, 2019).

- Rokeach's Belief System Theory

The belief system theory, with Rokeach as a primary theorist, postulated that belief systems are the framework that stimulates cognitive and motivational processes. Rokeach viewed the relationship between beliefs and behavior as interrelated and predictive, and suggested that the changing of central beliefs had great impact on behavior (Grube, Mayton, II & Ball-Rokeach, 1994). Values transcend situations and are viewed as single beliefs. As such, values are significant because they are cognitive representations of personal desires (Grube et al. 1994). Self-conception is the most central belief affecting the belief system theory and includes "all of an individual's cognitions about those qualities that define the self. As a result, "All other

beliefs and all behaviors are organized around self-conceptions and are in the service of maintaining and enhancing positive self-conceptions (Grube et al. 1994). Belief system theory recognizes that changing an individual's self-conception belief is a catalyst for life transformation. Rokeach believed that there are three levels in any belief or disbelief system. The first level involves a basic outlook on the world, and the individual either sees it as threatening and dangerous or as safe and accepting. The second level of any belief system addresses an individual's perspective on authority, and specifically who has legitimate authority, what it is based upon, and whether it will be respected. The third level of any belief system details the structure of living and how this varies based on what authority is accepted at any given time. Rokeach demonstrated the connection between people's patterns of belief and their underlying personality structure and their conduct (Rokeach, 1960). When an individual maintains two or more contradictory beliefs or values at the same time, however, cognitive dissonance creates excessive stress. Yet the process of change is incorporated in specifically held values which, when confronted with altered perceptions, is a psychological mechanism for transformation. A significant relationship was found to exist between self-dissatisfaction and change in target values (Grube et al. 1994).

- Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy theory relates to an individual's ability to organize and execute various courses of action. Self-efficacy is a person's effective interaction with the environment. Self-efficacy is demonstrated through exercising influence competently over events that impact one's life. Self-efficacy may be exemplified in mastery over thoughts, emotions, and behavior (Bandura, 1977). Bandura, who developed the self-efficacy theory, said, "It is hypothesized that expectations of personal efficacy determine whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences (Bandura, 1977, p. 191). Self-efficacy theory is insightful in developing the concepts behind mentoring offenders, and the role played in developing the self-efficacy of individual inmates. Bandura defined self-efficacy as "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of actions required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1997, p. 192).

Individuals do not live their lives in independent autonomy, and self-efficacy is developed in relationships. Self-efficacy is critical to an individual's ability to effectively learn and successfully complete tasks, and is often acquired by modeling the behavior of those one identifies with and with whom frequent contact is sustained (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy has relevance outside the classroom because it "is a socially created propensity to view oneself as capable

of responding to a range of life contingencies (Allred, 2013, p. 211). To hold the necessary skills and possess the ability to master a certain task is not enough unless individuals also perceive themselves able and capable of actually using their skills to accomplish the task (Miller, 2011).

Christian mentors who are willing to invest time with offenders both while incarcerated and upon their release are ideally situated to help offenders develop realistic self-efficacy because of their commitment and because of the shared values they possess and model. Bandura's self-efficacy theory relates to the current research regarding volunteer mentors working with offenders in a faith-based approach to reducing recidivism. Former offenders face a great degree of rejection, and "high self-efficacy is essential for persisting in the face of rejection (Miller, 2011, p. 244). Also, Bandura postulated that people learned from the behavior of those they associated with, and endeavored to emulate the lifestyle of those who model behavior with which they can identify. By placing a highly functioning and morally committed Christian mentor with an offender or group of offenders, a relationship develops in which the individual offender may learn both from what the mentor teaches and from what the mentor models. Offenders who are open to this relationship but lack in motivation or self-efficacy will be exposed to a mentor with whom they can identify. By beginning while still incarcerated, this relationship can grow and continue after the offender is released, and it can expand and strengthen with a group of mentors who reinforce transformational behavior. When embarked upon in the spirit of acceptance in a surrogate family with the offender that maintains boundaries and accountability, these mentors will increase the offenders' perception of their own genuine needs while demonstrating where their needs can legitimately be met. According to Bandura's theory, this exposure to positive mentors will enhance the offenders' recognition of their own abilities and motivate them to imitate the mentors around them (Bandura, 1994).

The offenders' perceptions of their own abilities may be altered at a critical stage in their mentoring relationship due to the environment and dynamics created. The new relationships and dynamics can positively transform their thoughts, emotions, behavior and self-efficacy, and thus break the cycle of recidivism. If genuine change does occur within an offender, the reason for the change will transcend the former, base desires, needs, or wants that previously motivated the offender to commit a crime. Consequently, even when no longer in direct association with mentors, the former offender will recognize the short-sightedness and emptiness of the former lifestyle and refrain from returning to it. Learning cannot be imposed from the outside. All persons must interact with their world (Hearron & Hildebrand, 2010).

Vicarious reinforcement is the process by which

new behaviors are acquired through watching a mentor or model practicing and reinforcing the new behavior. "A new cognitive structure generates new possibilities, which cause the person to try out new procedures on objects (Miller, 2011, p. 87). Cognitive development is a progressive reorganization of mental processes that are the result of biological maturation and environmental experience. People construct an understanding of the world, then experience discrepancies between what they already know and what they discover in their environment. Equilibrium, assimilation, and accommodation progress through stages.

Ultimately, beliefs influence thinking, and thinking results in behavior; consequently, if one wants to alter the behavior, one must first alter the beliefs and thinking that inevitably drive the behavior. "Offenders' readiness to engage in changes that will reduce their risk of reoffending is now recognized to be as important as the design and delivery of programs that support such change (Anstiss et al., 2011, p. 690). This readiness is usually achieved only through intensive mentoring and needs to directly address changes in dynamic risk factors to successfully reduce recidivism.

THEMES AND SUBCATEGORIES

The study illuminated three themes and ultimately eight associated subcategories:

Theme 1: Contributions to Offenders' Recidivism- Mentors perceived various factors as contributing to recidivism, including dysfunctional families and personal relationships, skewed perceptions, a lack of realizing their own value or the value of other people, and a lack of long-term and comprehensive after-care. The offenders had a very limited understanding of the "flaws behind their stories. If a person commented that the offender's story was interesting but asked the offender to explain the flaw behind their story, most often the offender would be unable to do so. This theme resulted to three subcategories:

- a. *They all had a story to tell.*
- b. *Importance of family.*
- c. *Connecting to society.*

Theme 2: Mastery of Self- The mentors perceived that offenders gained mastery over their thoughts and broke the cycle of recidivism through establishing new relationships and disassociating with negative relationships, interacting with role models and the positive example of others, and through Bible study that led to new values and perspectives. The following two subcategories were illuminated through this theme:

- d. *Christ as our Savior.*
- e. *Reason for change.*

Theme 3: Greater Faith Community - The mentors perceived that the churches were dynamic because

they had the answers from the Bible and in a personal relationship with Christ which could transform their lives and the lives of offenders, and because 15 churches demonstrated they could come together to work unselfishly and without tangible benefit to help offenders through the Jail Outreach program. The weakness of the churches, however, was that only a minority of members did what was required, revealing that the majority in the churches may have experienced cognitive dissonance and needed the same transformation that the offenders needed, so that they would see others as valuable and redeemable. The participants thought that more training in Scripture would help the indifferent church members feel the call of Christ in their lives and be willing to engage and care for others. Three subcategories were given light through this theme:

f. Engagement or rejection by the church

g. Connecting to Outreach- The participants perceived that those offenders who responded to the mentoring exhibited changed mindsets in which they began to see themselves and others as valuable, they developed a personal relationship with Christ which restored them to not only to God but facilitated restored relationships with others, they changed friends, they improved communication, and ultimately they demonstrated changed behavior.

h. Accountability.

The only unanimous finding from the study was that each of the 21 interviewed mentors from 15 churches and 8 different denominations concluded that their church had the answers to breaking the cycle of repeat offenses, but also that the majority of the members of each of their respective churches could not or would not interact with people in a way that could positively impact lives.

“Each participant articulated both strengths and weaknesses of area churches. The primary strength of the church was reported as both the awareness of the underlying problem and the possession of the solution. Participants reported that the main weakness in the area churches as that the majority of church members were unable or unwilling to extend themselves to help less fortunate or troubled people (Langteau, 2014, p. 90). The reasons for the failure of the majority of church members to engage outsiders was explained as either a lack of concern (apathy) or the sense of fear – neither of which are justified in Scripture. From the research we have done, they may also have experienced cognitive dissonance. The strength and weakness of the churches, it was noted, “are interrelated and represent the presence and absence of the same characteristic (Langteau, 2014, p. 91).

FINDINGS

The findings of the study regarding inmate offenders

was determined to equally hold true for the Christians within local churches. The same failures and associated cognitive dissonance observed in inmate offenders was also revealed in the majority of church members. The same medicine – hope, courage, and faith that transform lives, which is prescribed for jail offenders in faith-based programs is also required for church members whose lives betray their lack of faith. The mentors unanimously expressed the perception that it was essential for themselves and offenders to hold a belief where there was hope for change. Each offender had to want to change and believe they could change. The participants felt inmates may feel stuck, trapped in the false belief that they do not have a choice to break free. Rokeach demonstrated that self-conception is the most central idea impacting the belief system theory because self-conception defines the self (Grube et al., 1994). Yet some inmates could not relate to a life free from the cycle of repeat arrests because they did not think they needed to change or thought they could change. Participants reported that offenders frequently felt unable to change. Bandura’s self-efficacy theory affirms that it is not enough for individuals to have the necessary skills and ability to accomplish a goal unless they also perceive themselves able and capable of doing it (Miller, 2011). Other programs also report that perhaps the greatest hurdle is to help inmates realize they must change and that they could change (Greystone Educational, 2008). Participants conceded that inmates must want to change to have a better life, and that was supported by studies that revealed an offender’s readiness to change was as important as the program designed to support change (Anstiss et al. 2011). Oftentimes, this readiness for change is preceded by persons “hitting rock bottom and have no place else to go or no one else to turn to.

Study findings showed that inmates return to prison in part because churches do not have the parishioner involvement required to engage released offenders. The participants stated that this failure is often because of the lack of spiritual maturity on the part of many church members, exemplified by indifference or fear of offenders. Other research confirms that there are risks inherent in caring for offenders, but asserts the risk are worth the cost (Procter-Smith, 2008). The participants believed that the cause of this problem was that church members and even church leaders are themselves in the process of their own spiritual growth and might continue to struggle in their journey. That is also confirmed by other research which concluded the need for forgiveness and restoration is not just an inmate problem but is a human condition, and the church must remember that all people are equally in need of redemption (Kerley et al. 2010).

The focus group also recommended that a greater degree of community engagement be encouraged. This also included attendance in church activities. Broad-based community engagement both increases

the likelihood of success and is increasingly necessary as a cost-effective means of addressing recidivism (Persky, 2011). This comprehensive community interaction is needed to increase awareness about the problems and solutions concerning public safety and recidivism, and could improve the network of support needed to reduce recidivism.

SOLUTION

The research evidence and findings reveal that many church organizations today are focused inward, with little demonstrative transformation of their own lives and even less devotion to authentically engaging those who are hurting, whether in the church or the community. The Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 is often spoken of while rarely observed in their own communities much less with power around the world. Consequently, as this and other research confirms, there is often little difference between the church organizations and society at large.

By contrast, the New Testament records the dynamic interaction of the early Church as it engaged the culture and witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives. Lives were changed! The early Believers were Christ-centered rather than self-centered, and they did not shrink back from the bondage they witnessed in the world but engaged it with power.

It is one thing to claim that you, your spouse, and children made a public profession and now attend church weekly; it is quite another to witness the power of the Holy Spirit transforming the lives of your family members in an unselfish and fully devoted manner. The solution is not simply to try harder, but to surrender to Christ so hearts may be given life and transformed. Then mere acts of kindness will not be arduous effort and a clanging cymbal but overflowing love that isn't a sacrifice but a joy (1 Corinthians 13). Church members sometimes do not need to learn more but need to submit to the authority of Scripture and apply what they have already learned. At times, it is clear far more has already been learned than is practiced. Scripture admonishes not to be ever learning but never able to come to the truth, thus having a form of godliness that denies the transforming power available to genuine believers (2 Timothy 3:5,7).

Pollsters confirm what we regularly observed; often the plagues in society are similar to what confronts the churches, and for the same reasons. Inmate beliefs and church member beliefs inevitably lead to thoughts, and thoughts give birth to actions. Sometimes what is claimed as a belief is not what is actually believed, as individuals are capable of self-deception. For example, an individual may publicly declare they believe in monogamy while secretly convinced that multiple sex partners would bring them fulfillment. In the case of both inmates and professing Christians, the problem is found in flawed beliefs and likewise the

solution is found in an alignment of genuine beliefs which transform thoughts and inevitably actions. For example, the American Worldview Inventory assessment survey conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona University found from a sample of 1,000 Christian pastors that only slightly more than one out of every three pastors (37%) possessed a biblical worldview ("i.e., adoption of the basic scriptural principles and teachings that form the filter through which we experience, interpret, and respond to the world). Further, of those adults who are theologically-defined as born-again Christians, only 19% identified with a biblical worldview (Barna, 2022, p. 1). Research conducted by Christian Pollster, George Barna also concluded that among adults who considered themselves to be Christian, only 9% held a biblical worldview (Shepherd, 2021). These results are astonishing yet support the findings of our research and explain why many within the churches today need the same faith-based biblical antidote that offenders require. This is further observed through another poll which revealed that over 50% of American adult men in general admit to viewing pornography at least monthly, sadly similar statistically to adult men within churches (ProvenMen, 2014).

Presuppositional beliefs inevitably lead to thoughts, and eventually dictate behavior. The Bible declares, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7a). The primary ministry of the church is to conduct biblical discipleship of new and immature Christians into genuine followers of Christ who in turn then disciple others. "The entire missionary endeavor is built upon this God ordained strategy, and there will be no success apart from this plan. The current reality, however, is that we are expecting those who have never been fully disciplined to a place of maturity to go and produce in the lives of others what they themselves have never experienced. So, this is a call to the Church to get back to the fundamental task of making disciples (Langteau, Blankenship, Dunham, & Jun, 2021, p. 6).

The Lord Jesus Christ admonishes the current church era, and His words eerily describe the current condition yet also gratefully offer a solution: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent (Jesus, Revelation 3:15-19).

The Lord Jesus Christ gave us the answer and solution here. The Lord Jesus commanded the church to be zealous and repent. Revival is needed and it must first begin in the House of God with a call to be

zealous and repent.

CONCLUSIONS

The conceptual frameworks of Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory (1957), Rokeach's Belief System Theory (1960), and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977) each compliment the biblical record of authentic change. This demonstrates that the scholarly and the biblical resonate in this matter. Festinger identified the fact that contrasting and conflicting ideas are a real factor which must be resolved for dynamic and functional relationships. Rokeach pointed out how ideas and thoughts can and do affect behavior, and that beliefs and thoughts not only proceed behavior but unavoidably dictate behavior. Bandura argued that people learn and are changed by modeling behavior in others to the degree that they become convinced of it within themselves. The three theories address the complicated yet wonderful process that leads to transformation.

All 21 participants indicated that the 15 churches and eight denominations they represented had committed members like themselves who practice the faith and were willing to engage and care for offenders. The participants considered this significant and a strength because they believed the church had the answer to breaking recidivism, that the Bible held the truth that sets people free and that the church was, in fact, able to see lives changed. Yet each of the participants, to varying degrees, identified a common problem; that the majority within the churches were unwilling or unable to care for offenders, either because of indifference or fear or as we have found, cognitive dissonance setting in. In this matter, ironically, the churches were much like the offenders, in need of seeing the truth and embracing what is proclaimed from Scripture. The complacent majority within the churches needed the very thing they recognize the offenders needed. The church can and should maintain without compromise the truth established in the Bible, yet must do so without rejecting offenders and refusing to engage them. This admonition was shared by the participants, not to condemn the church of which they were integral and committed members, but to emphasize the need for many within the church to come into agreement with the sound biblical teachings that some in the church have strayed from.

Professionals have long argued that a person needs to "hit rock bottom" or come to a significant awareness of their desperate need before they are receptive to a change in behavior or a change in their lifestyle. A faith-based approach offers personal power for each of the offenders because Christ is an integral part of the message. Their "higher power refers to our Almighty God and our Lord and Savior who redeems us. Meditation may also be one of the more important steps needed to practice and to achieve self-efficacy, which is confirmed by the Bible in Philippians 4:8

which states, Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things. Offenders and the church both need to make new friendships and have support systems so they can trust others and feel like they are part of a community, yet that is only possible when the church obeys Christ and the Great Commission by engaging those in the community.

In the model on the last page, we have created a picture based on the ideas of a negative feedback system (Gossett, 1989) to display the dynamic nature of feedback loops in a complex adaptive system network associated with recidivism in human service programs. From the top-down, the model depicts the presence of outside (external forces) that can affect a person's life and can affect the programs these offenders may be offered. The forces create demands for appropriate needs, services, and wants that each of the offenders have as human beings. To meet these demands and needs, the costs for these programs and services will continue to increase in this country at both the federal and state levels for the 5 million persons on probation or parole. The need for evidence-based practices and strategies that have been found to work for achieving positive results in lowering and reducing recidivism continues to be an important subject for both faith-based programs and traditional programs.

The most important revelation in this model is to realize that if the dependent variables in the middle involving themes and strategies go up, the results on both sides of the equation will change in a desired direction. The individual improvements are more likely to happen and the negative experiences are more likely to go down which will improve the treatment effectiveness regardless of whether the program is faith-based or not. To reduce the 67% of offenders who return to jail or prison after 3 years to a lowered percentage, we must work on both sides of this equation with strategies based on evidence-based practices that have been found to be effective.

Church members and ministers of congregations need to remember that study findings showed many inmates return to prison because churches do not have the parishioner involvement required to engage released offenders specifically or community members in general. The study participants stated that failure was often because of the lack of spiritual maturity on the part of many church members, exemplified by indifference for or fear of offenders. Other research confirms that there are risks inherent in caring for offenders, but asserts the risks are worth the cost (Procter-Smith, 2008). The participants believed that the cause of this problem was that church members and even church leaders are themselves in the process of their own spiritual growth and might continue to struggle in their journey. This finding has also been confirmed by other research which concluded

the need for forgiveness, submission to Christ, and restoration is not just an inmate problem but is a human condition. The church must remember that all people are equally in need of redemption (Kerley et al. 2010, p. 507). When lives betray the lack of faith, broken relationships result, and false hope ultimately leads to disappointment. When lives are changed in Christ, however, the result is a thankful and wondrous transformation.

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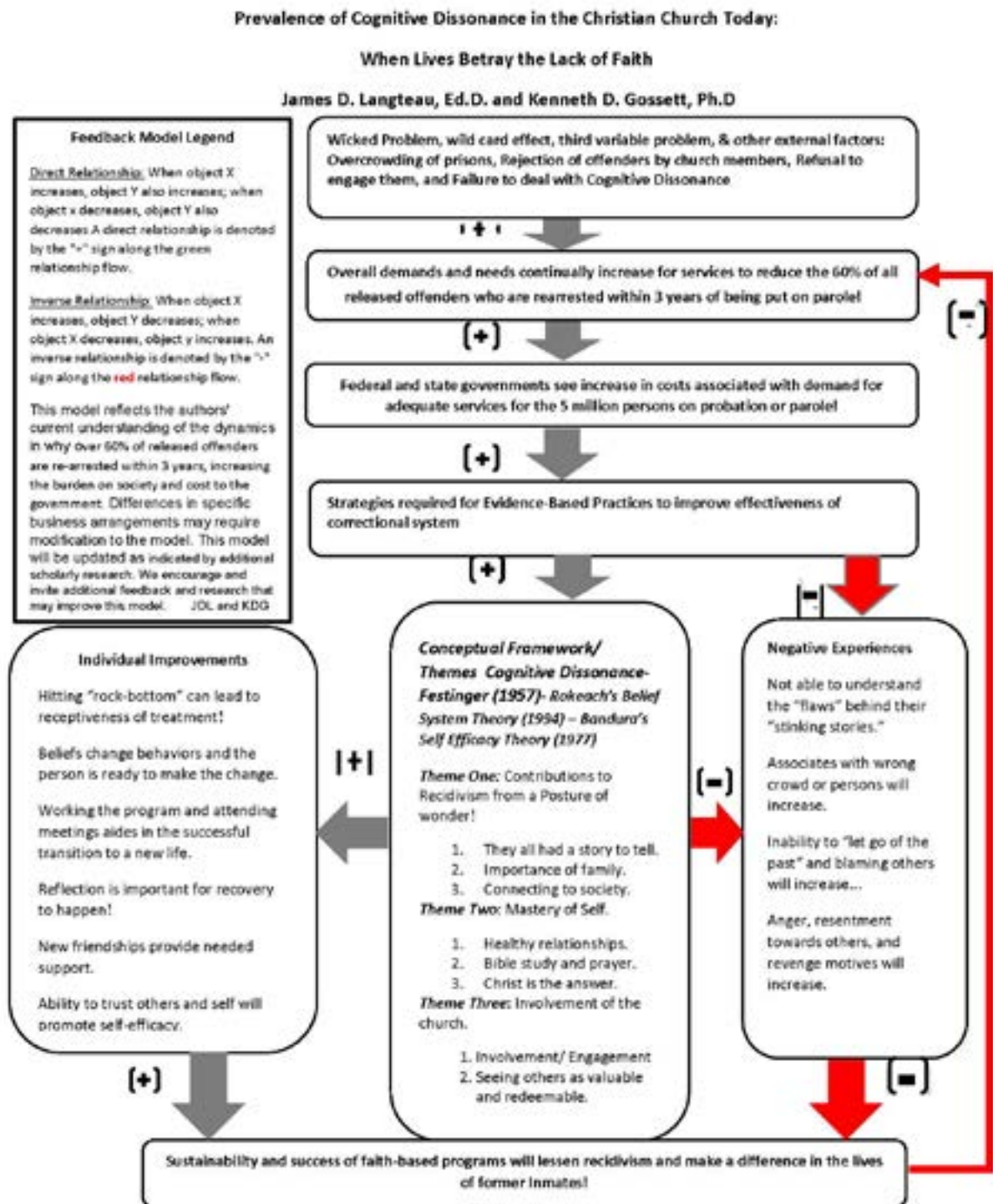


Figure 1: Feedback loops in a complex adaptive system network associated with recidivism in correctional programs.

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Missional Curriculum for Theological Education: Designing for Purpose

Sakunee Kriangchaipon

“The mission of the Church on earth is to serve the mission of God, and the mission of theological education is to strengthen and accompany the mission of the Church.” (Lausanne Movement’s Cape Town Commitment (2011, II.F.4)

The Cape Town Commitment highlights the mission of theological education, emphasizing that it exists to serve the church in fulfilling God’s mission (*missio Dei*). In this context, theological education refers to institutions that equip individuals within Christian contexts and academic settings to participate in God’s mission in the world. As the mission of the church is part of God’s broader work to the world; the mission of theological education does not exist as a separate, independent endeavor. The main task of theological education is to equip students to work alongside the church in every way to accomplish God’s mission in the world, which is to redeem and restore the world. Therefore, theological education is expected to be a training ground for the church. It plays a significant role in strengthening vision, equipping the saints, and sending them into the world to participate in His redemptive mission. Consequently, to accomplish this task, theological education must be missional.

However, we must not limit the meaning of a missional curriculum to merely a series of courses in Missiology, Theology of Missions, or Evangelism offered within an academic program. The meaning is broader and deeper than courses explicitly related to missions or evangelism. Also, we must not assume that a seminary offering a course in mission will, by default, indicate the missional nature of the institution. Rather, being missional goes beyond that by infusing a missional mindset into the entire curriculum and educational experience, including subject matter, pedagogy, ministerial training, and learning management. It is the heartbeat of a theological institution. Instead of viewing mission as just one course among many, a missional theological institution integrates a mission perspective into its identity and activities.

The goal of a missional curriculum is to foster transformative learning that prepares students to embody and advance the mission of the church in today’s complex and diverse world. A missional curriculum must be oriented toward joining God in His work of redeeming and restoring the world. Only when the curriculum is designed and developed to be relevant and responsive to what God has been doing will bring transformation to the lives of the students who are sent out, making a significant impact on society and the world. Everything that

theological institutions offer – whether Biblical studies, Theological studies, Church History, or Practical ministry – should be oriented towards participating with God in His work. It aims to provide an educational framework to equip learners with a deep understanding of what God is working towards and to prepare them to engage actively with the world as transformative agents of God’s mission in both contexts and global ministry. For theological education to be missional, it must be intentional and integrative. A missional perspective and activities must be woven into every aspect of educational settings. The following are some attributes of a missional curriculum that should be considered when designing or developing a curriculum to be missional:

The Missional Curriculum Emphasizes Scripture Engagement

Theological students should not simply read and interpret the Bible but encounter God’s Word in a real and transformative way. Instead of presenting Scripture in fragments, students should grasp the unfolding story of God, who acts to reveal Himself to people of all nations. They should understand God’s purpose: to love and be loved. The result of being trained in theological education should be a life of worship, demonstrated through loving obedience to God. It is the responsibility of theological education to cultivate a “heart-burning” experience for them as they engage with the Bible. The passion for the Word will not remain confined to the classroom but will extend to the community they serve.

Missional Curriculum Privileges Missional Hermeneutics

Missional hermeneutics centers on the mission *Dei* as the overarching narrative thread of the Bible. It involves reading the Bible with a focus on God’s mission in the world. It also seeks to understand biblical texts in terms of their broader redemptive purpose and how they call communities to participate in God’s ongoing mission of reconciliation and transformation. Reading and preaching the Bible through a missional lens can strengthen a sense of calling when integrated into the curriculum. Students can discover their identity and ministry within the context of God’s mission, helping them to understand their place and role clearly as they continue to advance God’s kingdom.

Missional Curriculum Integrates Theological and Contextual Understanding and Practice

The curriculum needs to facilitate the relevance of the Bible to contemporary contexts, reflecting in preaching and teaching, discipleship and leadership, counseling, and worship in church life. A missional curriculum should provide the tools for cultural exegesis and social analysis, which include a deeper exploration of cultural contexts, global perspectives, and practical engagement in ministry. This requires interdisciplinary approaches and engagement with various disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and others, connecting with theological studies (biblical studies, theology, church history, and practical ministry). The integration of theology and context will inform and enrich one another, revealing how God's Word and God's world work together to reveal God Himself.

Missional Curriculum Leads To Ministerial Formation

Ministerial formation seeks to see church leaders being formed and transformed to reflect the image of Christ. Then, they are sent out to fulfill the Great Commission through the church. They are commissioned to engage in God's mission equipped with knowledge and wisdom (head), a passionate commitment to proclaiming God's Word (heart), and proficient ministerial skills (hand).

Missional Curriculum Values the Significance of Contextual Spiritual Studies

Spirituality is multidimensional and dynamic. These dimensions interact and intertwine to form complex lives for people. It is shaped by cultural contexts, traditions, and worldviews. Diverse cultures have unique spiritual practices, rituals, symbols, and beliefs that contribute to the richness and diversity of spiritual experiences and expressions. As a result, individuals seek meaning, purpose, and connection with the sacred, which are distinct across cultures and traditions. Therefore, studying spirituality involves exploring the dynamics of human spiritual aspects to understand human experiences towards the sacred. In turn, this understanding informs how the church provides hope to those who seek it.

The Missional Curriculum Should Not Put an Over-Emphasis on Academic Output and Outcomes But Seek to be Grounded and Focused on Mission-

Theological education today is increasingly dominated by academic priorities, often losing sight of its purpose in mission and character formation. In some countries, governmental policies have pushed theological programs into the university system, placing excessive importance on accreditation. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to hear of graduates who, upon completing their studies, choose not to return to church or engage in mission work. Therefore, a missional curriculum should be at the center, with other disciplines being driven by it.

Missional Curriculum Is the Result of a Shared Vision Between Theological Education and Local Churches

Missional theological education and a missional church can develop effective missional curricula when both entities share the same vision to advance God's kingdom. The clearer the sense of mission, the more educational philosophy and pedagogy will align with that vision. This is a participatory action when local churches and theological seminaries come together to discern God's action in the world and how it would play out in the contemporary context. It is a communal process that requires continuous improvement to lead to more meaningful and impactful action. It is a fellowship in service with one accord, prioritizing *missio Dei*.

CONCLUSION

God has called men and women throughout history to advance His kingdom. Theological education has been invited to participate in God's mission by pouring our efforts into equipping those men and women to be sent out into the world. Our missional endeavor is demonstrated through the instrument we use – a missional curriculum that will assist those who commit themselves to run the racecourse and finish the line that God has called them to accomplish.

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Pneumatiphobia and Pentecostalism among the Yoruba Christians in Nigeria

Benjamin Isola Akano

ABSTRACT

When the Western missionaries established the Christian faith in Nigeria's southwest in the nineteenth century, it was not easy to engage the heavily spiritualised cosmologies of the Yoruba people. Eventually, Pentecostalism brought a breakthrough to the complex spiritual realities they encountered. However, its expression is not without some unbiblical baggage of some parts of the African worldview as they respond to these existential realities. These undesired baggage include pneumatiphobia, an extreme fear of the spirits, as a driving force for Pentecostal-like manifestations. Therefore, this study examined pneumatiphobia and Pentecostalism among the Yoruba Christians in Nigeria. The descriptive study surveyed some Pentecostal prayer practices, using participant observation of events on selected 'Prayer Mountains,' interviews of twenty-five visitors, ten leaders of 'Prayer Mountains,' and ten others. The study revealed that some Pentecostal-like expressions, including energetic prayers and ecstasy, were motivated by fear of the malevolent spirits in the people's worldview. Also, there is a strong attachment to the spirits of the ancestors, and some invoke the 'God of their leaders' rather than praying directly to God, assuming it will hasten answers to prayers. More so, it has reduced Christianity to a 'selfie' faith and a mere tool for solving personal problems. Thus, the writer argued for an overhauling of the current engagement approaches of Yoruba cosmologies and shifting to a more authentic biblical perspective so that the church can be the agent of holistic transformation and God's glory on earth.

Keywords: Christians, Nigeria, Pentecostalism, pneumatiphobia, Prayer Mountain, Yoruba

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, I attended a two-hour revival service of an evangelical gathering in Nigeria's southwest, where Yoruba people are the majority. Though the organizer expected that a bible-based extemporaneous preaching of about thirty to forty minutes would lead to another forty minutes of intense and energetic praying, it ended up that the revival preacher only sparsely flash-read the assigned Bible text without any exposition or application. What followed was a series of fear-instilling, terrifying stories of calamities that had befallen people, Christians included. The response was a spontaneous session of passionate, vigorous, and energetic prayers, including people going into ecstasy. The phenomenon continued as the preacher

interspersed his ministration with more emotion-moving stories that led to renewed frenzy displays in prayer.

The spontaneous and simultaneous prayers experienced were typical of Pentecostals, especially the indigenous ones. African Pentecostalism takes Bible passages like Acts 2:2 and 4:31 more seriously and literally, priding in emotional vis-à-vis physical display in prayer. It may have emerged from their experiences in traditional religions and contrasts sharply with the prayer tradition most mainline evangelicals inherited from their mother mission agencies, where prayer is either read or said solemnly by an individual. In contrast, the others respond with 'Amen,' intermittently or at the end of the prayer. However, a critical factor that enhanced the frenzied atmosphere was the fear instilled by the stories presented as reported by the revival preacher. The calamities reported in all the stories were associated with the malevolent spirits and their human agents on earth. Thus, the preacher leveraged this pneumatiphobic tendency to advocate invoking Pentecostal power for victory. This is a common phenomenon in 'Prayer Mountains,' and it has often led to an overdependence on the reality of people's pneumatiphobic experiences and the neglect of authentic biblical motivation and faith.

Therefore, this paper examines how an extreme fear of spirits, a carry-over from the traditional African worldview, has often influenced the Pentecostal prayer practices among the indigenous Yoruba Christians of southwest Nigeria. In this research, Pentecostalism refers to all strands, including charismatic manifestations across denominations. The research is descriptive, and the researcher employed a qualitative means to survey some indigenous Pentecostal prayer practices on ten (10) 'Prayer Mountains,' interviewing twenty-five (25) regular visitors, seven (7) Prayer Mountain prophets, and five (5) other Christians on the subject of pneumatiphobia and Pentecostalism. The research agrees that while some spiritual experiences are real, some are fear-instilled and that some contemporary Pentecostal approaches to engaging the Yoruba spiritual cosmology need an overhauling and replacement with more authentic biblical approaches.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the literature to explicate pneumatiphobia and Pentecostalism among the Yoruba Christians in Nigeria. Areas covered include the fundamental spiritual realities in Yoruba

religious worldview, Pentecostal Christianity in Yorubaland, and pneumatophobia in Yoruba Christian Pentecostalism.

Fundamental Spiritual Realities in Yoruba Religious Worldview

Yoruba people in Nigeria are in the southwestern states of Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ogun, Lagos, and Ekiti states and speak various dialects.¹ There are also Yoruba people in the neighbouring states of Kwara and Kogi to the north, Edo to the south, and Benin Republic to the West. According to Toyin Falola, though they have different ethnic subgroups like Oyo, Ijebu, Ijesa, Ekiti, Egba, and Igbomina, they take advantage of their collective identity, especially for nationalistic prestige.² They are “a collection of diverse people bound together by a common language, history, and culture. . . . Yoruba mythology holds that all Yoruba people descended from a hero called Oduduwa.”³ Olakunle Folami, Taiwo Olaiya, and Adebajji Akintoye affirm the historical acceptance of Ile-Ife as the cradle of the Yoruba and the ‘source of civilisation’.⁴ Some archaeological findings show them to be one of the oldest peoples found in the tropical forests of West Africa.⁵ They see themselves as people originating from one person, Oduduwa, and a place, Ife.

Scholars like John Olopade and Samel Kunhiyop agree with John Mbiti’s assertion that “the spiritual world of African peoples is very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits and the living-dead.”⁶ This assertion is more real among the Yoruba than many other cultures. Yoruba people are a single African people with the largest collection of divinities – 1,700. These divinities, called *òrìṣà*, are categories of spiritual beings regarded as God’s associates with *Òrìṣà-nlá*, or Supreme divinity, as God’s earthly deputy.⁷ Kunhiyop further states that the Yoruba people believe that the full responsibility of all affairs belongs to the Supreme Deity, while humans only follow their orders through priests and diviners.⁸ This is a reason for their firm belief in destiny that only the Supreme Being can unravel its mystery. Since God

is immanent, these lesser spiritual entities, namely, divinities, spirits and ancestors, are His personalised representation that they can relate to in daily affairs.⁹

Yoruba believe that there are different forms of spirits – whether those created or those who turned so after death. They also believe animals, rivers, and other natural entities have spirits. Though invisible, they may make themselves visible to human beings.¹⁰ This is one of the reasons those who engage in farming, hunting, or other forest or river-related vocations need ‘spiritual fortification.’ Kunhiyop adds that spirits are either benevolent or malevolent, and their activities make Africans generally hold to a dualistic theodicy, believing that good comes from God and evil comes from malevolent spirits or evil people through witchcraft, sorcery, and other magic powers.¹¹

Two essential paradoxes make Yoruba spiritualized cosmologies relevant to this research. First, though spirits are more powerful than humans, making humans fear them, they can be manipulated for evil and personal advantage.¹² The religious officials or leaders conduct various ceremonies, rituals, and other specialised activities to do this. They are supposedly trained and have good knowledge of the religion. Consequently, they are often respected by the religious community. The second paradox is that, though these spirits are powerful but not as omnipotent as God, they may still oppose God’s will in their activities. This is one of the reasons humans seek the assistance of other spirits, particularly the benevolent spirits, to counter the activities of these malevolent spirits. This also points to why there are good and bad magic powers.

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1. Peter Ropo Awoniyi, “Yoruba Cultural Approach to Justice and Peace and Its Influence on the Church in the Southwest Nigeria” *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology* XIX (2), 2014: 1-2. 1-10.

2. Toyin Falola, “Atlantic Yoruba and the Expanding Frontiers of Yoruba Culture and Politics” *J.F. Odunjo Lecture* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 2012), 17.

3. “Yoruba” Countries and their Cultures. Retrieved from <https://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Yoruba.html> <October 12, 2019>.

4. Olakunle Michael Folami & Taiwo Akanbi Olaiya, “Gender, Storytelling and Peace Construction in a Divided Society: A Case Study of Ife/Modakeke Conflict” *Cogent Social Sciences*, Vol. 2 (2016): 4. DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2016.1159015; S. Adebajji Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People* (Dakar: Amalion Publishing, 2014), 18.

5. Akintoye, 19.

6. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1982), 75; John A. Olopade, *Introduction to World Religions* (Osogbo: Oluwatoyin Publishers, 2018), 63.

7. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 76.

8. Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Kaduna: Baraka Press & Publishers Ltd, 2004), 16.

9. Kunhiyop, 16.

10. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 78, 79.

11. Kunhiyop, 17, 18.

12. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 79, 80.

humans fear them, they can be manipulated for evil and personal advantage.¹³ The religious officials or leaders conduct various ceremonies, rituals, and other specialised activities to do this. They are supposedly trained and have good knowledge of the religion. Consequently, they are often respected by the religious community.¹⁴ The second paradox is that, though these spirits are powerful but not as omnipotent as God, they may still oppose God's will in their activities.¹⁵ This is one of the reasons humans seek the assistance of other spirits, particularly the benevolent spirits, to counter the activities of these malevolent spirits. This also points to why there are good and bad magic powers.

The category of the 'living-dead' refers to the departed of up to five generations who have been considered the guardians of the family heritage and ethos. They are often regarded as the best of their intermediaries with God because they understand the situations of the living since they had been there before their departure.¹⁶ A freshly departed soul is assumed to be roaming within the vicinity of their abode. This may be one of the reasons the living pour libation to ensure they do not offend the living dead. Thus, while the living desires the intermediary roles of the living dead, they also fear them because they may want to inflict punishment on those who violate the ethos of the family or clan. Kunhiyop affirms that the ancestors may appear to their descendants through dreams or visions to share information, including instructing them on steps to take in different situations.¹⁷ It is common to hear people speak of their grandparents or parents appearing to them in dreams to instruct them on preparing some portions of herbal concoctions to heal a terrible sickness or what incantation to use to overcome some spells. Because of these benefits, they do not want to offend the living dead as doing so may lead to punishment such as misfortunes, barrenness, war, and sicknesses, among others.¹⁸ Till date, some Yoruba look forward to their parents appearing to them in dreams.

From the foregoing, the Yoruba people are self-conscious of spirits, deities, gods, or ancestors in every aspect of their lives, including diet and dressing. Kunhiyop affirms that religion, as a function of beliefs in God and other spiritual entities among the Yoruba, defines their ethical values. This is the reason for their being incurably religious.¹⁹ These values often serve as bases for taboos in Yorubaland. For instance, the Òrìṣà-nlá worshippers do not eat snails; worshippers of Èṣù, the trickster deity, will not eat fried maise,

while the worshippers of Ògún, the deity of iron, will not eat roasted yam.²⁰ As Fatou Diop and Dwight Merunka rightly put it, some African traditional attires are attached to religious identity, ethnicity, and nationality and religious-spiritual meanings, benefits, instrumental values, or end goals motivate them toward such identity.²¹ Bukola Oyeniya avers that some colours are meant for the devotees seeking favour from the deity, illustrating that "the red colour . . . implied certain spiritual state for Şàngó and Ògún worshippers. White, so also water, was important to Òṣun worshippers. They complement the use of water with the use of a white dress. Both relate to the virtue of colour and the spiritual quality of water."²² Thus, the Yoruba people are conscious of the various spiritual personalities in all they do, whether directly religious or non-religious. Hence, there is no sacred-secular dichotomy of any sort.

These cognitive orientations about the spirits often affect the day-to-day way of responding to situations that come their way. For instance, walking into cobwebs is not ordinary, particularly if it becomes a repeated experience, even if it is due to some obvious uncleanness or abandonment of the route. They attach some spiritual connotations to such an experience. Similarly, stepping out or entering one's house may not be done anyhow: a particular leg must go out first or step in. These all dictate how they respond to issues. They believe that a malevolent spirit causes problems, and sometimes, they carry such traditional African perceptions over into the Christian faith.

Pentecostal Christianity in Yorubaland

Scholars agree that the nineteenth-century efforts of the Western missionaries yielded an outstanding result that led to a firm establishment of Christianity in most parts of Africa.²³ Though Adrian Hastings was concerned that the impact did not include the whole of Christian life, he had affirmed that the missionary works of the mission churches had spread considerably and became known across most of the continent.²⁴ Notable coverage areas include southwest Nigeria, where the Yoruba people form a major ethnic group. However, engaging the heavily spiritualised cosmology they encountered among the Yoruba

20. Bolanle WAHAB, "African Traditional Religions, Environmental Health and Sanitation in Rural Communities" *The Environment*, Vol 1, No. 1 (April 2004): 1-9, 3.

21. Fatou Diop and Dwight Merunka, "African Tradition and Global Consumer Culture: Understanding Attachment to Traditional Dress Style in West Africa," *International Business Research*, Vol. 6, No. 11 (2013): 1-14. 2, 7, 8, 12. doi: 10.5539/ibr.v6n11p1.

22. Bukola Adeyemi Oyeniya, *Dress and Identity in Yorubaland, 1880-1980* (Leiden: Leiden University Repository, 2012), 162-163.

23. Matthews A. Ojo, "An Overview of the History of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria," in *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Eds. Philip W. Barnes, Bazil Bhasera, Matthews A. Ojo, Jack Rantho, Trevor Yoakum, and Misheck Zulu, 13-27 (AB-316, 2021), 14.

24. Adrian Hastings' *A History of African Christianity, 1950-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 67.

13. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 79, 80.

14. John S. Mbiti, *African Religion* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2015), 11-12.

15. Kunhiyop, 17, 18.

16. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 83. This seemingly has a Christological resonance based on the message of Hebrews 2:14-18.

17. Kunhiyop, 19, 20.

18. Kunhiyop, 20.

19. Kunhiyop, 13.

people was difficult.

Historically, the African Indigenous Churches, African Initiated Churches or African Instituted Churches emerged out of the need to deal with issues pertinent to African people's experience, which theologies of the Western missionaries did not practically handle.²⁵ There was a great concern that the White missionaries did not do well in incarnating Christian practices into the local cultural milieu.²⁶ Therefore, African emphasis on spirituality, especially prayer, for solving all existential problems of man was to reflect the African factor in the church's mission in Africa. As earlier stated, they took the events of the Church in Acts literally, expecting all true Pentecostals to manifest those practices, irrespective of their existential challenges. This is noticeable in Nigeria, particularly among the Yoruba people.

Though the indigenous churches movement may be traceable to 1817 schisms and secessions from Methodist missions in Sierra Leone, which spread rapidly but independently across South Africa, Congo-Kinshasa and Nigeria, Omoyajowo notes that the schism is not a result of anti-West or anti-European attitude.²⁷ As far as the intentions of the people are concerned, they are Christo-centric movements aimed at making the Christian faith provide answers to all life's problems. Examples include the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Cherubim and Seraphim Movement (C&S), the Church of the Lord (Aladura) and the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC).²⁸ Notably, these foremost examples are all from southwest Nigeria among the Yoruba people. Thus, going by Ikem et al.'s assertion that Nigeria is the leading frontier of the Pentecostal explosion in Africa, the southwest was critical to this reality that has three phases: first, a blend between foreign and indigenous Pentecostalism (1930s to 1960); second, interdenominational campus fellowships (1970s to 1980s); and third, a shift from traditional or classic Pentecostalism to neo-Pentecostalism (1990s till date).²⁹ These phases have areas of similarity, including associating most problems to spiritual roots to which prayer is the primary response.

Ojo asserts that "beginning from the early 1970s, a new form of Christianity emerged with the rise of

25. Deji Isaac Ayegboyin, "Aladura Spirituality: Authentic African Initiative in Christian Missions" *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (2011): 166. Ayegboyin, "Aladura Spirituality: Authentic African Initiative in Christian Missions," 166.

26. Michael Ogunewu & Deji Ayegboyin, "Moses Orimolade Tunolase, Joseph Ayodele Babalola, Josiah Olunowo Oshitelu, and Samuel Bilewu Joseph Oschoffa: Four Trailblazers of the Aladura Movement in Nigeria" *Journal of African Christian Biography*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (April 2017), 6.

27. Ayegboyin, "Aladura Spirituality: Authentic African Initiative in Christian Missions," 166; J. Akinyele Omoyajowo, *Cherubim and Seraphim: the History of African Independent Church* (Lagos: NOK Publishers International, 1982), xiv.

28. David B. Barrett, "African Initiated Church Movement:" 43-44. In A. Scott Moreau (Ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 43.

29. Afamekune Patrick Ikem, Confidence N. Ogbonna & Olu-sola Ogunnubi, "Pentecostalism, Electoral Prophetism and National Security Challenges in Nigeria," *African Security* 2020: 3-7. DOI: 10.1080/19392206.2020.1731111.

Pentecostal and Charismatic movements."³⁰ Their emphases include radical conversion experiences like Saul's, baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, literal interpretation of the Bible, healing and miraculous manifestations, and exercise of power over all demonic manifestations.³¹ However, these features seem to combine indigenous and imported cosmological worldviews. While their outlook reveals Westernised articulation, "their basic religious cosmology is rooted in the African worldviews of spirits, evil, and fear of the present and the future. Moreover, their social goal is congruent with the general aspirations of African traditional quest for long life, money, power, success and fame in a competitive but dislocated society."³² In practice, three strands of Pentecostalism present in Nigeria have blending impacts on one another, making distinguishing them impossible.³³ For instance, they all have this pneumatophobic tendency as a means of retaining their members and attracting non-members.

Thus, some features of imported Western Pentecostalism, imparted Western Pentecostalism, and Pentecostalism independent of the West have mingled. A keen observer of Christian practices among the Yoruba people would agree that it is difficult today to use prayer programmes to categorise churches into Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestants, African Indigenous, or Independent Pentecostals, as it used to be. One other useful digression is that even Muslim groups are venturing into some forms of Pentecostal-like prayer practices because they want to retain members and attract non-members.³⁴ Then, one may infer that 'Pentecostalism' is no longer as conceived in Acts 2 or as re-encountered in the Asuza 1906, but a tool for responding to fear of anything with spiritual connotation. This is pneumatophobia.

Pneumatophobia in Yoruba Christian Pentecostalism

Pneumatophobia refers to an extreme fear of spirits. Its causes range from genetic to environmental factors.³⁵ Environmental factors include the socialisation process that makes people view spirits

30. Ojo, "An Overview of the History of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria," 15.

31. Ojo, "An Overview of the History of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria," 15.

32. Ojo, Matthews A. (2018) "Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements in Nigeria: Factors of Growth and Inherent Challenges," *The WATS Journal: An Online Journal from West Africa Theological Seminary*. Vol. 3, No. 1, Article 5: 76 (74-94). <https://place.asbury-seminary.edu/watsjournal/vol3/iss1/>.

33. Benjamin Akano "Mentoring as an Effective Strategy for Leadership Development in Contemporary African Pentecostalism" *Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Prophetic Movements Journal* Volume 3 Issue 2 (July 2022): 23-33. Available online at: <https://noyam.org/journals/pecanep/>.

34. M. Janson, "Crossing Borders: The Case of NASFAT or 'Pentecostal Islam' in Southwest Nigeria," *Social Anthropology* 28 (2), (2020): 418-433. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12769>. The social media also has a number of such 'Pentecostal' manifestations: "Female Muslim Cleric Conducting Deliverance," September 25, 2021. <https://fb.watch/sxm3hN74ey/>. Accessed June 6, 2024; "Muslim Cleric Spotted Performing Deliverance inside Mosque," March 11, 2023. <https://fb.watch/sxmEtbOm37/>. Accessed June 6, 2024.

35. "Pneumatophobia (Fear of Spirits)" *Psych Times*. <https://www.psychtimes.com>. Accessed April 9, 2024.

in a particular light. As with other phobias, it causes significant distress and affects the way people live their lives.³⁶ The Yoruba spiritual cosmology is complex. The whole psychic atmosphere of the African setting, especially the villages, is filled with the reality of mystic powers.³⁷ Notably, most of the experiences of Africans may appear as mere fiction to outsiders. Nevertheless, they are a source of worry for those who went through the experience. For instance, I met Boti, an okada rider (a commercial motorcycle used for transport in parts of Nigeria) in a Yoruba city. He narrated how he transported a man to an agreed destination one night, only to realise that the man was a 'living dead,' as he began to shiver for cold after being paid the agreed fare. He had to stop his business abruptly that night. Though Boti is a pseudonym, his story is an authentic life experience that, though difficult to prove, other Yoruba can associate with it.

Some have narrated that they felt swollen/heavy heads after buying wares in some local night markets. They often concluded the strange experience could only be with a perceived 'living dead' or other spirits' wearing' human body temporarily. These are just some of the different experiences in Yoruba spiritual cosmology. While man is destined to die once and face God's judgment (Heb. 9:27), one must provide more than an ivory tower theology of this reality. They want a practical theology that speaks to this situation more practically. They attribute every strange occurrence that is beyond their understanding to spirituality. For instance, they do not know how to explain the rising of a fallen tree after 24 hours except by spiritual connotation.³⁸ People have also reported that they found some household utensils after some big trees were cut down, showing that some activities were happening inside such trees. Such activities go beyond what humans can explain. This is also true of any illness or disease that defies medical solutions. It is often associated with some spiritual forces. While the Pentecostal Christian faith seems to respond to this reality more practically, its contemporary approach has some unbiblical elements that become a source of concern.

According to Osadolor Imasogie:

The atmosphere is usually pervaded by fear of a possible inadvertently provoked anger of the divinity as well as the possible harmful consequences of the evil intention of diabolical fellow worshipers who may want to experiment with their newly acquired magical powers. . . . The main emphasis is on propitiation to avert calamities because, in the African worldview, man is constantly at war with the evil spiritual forces as manifested in witchcraft and magical power as

36. Manchester Hypnotherapy & Counselling, "Treatment of Phobia." <https://www.manchester-hypnotherapy.com>. Accessed April 8, 2024.

37. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 197.

38. Sola Isola, "How 100-yr-old tree fell, rose again in 24hours," *Vanguard* October 14, 2021. <https://www.vanguardngr.com>. Access June 6, 2024.

*wielded by fellow human beings.*³⁹

He adds that the evil forces may cause evil in people after being bribed by enemies or when the spirits are driven by hunger. This may be why a typical Yoruba prayer for travellers would be that they would not travel 'on the day the road is hungry.' By implication, there is a spirit behind the physical road, which, if hungry, will demand the flesh of those travelling on it.

Both Matthews Ojo and Scott MacDonald agree that the African strand of Pentecostalism incorporates and accommodates traditional African worldviews that are not necessarily biblical. Ojo explains that:

*Despite their modern outlook, African Pentecostalism is steeped in primal worldviews that have been made elastic to accommodate essential questions about life, whether in its traditional moorings or in its modern perspectives. Hence, with their emphases on demonic oppression, spiritual warfare, and healing and deliverance activities, it is evident that Neo-Pentecostals continue to grapple with power in its various manifestations.*⁴⁰

MacDonald affirms that their music and prayer often set a theme that shows that "Christians are at war with spiritual forces, and our tumultuous services revolve around that conflict through declarations and exorcisms."⁴¹ This is simply because, as hostile spiritual forces, demons bear the primary blame for human sufferings and calamities. Hence, African Pentecostalism is more concerned with spiritual warfare than praying for lost souls.

Further, Conrad Mbewe asserts that Africans have been made to believe that some humans associate with spiritual forces to bring about curses that lead to illnesses and afflictions. In some cases, they are spirits of the ancestors who have been wronged by the living, wrongly or rightly. Thus, they often cause barrenness, infertility, and other misfortunes. Sometimes, they are generational curses due to what ancestors have done wrongly.⁴² This agrees with Mbiti's assertion that they fear magic, sorcery and witchcraft. Two major types of magic may motivate people to pray passionately. These are contagious and homoeopathic magic. In contagious magic, people hurt individuals by pricking objects belonging to them. This is one of the reasons people do not want to leave their hair, nails, clothes, or other objects they suspect may be used against them. Some Pentecostals are always careful not to

39. The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomoso, *A Voice of Conscience: Selected Speeches of Rev Prof Osadolor Imasogie* (Ogbomoso: Kingdom Impact Publishing and Media Ltd, 2022), 133-134.

40. Ojo, "An Overview of the History of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria," 25.

41. Scott MacDonald, "Spiritual Powers," in *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Eds. Philip W. Barnes, Basil Bhasera, Matthews A. Ojo, Jack Rantho, Trevor Yoakum, and Misheck Zulu, 53-62 (AB-316, 2021), 54.

42. Conrad Mbewe, "Illnesses, Curses, and Afflictions," in *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Eds. Philip W. Barnes, Basil Bhasera, Matthews A. Ojo, Jack Rantho, Trevor Yoakum, and Misheck Zulu, 75-83 (AB-316, 2021), 76,77.

leave any of their items that may be used against them. In homoeopathic magic, they hurt individuals by pricking the representation of what looks like the person. These include a mirror image and a wooden doll.⁴³

These experiences often push Yoruba people to seek higher powers to control the powers working against them. For the Christians among them who still have such fear, the way out is the Pentecostal power. Hence, it helps them get involved in spiritual warfare programs in prayer houses, prayer mountains, or prayer camps. The goals are related to dealing with the powers that want to manipulate them. In other cases, 'deliverance ministers' have asked adult Christians to travel hundreds of kilometres to their village of origin, ask for the location where their placentas are buried, exhume them and 'destroy' whatever contagious magic that may be associated with them. Some pastors have asked their members to 'cover' themselves with the blood of Jesus to prevent every form of homoeopathic magic that may be targeted at them.

Often, when there is a snake bite or a scorpion sting, the first place to look at is not the physical reason that may have attracted the scorpion or snake to where the people are, especially in the house. Such occurrences are often associated with sorcery, believing that an enemy may have sent such harmful creatures from the spirit realm.⁴⁴ A familiar prayer song in this regard is:

Evil arrow: go back to the sender

Evil arrow: go back to the sender

The idea in the prayer song that they often sing with vigour is that everyone always has one human enemy somewhere who may be sending some 'evil arrows' of sorcery representing such snake bites, scorpion stings, or other calamities, including misfortunes, sicknesses, sorrow, and other mystical experiences.⁴⁵

Thus, it is agreeable that the formation of indigenous Pentecostalism was vital to the growth of Christianity in 20th-century Africa because of its response to their fears and other existential challenges, as opined by some scholars.⁴⁶ However, one cannot but agree with Joel Mokhoathi that its practices have a high tendency of undesired syncretism.⁴⁷ The implication is that Christians must subject every attempt at contextualisation to critical examination. As shown by the findings in this research, the argument is that some Pentecostal manifestations of some churches,

particularly on Prayer Mountains, in Yorubaland, reflect syncretic patterns that contradict the biblical standard.

METHODOLOGY

This research used descriptive design to elucidate pneumatophobia and Pentecostalism among the Yoruba Christians in Nigeria. It employed a qualitative means to survey some indigenous Pentecostal prayer practices on ten (10) 'Prayer Mountains.' Apart from observation of the practices, the researcher used research assistants to interview twenty (25) regular visitors to Prayer Mountains, ten (10) leaders, ministers, or prophets of the visited locations, and five (5) other Christians. Issues of concern ranged from what led the visitors to the Prayer Mountains, their belief in ancestors, their salvation experience, and testimonies about those Prayer Mountains. On the part of the ministers on those Prayer Mountains, the focus includes operations of the Prayer Mountains, statistics of people visiting their Mountains, reasons for their visits, their links with fathers of faith, and general testimonies of the Mountains.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A 'Prayer Mountain' (called Ori Oke in Yoruba, meaning a hilltop or mountain top) is a place of solitary worship and prayer, usually established for Christians and those who have confidence in the Christian God. Such a place is often free from interruption and obstruction so that the seeker of God may not be distracted while sorting out critical spiritual issues. While this concept has different connotations, keen observers of the practices on Prayer Mountains agree that its etymology implies 'destiny at the top'. Some understand it to be a place that is geographically closer to heaven, the abode of God, and that the Spirit of God resides permanently on the Mountains.⁴⁸ Though the contemporary Prayer Mountain phenomenon cuts across different churches and denominations in Yorubaland, it originated with the indigenous churches like the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Cherubim and Seraphim Movement (C&S), Church of the Lord (Aladura), and Celestial Church of Christ (CCC).⁴⁹ They usually appoint resident pastors, prophets, and prophetess to oversee the affairs of the place and render spiritual assistance to its visitors.⁵⁰

The founders of Prayer Mountains trace their beliefs to the Bible. The first group traces their establishment to Moses' encounter on Mount Sinai in Exodus 3:4, 19, 20. A second group associates the prayer mountain

48. Akiti Glory Alamu, "The Do's and Don'ts: A Theological Inquiry into the Kpim of Ori Oke in Ilorin Metropolis," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, Vol. 6 No. 1 (2020). <https://www.scielo.org/DOI:10.17570/stj.2020.v6n1.a13>.

49. Alamu, <https://www.scielo.org>.

50. Deji Ayegboyan & Solomon A. Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: A Historical Perspective* (Lagos: Greater Height Publications, 1999), 78-79.

43. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 200.

44. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 200.

45. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 200.

46. Ezekiel O. Ajani, "Leadership Dynamics and the Trans-Nationalisation of Nigeria Pentecostal Missions." *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology*, vol. XIII, no. 1, 2008: 154; B. I. Akano, "Mentoring as an Effective Strategy for Leadership Development in Contemporary African Pentecostalism." *Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Prophetic Movements Journal* (PECANEP), Vol. 3, Issue 2 - July, 2022: 23; Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 232-234.

47. Joel Mokhoathi, Abstract of "From Contextual Theology to African Christianity: The Consideration of Adiaphora from a South African Perspective" *Religions*, Vol. 8, No. 266 (2017): 1. DOI: 10.3390/rel8120266.

phenomenon with Jesus' experience in Matthew 17:1-5. A further establishment of the phenomenon came through the great revival of Apostle Ayo Babalola in 1930.⁵¹ However, a contemporary Prayer Mountain is conceptual rather than geophysical. Observably, while it is often desired to be located on a mountain, hill, rocks, or other elevated platforms, some gospel ministers declare a selected campground, retreat centre, or even a church auditorium as Prayer Mountains as long as they converge regularly for prayer programmes other than the regular worship services.

Modes of Operation on Prayer Mountains

Personal observation shows that most prayer mountains operate similarly. First, there are specific times when visitors gather in a hall or any designated point for corporate devotion in the morning, evening, or both. Second, they allow each to go to different parts of the mountain for personal prayers. Third, they have specific programmes monthly and quarterly, and 'as the Spirit leads,' when they invite 'heavily anointed prophets' to minister to the spiritual needs of the people. Some visitors' target is when such renowned prophets visit to cause a 'Bethesda' kind of stir (John 5:4). This researcher's observations and confirmation from the visitors and ministers of the Prayer Mountains show that attendance ranges from a ten to a few hundred, depending on how long a Mountain has been established and the kinds of testimonies from the place.

On assurance, findings revealed that what draws the majority of the visitors to the Prayer Mountains is their belief that prophets generally, and particularly those located on mountains, have special anointing to deal with spirits. One of the prophets noted that the physical altitude of the mountain has a spiritual implication of placing an individual above their enemies. Therefore, they are so committed to their prophets and can follow them to any 'Mountains' as they seek solutions to their life challenges. They stated further that some have been drawn to specific mountains because of others' testimonies as they battle their life challenges. One of the prophets stated that a 25-year-old young man who was struck with the 'spirit of madness' is now healed while a baby of six who was concluded to go for surgery did not need to go for surgery because she experienced healing. Some reveal that Prophets and Apostles are more anointed for miracles, signs, wonders, and deliverance than the pastors. This may be a reason the ministers go by the title of Prophet and Apostle.

Perception on Source of Problems

People visit Prayer Mountains for different problems, including diseases, medical conditions, emotional and psycho-social disorders, medical conditions, poverty, lack of marriage suitor, joblessness, and lack of promotion. Most of the visitors

interviewed assert that the sources of their problems are spiritual. Some refer to the problems as arrows or attacks from the enemies of their destinies. They also feel that some of their enemies are from their extended families. One of them expressly affirmed that the spiritual arrow from his extended family created a problem in his marriage that made him visit the prayer mountain for the first time. Like other visitors, he noted that he had often associated every problem with a 'spirit.'

The views of the majority of the interviewed visitors are built on Yoruba understanding of the world as a battlefield. According to a woman, her life problems are a function of spiritual forces of darkness, or malevolent spirits, that battle her God-given destiny. Sometimes, they see the Prayer Mountains as places of refuge from where to seek cover from the arrows of the wicked spirits. Some Christians who do not visit Prayer Mountains state that some of the visitors they know believe that the spiritual source of their problems is in their family. So, they often keep away from members of their family.

Beliefs and Perceptions about Ancestors

Findings also discovered that they revere some past and present Christian leaders whose ministries have been associated with power manifestations. These heroes of faith are majorly ministers from the African Indigenous Churches (AICs). The prominent ones whose names cut across these churches, irrespective of denominational lines, include Joseph Ayo Babalola of Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Enoch Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Samuel Oshoffa of the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), and Moses Orimolade of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement (C & S). For instance, they refer to God as 'Olorun Ayo Babalola,' meaning 'God of Ayo Babalola.' They believe their anointing is still 'alive' to attract miraculous solutions to their problems. This sounds like the concept of living dead in African understanding. These names were not limited to the denomination or church that a hero belongs. Adeboye's or Babalola's names are heard in a C & S mountain, though they belong to RCCG and CAC, respectively. Some even say they combine the 'anointing' and 'calling' of these heroes of faith to claim their right from God.

Other Issues

One of the common ideas among AICs is the use of 'faith objects' like water, oil, and fruits. Prophets has asked some to sprinkle 'sacred water' upon a person or location where the activities of the spirits are suspected. In some mountains, to not have water for special prayer is to be incomplete. Assuredly, people bought prayer-customised bottled water that should cost fifty naira at one thousand. Sometimes, visitors to Prayer Mountains have been asked to bring a photograph or other items of the loved ones they are praying for because such individuals are

51. Alamu, <https://www.scielo.org>.

not around. This is patterned after the traditional African contagious or homoeopathic magic. When the clients were asked to bring fruits, like bananas, apples, oranges and coconuts, the prophet said the fruit would serve as a form of 'sacrifice' to appease the spirits troubling their clients so they could leave the host alone. The researcher has seen cases where people from the AICs have placed assorted fruits by the streamside. Others do not attach any importance or meaning to such fruits.

Another issue of concern is a low emphasis on the salvation experience. This is obvious in most of the sessions attended because some prophets believe they have been sent to all oppressed people, irrespective of their religious backgrounds and orientation towards Christ. Some individuals attested that a prophetess told them her mandate was not to tell people to leave their religion but to tell them to be morally upright and deliver them from their problems. Their emphasis is on the problem and the enemies that brought the problems. In most cases, they do not even probe the clients' roles in their problems.

Also, most regular visitors often idolise the prophets, and they tend to believe the words of the prophets more than the Bible because their prayers and prophetic declarations often come to pass quickly. Some of them are even ignorant of God's Word concerning their situations. Some interviewees stated that some have returned home with more problems than what took them to the mountains because they do not handle them holistically. I know some people who went to Prayer Mountains for what later turned out to be medical cases, which had got worse by the time they eventually went for medical attention. Another prominent issue raised is that some self-inflicted character problems have often been associated with 'spirits.' For instance, instead of looking for biblical steps to overcoming emotional problems like envy, anger, and lust, they only look for a spiritual solution on the mountains, praying 'all manners of prayers.'

CONCLUSION

In explicating pneumatophobia and Pentecostalism among the Yoruba Christians in southwest Nigeria, the researcher argued for a change in perspectives and approaches to engaging Yoruba cosmologies. He noted that Pentecostalism, especially the indigenous strand, brought a significant breakthrough to the complex spiritual realities missionaries encountered in Africa. He also pointed out that the breakthrough is not without some unbiblical carry-overs, such as an extreme fear of the spirits - pneumatophobia, from some parts of their indigenous worldview. Thus, because of the fear of the spirits that dominates their cosmologies, some seemingly Pentecostal manifestations among them, particularly on 'Prayer Mountains,' may not necessarily be authentic Pentecostal manifestations but an expression of their pneumatophobia with Pentecostal colouration.

Consequently, their prayer has remained focused on dealing with or escaping from the enemies of their destiny. As a result, their faith has become a 'selfie' (self-focus) type, and they rarely understand or remember the mission of the Church, which is to bring shalom to the world. He advocated a shift to a more authentic biblical perspective for the church to be the agent of holistic transformation and God's glory on earth. To achieve this, all hands must be on the deck, and the following recommendations are critical:

First, theological educators, theologians, and other scholars in Africa must clearly emphasise the nature and mission of the church on earth. Some Christians perceive the Christian faith as only a means of dealing with their existential needs with no attached responsibility for them. Understanding the church's nature and mission will help them see the church in its rightful place as the agent of mission Dei, bringing shalom to the world.

Second, the stakeholders of Christianity in Africa, including theological educators, theologians, leaders of denominations and ecumenical bodies, must educate believers and ministers on subjecting their contextualisation processes to re-examination. For instance, they must be guided to understand biblical figures as ancestors. This will prevent them from unnecessarily idolising some Christian leaders as noticed on the field.

Third, stakeholders, particularly those with Pentecostal orientation, must create more awareness on one of the essential motifs of Pentecostalism, the prophethood of all believers, which, in addition to their priesthood, allows every believer free and direct access to God. This would minimise their extreme dependence on 'prophets' for prayer and understanding of God's purpose.

Fourth, believers in Africa, especially gospel ministers, need to prioritise the prominent role of the Bible in all attempts at contextualising the gospel. Evangelical believers need to make more awareness in this regard to prevent a complete syncretisation of Christianity. This may require inductive and more systematic teaching of the Bible.



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Effects of Interfaith Dialogue on Christian Missions

Akin Alawode

ABSTRACT

The cultural and religious diversity of the world has no doubt made Christians devise various means to fulfil the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations. Likewise, peaceful coexistence that enhances the quality of life has become a most demanding human need, especially in the last two decades. The intricacy of diverse faiths, beliefs, traditions and languages, coupled with religious fundamentalism and fanaticism, has led to religious communalism, arson, looting, killings, rape, and damage of properties in various nations. Since there can be no peace among the people without peace among religions, there can be no peace among religions without dialogue. Interfaith dialogue serves the purpose of bringing peace among the people of the world. However, this paper examines interfaith dialogue's positive and negative effects on missions through the descriptive research method. It explains some of the positive effects of interfaith dialogue, which include providing a peaceful environment, eliminating ignorance and misconception, deepening one's faith, fostering collaboration with other faiths, assisting in seeing the truth, and effectively witnessing to people of different faiths. However, some adverse effects of interfaith dialogue include the promotion of religious pluralism, placing the least priority on eternal peace with God, encouraging cultural arrogance, hindering evangelism, and encouraging syncretism. Given the positive and negative effects of interfaith dialogue on Christian missions, Christians are encouraged to be involved in interfaith dialogue with wisdom and caution only to accept what would bring about the Great Commission's fulfilment.

INTRODUCTION

The Christian faith's attempt to understand its relationship with other religious traditions began in the early Church when the new faith grappled with diverse religio-cultural environments, including Jewish and Graeco-Roman worldviews. Again, history is replete with evidence that from the patristic period through the medieval to the modern era, there had been divergent schools of thought on understanding and relating to a religious lifestyle that was not based on Christian convictions.¹ Many gatherings occur in many parts of the world among religious leaders and scholars on improving the world through peaceful

coexistence.

One of the remarkable gatherings of the modern era was in October 1986, when Pope John Paul invited prominent religious leaders to come together to pray for peace in the world.² This event electrified the world and kickstarted what is now known as the interfaith dialogue. In a nutshell, interfaith dialogue, also known as inter-religious dialogue, is the positive interaction between different denominations, faiths, cultures and beliefs. For instance, it can discuss the issues of peace, poverty, world hunger, and oppression, among others and how religions can work together to stop such things. However, the Christian faith is not only limited to solving the immediate problems of society but must show the way to eternal life with God. The Lord gave his disciples the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, and it must not be compromised or neglected to any other activities. Therefore, apart from the introduction and conclusion, this paper explains through a descriptive research method the positive and negative effects of interfaith dialogue on Christian missions.

CONCEPT OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

The term "dialogue" is obtained from the Greek *dia-logos*, which means "through word." Dialogue is, therefore, "talking together" or "conversation."³ Therefore, dialogue builds the openness, understanding and trust needed for people to live and cooperate despite their differences.⁴ Interfaith dialogue implies the coming together of people of different faiths to a mutual understanding and respect.⁵ It means interfaith dialogue is primarily a conversation or interaction between believers of different faiths or religious traditions. It is a cooperative, constructive and positive interaction between persons of different religious traditions (faiths) at both the individual and institutional levels, and the primary goal is that each party remains true to its own beliefs and, at the same time, respects the right of the other to practice their faith freely.

1. Paul O'Callaghan, "Cultural challenges to faith: a reflection on the dynamics of modernity", *Church, Communication and Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (2017):25

2. John Paul II, "Speeches 1986 October", Address Of John Paul II To The Representatives Of The Christian Churches And Ecclesial Communities Gathered In Assisi For The World Day Of Prayer, Page 1

3. Abroo Aman Andrabi "Interfaith dialogue: its need, importance and merits in the contemporary world" *International Journal of Advanced Academic Studies*, Vol2 Issue 3(2020): 264.

4. Emmanuel Martey, The Challenge of Inter-Religious Dialogue and Praxis to the African Theological Community https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/WOCATI_2008_-_Presentation_on_INTER-RELIGIOUS_DIALOGUE_CATI_-_Emanuel_Martey.pdf#:~:text=The%20term%20%20dialogue%20is%20derived%20from%20the (Accessed 5th October, 2024)

5. Ibid.

In a general sense, interfaith dialogue has come to be accepted as an encounter between people who live by diverse faith traditions in an atmosphere of mutual trust and acceptance. Therefore, interfaith dialogue seeks to bridge the gaps between the world's faiths or religions. It aims to recognise that in the splendour of the human heart across every culture and time, men and women seek to discern and understand the transcendent and how it can be a blessing and grace for their lives and the human community. Furthermore, it recognises that people find different pathways to the transcendent. An authentic interfaith dialogue recognises that everyone needs to be faithful to their religious tradition with a pure conscience.

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Also, an interfaith dialogue seeks to make others see the richness of other faiths and religions, which binds them together and those elements that set them apart.⁶ Interfaith dialogue seeks to recognise that at the deepest level, humans are called to live/relate with one another, so they should answer the following questions: who they are, why they are here in this world, and, ultimately, their destiny. It also recognises that human families are bound together

6. Johannis Siahaya¹, Yanti Mulia Roza, Achmad Siddiq, Ilham Tri murdo, and Muhammad Nafi, "Interfaith Dialogue in the Context of Globalization: The Role of Religion in International Diplomacy" *International Journal of Science and Society*, Vol. 5 No. 4 (2023):851.

not just by pain and tragedies but most especially by the particular essence of human nature rooted in the transcendent. Therefore, interfaith dialogue should not be necessary because of external forces like crisis, war, and poverty.

Considering what interfaith dialogue seeks to achieve, it is clear that interfaith is not an easy task. It takes humility, commitment, interconnection, empathy, and generosity or hospitality.⁷ For instance, doctrinal humility seeks to know the absolute truth irrespective of one's tradition. Furthermore, it takes a humble person to accept correction or an error when someone else points it out. Interfaith dialogue involves some principles that are necessary for it to be effective. Below are highlights of six principles of interfaith dialogue as stated by Leonard Swidler, a highly respected American scholar in interreligious dialogue⁸.

First Principle: The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to adjust and grow in the understanding and perception of reality and then to act accordingly.

Second Principle: inter-ideological dialogue, Inter-religious, must be a two-sided project within each ideological or religious community and between ideological or religious communities.

Third Principle: Each participant must come to the dialogue honestly and sincerely.

Fourth Principle: In inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue, one must not compare one's ideals with their partner's practice, but rather one's ideals with their partner's ideals and one's practice with their partner's practice.

Fifth Principle: Each participant must define himself. Conversely, the interpreter must be able to recognise herself in the interpretation.

Sixth Principle: Each partner must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast expectations regarding where the points of disagreement are.

These principles can apply to all forms of interfaith dialogue, and if they are appropriately implemented, the conversation will be fruitful.

The Church and Interfaith Dialogue

An accurate and comprehensive understanding of "ecumenism" obliges the Church to dialogue with people of other faith traditions. It is because the Church's ecumenical mandate or vision is not only to bring unity and renewal of the whole Christian community but also to embark on a worldwide mission and seek the unity of the whole human

7. Dodeye Uduak Williams, *Interfaith Dialogue, Peacebuilding, and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: A Case of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC)*, The Palgrave Handbook of Religion, Peacebuilding, and Development in Africa, (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2023), 553.

8. Leonard Swidler, *Principles and Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue: How to Dialogue*, <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/academics/centres/cjcml/PGID-%20How%20to%20Dialogue.pdf#:~:text=understanding%20of%20reality,%20and%20then%20to>

race, that is, the entire inhabited earth.⁹ The Church must be seriously involved in interfaith dialogue to bring harmony and peace. Likewise, theology and theological education should be taught and done with the concern of the people of other faiths, and inter-religious dialogue should be taken seriously; this means that interfaith dialogue is to become an essential and constitutive part of the Church's mission and it is significant for Christian theology. Currently, "theology of dialogue" has become one of the most significant missiological currents and has found a firm place of acceptance in the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.¹⁰ Such a theological understanding has led the ecumenical bodies to initiate some contacts with African traditionalists, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists and to convene bilateral and multilateral conferences. However, interfaith dialogue has some positive and negative effects on missions.

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE ON CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

1. It Provides a Peaceful Environment for Living

In a multicultural and multireligious global environment, dialogue becomes necessary to promote understanding and acquaintance with one's neighbours. Without dialogue, people will all end up in diverse conflict situations. Similarly, in a pluralistic situation, dialogue becomes a contention to find a mutual basis for peaceful coexistence.¹¹ Unless people learn how to walk together in harmony and peace, they will drift apart and destroy themselves and others simply because they believe differently.¹² For instance, in Africa, interfaith engagements after conflicts and civil wars have produced encouraging results in countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone because they unlock the tensions and conflicts between religious groups.

In the political context, dialogue is understood as the opposite of conflict. In contrast, entry into dialogue could bring conflict and hostilities to an end, and the abrupt end of dialogue can resume conflicts and even war. Among believers of different faiths, enmity has been created because of the prejudices and stereotypes that have been handed down from generation to generation, and even today, and there is the reinforcement of such misrepresentations that generate religious intolerance and fundamentalism. In the name of religion, several crimes are being

(accessed 5th October, 2024)

9. Martey.

10. World Council of Churches and the Wm. Eerdmans in 2002, Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement article on Interfaith Dialogue, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/dictionary-of-the-ecumenical-movement-article-on-interfaith-dialogue#:~:text=The%20following%20article%20by%20S.%20Wesley> (accessed 5th October, 2024)

11. Roger Campdepadrós-Cullell, Miguel Ángel Pulido-Rodríguez, Jesús Marauri, and Sandra Racionero-Plaza, "Interreligious Dialogue Groups Enabling Human Agency" *Religions* Vol. 12, No.189 (2021), 2.

12. Ibid.

committed against humanity daily. Therefore, Christians are to promote interfaith dialogue that will bring about peaceful coexistence between humankind.

Interfaith dialogue becomes necessary when people cannot live out their faith. Through interfaith dialogue, the peaceful environment will allow Christians to demonstrate their Kingdom lifestyle of love, peace, kindness, and loyalty, which can bring others to the knowledge of God. Christians are the light of the world; therefore, when allowed to live freely in their environment, they cannot be hiding. Likewise, they are the salt of the earth, and their impact is irresistible. Therefore, the results of peace that could be generated from interfaith dialogue can create an atmosphere for believers to win more souls and disciple many.

2. It Eliminates Ignorance and Misconceptions about Christianity

Interfaith dialogue provides an appropriate platform for Christians to explain their beliefs, doctrines, and practices. It will eliminate ignorance about the Christian faith and reduce misconceptions about it. There are many misconceptions about Christianity. For instance, some other faiths believe Christians worship three "Gods": God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.¹³ Such a misconception can be clarified through various means, such as the scriptures and practical illustrations. Therefore, interfaith dialogue can remove ignorance and misconceptions about participants' practices and beliefs and promote critical appreciation, informed understanding, and balanced judgment on matters of faith.¹⁴ Through the explanation and information by Christians during the interfaith dialogue, some may see reasons to believe in Christ or to help inform others, which could be a means of "evangelism".

3. It Helps to Deepen One's Faith

In dialogue, all partners as "believers" are invited to deepen their religious commitment to respond with increasing sincerity to God's call and gift of the Divine Self. For Christians, this comes through Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. For Christians to engage in meaningful dialogue, they must be grounded in their faith and have strong beliefs. The same thing is expected of all dialogue partners. It calls for adequate preparation in which they must ask themselves questions concerning their faith. For example, Christians must be willing to answer questions about the doctrine of the Trinity, and that of the incarnation must be responded to well because they are frequent questions. Therefore, Christians need to have a broad knowledge of their faith and a deep understanding that will enable them to explain it to others simply

13. Andrabi.

14. "World Council of Churches, Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions, Geneva, WCC, 2003". Paper received by the Central Committee and sent to churches for study. <https://oikoumene.org/resources/documents/ecumenical-considerations-for-dialogue-and-relations-with-people-of-other-religions#:~:text=Dialogue%20partners%20are%20responsible%20for> (accessed 5th October, 2024)

and practically.

In all these, there is the need to formulate the Christian belief so that the stranger or the non-Christian can understand and believe. The dialogical process, therefore, helps to clarify and makes Christians understand their beliefs more, thus making them more robust to be involved in missions and evangelism. It prepares Christians for the challenges that may arise from their encounters with other people of other faiths.

4. It Helps to Foster Collaboration to Fight against Evil in Society.

Interfaith dialogue testified to the unity of the human family by discovering the bridges to the Transcendent. The peace and unity promoted by interfaith dialogue allows the human family to work together for a common purpose in society, mainly where human rights, social and economic justice and peace in the community and the nation are concerned and lovely.¹⁵ Therefore, interfaith dialogue searches for means to bring to bear the deeper resources of our respective faiths on the fundamental problems of human existence that arise because of human finiteness.

Christian missions are all-encompassing in that they seek not only the spiritual well-being of humanity but also social, political, economic, and physical well-being. Due to the enormous challenges in society, the interfaith dialogue allows Christians to collaborate and network with other people of other faiths to confront the evils in their society. The Sovereign Lord can use interfaith dialogue to create relationships leading to soul and societal transformation.

5. It Helps to Seek Out the Truth in Other's Faith

Interfaith dialogue is not only about bringing mutual understanding but also about mutual enrichment. Some have affirmed that in the dialogical process, there is mutual enrichment of the life of believers of God from different religious traditions.¹⁶ It is argued that each believer becomes spiritually more prosperous than before the religious encounter and, therefore, becomes a better believer. In a sense, interfaith dialogue can give the person involved a broad perspective about truth and life. There is an element of truth in every religion of the world, which can benefit anyone who cares to learn in humility.¹⁷ Since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, God has always sought to reveal Himself to people through diverse means.

Hence, in inter-religious dialogue, people seek the truth in their faith and that of their neighbours.

15. Andrabi

16. Rupert Wegerif, "Dialogic Education". In *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Education*. (England: Oxford University Press, 2018)3

17. Terry F. Godlove "Truth, Meaning, and the Study of Religion" *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, Vol. 30 (2018): 357.

Dialogue is, therefore, to be viewed as "a common pilgrimage toward the truth, within which each tradition shares with the others the way it has to perceive and respond to that truth."¹⁸ In inter-religious dialogue, all the partners become pilgrims walking together towards truth. The Christian faith has an excellent opportunity to reveal the truth to others through interfaith dialogue. Christians have the scriptures and the Holy Spirit, and their primary purpose is to reveal the truth (Jesus) to the world.

6. It Helps to Understand How to Witness Effectively

Interfaith dialogue can be fruitful if adequately carried out. Dialogue is not antithetical to missions; on the contrary, it promotes missions. If one does not take one's belief or religion seriously, one will not be eager to talk and tell others about it. Missions are, therefore, part of dialogue because Christians are to share and tell others about their faith. Dialogue and witnessing cannot be separated in real-life situations. Through engagements in interfaith dialogue, Christians will be able to notice some loopholes in other faiths, which can serve as an opportunity to witness to others. An appropriate understanding of other people's points of view will create an understanding of how to respond and witness Christ effectively without being unnecessarily offensive.

Due to the intense studies of Christians about Islam, there have been a handful of records of missions and evangelism successes. Likewise, to a certain extent, progress has been made in inter-faith dialogue, especially between Christians and Muslims, which has yielded evangelistic fruits. Christians should be involved in interfaith dialogue with the main world religions and all faiths. Although Christians are to be encouraged to engage in interfaith dialogue, there are still some possible negative influences of interfaith dialogue on Christian missions.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE ON CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

1. It Promotes Religious Pluralism that Hinders Christian Missions

Promoting religious pluralism through interfaith dialogue is one of the significant challenges confronting Christian missions. Religious pluralism is the view that all religions ultimately lead to God, and it is not appropriate for any faith to claim they are the only way to God. Interfaith dialogue promotes such an understanding that negates the Christian claim that Jesus is the only way to God. Therefore, interfaith dialogue denies the need for the conversion of people of other faiths.

2. It Overemphasises Temporal Peace Coexistence to

18. Namsoon Kang Wonsuk Ma, *The Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives, Ecumenical Trends, Regional Surveys*, edited by Dietrich Werner, David Esterline and Namsoon Kang (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010), 800

the Detriment of Eternal Peace With God

Interfaith dialogue promotes peaceful coexistence, which is very important, but this must not be overemphasised to the detriment of eternal peace with God. There is a thin line between living and pursuing peace with people for God's glory and pursuing peace because of the fear of people. Interfaith dialogue seeks to make people live peaceably with others irrespective of where they will spend eternity. At the same time, Christian missions are not limited to making people live peaceably on earth but primarily to seek means of rescuing the dying world from living eternally in hell.

Through interfaith dialogue, Christians and all other faiths are cautioned not to engage in any other activities that will interrupt the peace of the society. At the same time, Christ commands Christians to rescue others from going to hell at all costs. Therefore, Christians are placed in the box of obeying the decision from the interfaith dialogue or the command of their Lord. Any attempt to make converts is defined as bridging the peace of the society, which may attract punishments and persecution.

3. It Promotes Cultural Arrogance that Hinders Christian Missions Culture Transformation

Christian missions are to bring about cultural transformation through the preaching and teaching the Gospel. However, interfaith dialogue demonstrates the attitude that minimises difference to the point of viewing all religious cultures as basically the same. Portraying different religions as the same prevents people from seriously learning from one another. It usually manifests cultural arrogance in which people hold on to their claims and only judge others through the lens of their beliefs and practices. Through the interfaith dialogue claims that all religions are equal and others are to respect other religious practices and beliefs without interference, Christian missions are limited to bringing about the cultural transformational mandate.

4. It Hinders the Gospel Proclamation and Evangelism

Christian missions will be ineffective if all other religions are accepted to be equally a means to God. Likewise, Christian dialogue is Christ-centred and persuasive in winning others to Christ. In a Christian dialogue, others must realise they are on the wrong path and need genuine repentance to turn to God. Therefore, any interfaith dialogue that does not aim to persuade others to have faith in Christ is indirectly making them not believe in Christ and allowing them to hold on to their false religion.

Also, interfaith dialogue hinders evangelism because of its popular theory that each religion or culture is an entirely self-contained system that articulates itself in a particular pattern of symbols and language that can only be comprehended concerning other words and symbols constituting the complete system.¹⁹ This leads

¹⁹ Amir Martin Ebrahimi, "The Concept of Religious Pluralism

to the claim that interfaith dialogue is not primarily about understanding or learning about other religions but accepting them as they are and not changing them.

5. It Promotes Religious Syncretism

Religious syncretism is the phenomenon where a person or group combine the practices and beliefs of two or more religions.²⁰ Interfaith dialogue accepts all religions as equal in value and relevance. It indirectly encourages people to respect and even accept the beliefs and practices of their faith. Such promotion seems to encourage many individuals, movements, and groups to be involved in syncretism. One of the adverse effects of syncretism is that it brings about confusion about the identity of God. Christian missions could also be challenging as people may see Christianity as one means of reaching God and thereby adding it to their current religion(s).

CONCLUSION

The contemporary world is a multicultural and multireligious society. Christians' survival depends on how they strategically learn to live and walk together in harmony with other non-Christian neighbours and to disciple them for Christ. Through interfaith dialogue, people know how to live and walk together with their neighbours to confront the crises of poverty, oppression, injustice, racism, and sexism. However, Christians are not only to live at peace with those of other faiths but also to fulfil the Great Commission mandate of making disciples of all nations. As good as interfaith dialogue is for peaceful coexistence, it still has a cogent relationship with both positive and negative Christian missions, as explained in this paper.

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²⁰ Matthew Baerman, "Case Syncretism" *The Oxford Handbook of Case*. Spencer A & A Malchukov (eds) (England: Oxford University Press, 2009) 56



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The Extension of the Gospel in Thailand and the New Wave of Latino Workers in Mission: Cultural Similarities, Differences, Obstacles, and Advances

Noemi Troncoso de Vallejos

INTRODUCTION

The extension of the gospel in Thailand has been a challenging yet significant process over the decades. While the country has experienced a slight opening to Christianity, the Christian faith remains a minority, representing about 1% of the population. In this context, a new wave of Latin American missionary workers has begun to arrive in Thailand with the intention of expanding the message of the gospel. This article will analyze the fundamental aspects of this mission, exploring the cultural similarities and differences, the obstacles faced by missionaries, the progress made to date, and some practical advice for organizations receiving Latino missionaries in their teams, considering the unique characteristics of Latin Americans compared to other Western cultures.

THE MISSIONARY CONTEXT IN THAILAND

Thailand, located in Southeast Asia, is a predominantly Buddhist country with a strong focus on religious and spiritual tradition. Theravada Buddhism, along with animist beliefs and Hindu influences, dominates the cultural and religious life of the nation. In this context, the task of Christian missionaries has been both a significant challenge and a source of unique opportunities. Despite the social and cultural restrictions faced by Christians in Thailand, especially in rural areas, evangelism has had some impact, particularly in urban areas such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai.

It is worth noting that the first Protestant missionaries arrived in Thailand in 1817, three centuries after the Catholic mission. Thailand's history of Christianity can be divided into six periods influenced by historical events in the country, as mentioned by Dr. Alex G. Smith in his book *Siamese Gold*. (1) The beginning of the Protestant mission (1816-1851); (2) The emerging church (1851-1883); (3) The period of church growth (1884-1914); (4) The delayed growth period of the church (1914-1940); (5) The decline of the church during the war (1941-1945); (6) The revitalization period (1946-2023)

Regarding Latin America at the COMIBAM congress in 1987, it was stated that Latin America is no longer just a mission field, but a missionary force towards the unreached. This declaration challenged, empowered, and directed organizations, churches, and agencies to work towards sending missionaries into the world.

At CLADE V (Latin American Congress on Evangelization) held in Costa Rica in 2012, it was an excellent opportunity to reflect from a Latin

American worldview, inspired by the Lausanne movement. There, it was affirmed: 1- the importance of discipleship, 2- the reality of globalization must be addressed, 3- the care of creation is an important concern that should be a focus of missiology.

The recent Lausanne IV congress also produced reports and reflections from Latin America; the last online meeting for this purpose was on December 3, 2024, under the presentation of Valdir Steuernagel - Allan Matamoros, with coordination and summary by the regional director Daniel Banchi. The current challenge facing Latin America is the massive growth of the gospel while still confronting issues of injustice, corruption, and violence. Amid these regional reflection meetings, Latin workers are going out to various mission fields, taking on the challenge of bringing the gospel where it is not present.

CULTURAL SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LATINOS AND THAIS

Cultural Similarities

One of the most notable similarities between Thai and Latin American cultures is the importance of family and interpersonal relationships. In both cultural contexts, community life is fundamental. Family is seen as the foundation of society, and both Thais and Latinos tend to have a holistic view of life that values social and familial connections. This characteristic can serve as an important bridge in the relationship between Latino missionaries and Thai society, as missionaries can connect with Thais through the significance both cultures place on family unity and community support.

Cultural Differences

However, there are notable differences that Latino missionaries must understand to be effective in their work. One of the main differences is the attitude toward authority and respect. In Thai culture, respect for elders, authority figures, and hierarchies is essential. The concept of "kreng jai," which refers to extreme courtesy and the concern for not bothering others, can create communication barriers. In contrast, Latin culture, while also respectful, tends to be more expressive and open, which can be interpreted as disrespectful or overly intrusive by Thais if not handled with tact.

Additionally, Buddhism, as the predominant religion, profoundly influences the Thai mindset. The concepts of suffering and reincarnation are key elements of the Thai worldview, which can complicate the understanding of the Christian message of

salvation. Latino missionaries must be sensitive to these aspects, adapting their approach without compromising the essence of the gospel.

OBSTACLES IN MISSION

Cultural Obstacles

One of the main obstacles faced by Latino missionaries in Thailand is cultural shock. The way interpersonal relationships are approached, indirect communication, and differences in worldviews can hinder the evangelization process. Respect for traditional beliefs and the fear of being perceived as cultural invaders are significant barriers.

Religious Obstacles

Buddhism also presents a significant challenge. Thais not only follow this religion out of tradition but also because it is a pillar of their cultural identity. Converting to Christianity can be seen not just as a religious change but as an act of betrayal towards family and community. Latino missionaries must be aware of this emotional burden and be prepared to accompany new believers through a slow and delicate process.

Logistical Obstacles

From a logistical standpoint, Latino missionaries must face language barriers. Thai is a tonal language, making it especially challenging to learn for Spanish speakers. Although resources are available, total immersion in the language is essential for establishing authentic communication.

PROGRESS IN MISSION TO THAILAND

Despite the obstacles, notable progress has been made in the Christian mission in Thailand. Latin American missionaries have been a source of renewal in Christian communities, bringing new approaches to evangelization and contributing to the establishment of churches and ministries in less reached areas.

The teamwork between Thai and Latin missionaries has led to initiatives that combine the best of both cultures. Improvements have been seen in the training of local leaders, the use of technology to share the gospel, and the strengthening of the Christian presence in Thai society.

Artistic, sports, and humanitarian resources are tools that the Latin community knows very well, putting them at the service of the national church and communities that need to deepen in these areas.

TIPS FOR ORGANIZATIONS HOSTING LATINO MISSIONARIES

Understanding Latino Culture

Missionary organizations that host Latino missionaries must be aware that Latin Americans have a unique way of relating, characterized by warmth and closeness. It is crucial not to misinterpret their

enthusiasm and expressiveness as a lack of respect or aggression. Additionally, they should value the vibrant and passionate faith that Latino missionaries bring with them.

Cultural Adaptation and Training

It is essential for organizations to provide cultural training programs to prepare Latino missionaries for adapting to Thai norms, such as customs related to respect, deference to elders, and moderation in emotional expressions. Patience should also be emphasized, as the process of conversion and adaptation to Christianity will be much slower and more complex than in Western cultures.

Building Bridges of Trust

Latino missionaries may have the advantage of being seen as outsiders, which allows them a neutral approach in their interactions with Thais. However, this role of "outsiders" can be useful in building bridges between the Thai Christian community and new converts.

CONCLUSION

The Christian mission in Thailand has advanced considerably in recent decades, and the arrival of Latino missionaries adds a new dimension to this work. Although there are cultural and religious challenges, the similarities between Latin American and Thai cultures provide fertile ground for collaboration. Through mutual understanding, respect for local traditions, and a flexible attitude, Latino missionaries can play a crucial role in the expansion of the gospel in Thailand.

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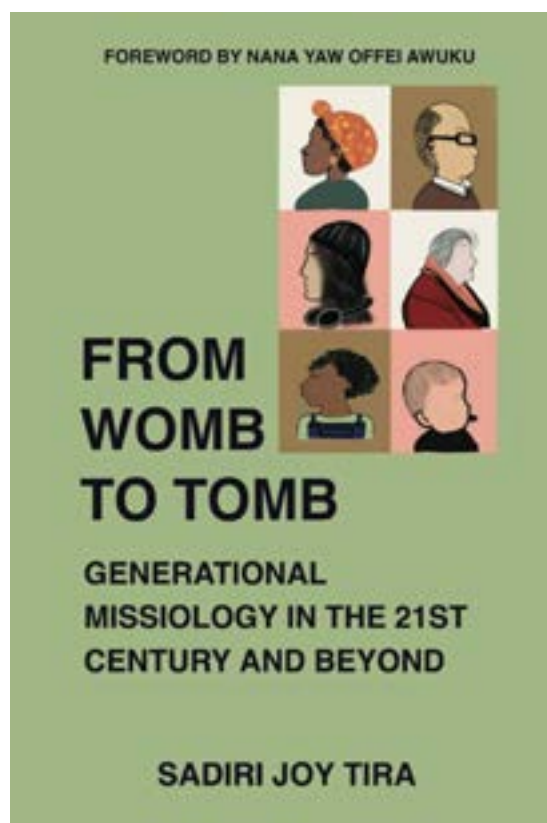
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BOOK REVIEW

From Womb to Tomb: Generational Missiology in the 21st Century and Beyond by Sadiri Joy Tira

Chris Carr



About the Author:

Sadiri Joy Tira, DMiss, DMin, is the Diaspora Missiology Specialist at the Jaffray Centre for Global Initiatives, Ambrose University (Calgary, Alberta, Canada). Dr. Tira was the Founding Chairman of the Global Diaspora Network (2010-2015) and served as Senior Associate/Catalyst for Diasporas (2007-2019) of the Lausanne Movement. He studied Missiology and Theology from Canadian Theological Seminary, Taylor Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, and Western

About the Book

Tira's book addresses and now fills a previous intergenerationally-focused lacuna in the field of diaspora missiology he has helped lead through his connections with the Lausanne Movement and his many written books and journal articles:

Fifty years ago the major missiological discussion was UPG (Unreached People Group). This was followed by Urban/Mega Cities, 10/40 Window, Holistic Business as Missions, and Diaspora Missions. While all these remain, the contour of Global Missions, however, in the coming years is Generational and Polycentric missiology. The UPG are now in our own

circle. The growing population among the younger people and the aging population cannot be ignored by the Global Church. The gospel is for all people. (content introduction from Tira's text at https://www.amazon.ca/Womb-Tomb-Generational-Missiology-Century/dp/177354585X/ref=sr_1_2?)

The book has four sections. The first section introduces foundational biblical texts undergirding intergenerational mission. The second section examines the sociological, anthropological, theological, and missiological aspects of intergenerational mission. The third section reviews seven wide-ranging case studies reflecting intergenerational mission involving children, a Tsinoy Gen Z-er, cross-generational personal reflections, a Boomer, a diaspora Eurasian nonagenarian, and a closing word from Tira regarding intergenerational mission as modeled for him by his parents and grandparents in the Philippines. The fourth section contains a pastoral exhortation for passing on faith legacy to the next generations, with a warning to not abuse seniors or exclude them.

The first section of the book finds Tira addressing the umbrella of Biblical Contextual Intergenerational Missions, with sections nesting underneath it regarding how the Psalmic writers model

generational mission, the biblical foundations of intergenerational mission as reflected by the lives and leadership of Moses, Joseph, and Caleb, the unique intergenerational partnership story of Ruth and Naomi, and intergenerational mission exemplified in the New Testament by Jesus' and Paul's life-on-life modeling. This echoes David Hesselgrave's contrasting of incarnational vs. representational mission approaches.

The second section of the book brings an examination of the umbrella of sociological, anthropological, theological, and missiological aspects of intergenerational mission. Underneath this umbrella, Tira treats the need for engaging the next generation in God's global mission and bridging the gap for that by embracing intergenerational leadership in Christian ministry.

The third section of the book presents valuable relevant case studies of intergenerational missions:

1. God speaking in the lives of children
2. A Tsinoy Gen Z-er struggling with language, hybridity, and identity
3. A personal reflection about investing across generations
4. Reflections of a baby boomer regarding God's abiding faithfulness
5. Interview of a diaspora Eurasian nonagerian's experience from family tragedy to triumph
6. A centenarian's passing on of their personal legacy to further generations

The final section of the book comprises a pastoral exhortation that examines the need for intergenerational mission's passing on of faith legacy to subsequent generations, as well as a warning to neither abuse seniors nor exclude them from the family circle.

Tira ends his book with a conclusion, afterward, list of contributors, and appendix. Some observations about helpful insights and approaches in the book, plus a brief suggestion:

1. The second section of the book—an examination of sociological, anthropological, theological, and missiological aspects of intergenerational mission—provides an interesting symbiotic lense examining shared Next Gen (e.g., Gen Z and emerging Gen Alpha) and intergenerational leadership. This is likely more feasible in a local church context, but more problematic in a cross-cultural diaspora hybrid mission service setting due to significant lack of experience and understanding of inherent nuance that comes only via the rough and tumble of polycultural mission service immersion.
2. The use of case studies is invaluable, especially that of author Joy Tira with whom I've contributed to a separate book for which he served as editor (*Tides of Opportunity*). The case study approach adds a powerful personal touch

as he 'lands the plane' for the book. This approach moves the topic of intergenerational mission from the realm of mere theory into the crucible of experiential application.

The final section of the book comprises a pastoral exhortation that examines the need for intergenerational mission's passing on of faith legacy to subsequent generations, as well as a warning to neither abuse seniors nor exclude them from the family circle.

3. In a time of demographic fragmentation, tribalism, and public/private polarization in North America, Tira's book is a clarion call via which he skillfully forges an integration of the theoretical frameworks of diaspora, relational, and polycentric missiology into an actionable framework that embraces the entire Church.
4. A brief suggestion: though both this reviewer and Dr. Tira wholeheartedly accept the diaspora gateway UPG paradigm as biblical, valid, fitting, and relevant as a missiological worldview, nonetheless, in a future edition of his book, Dr. Tira should consider that a current maximum of only 3.6% of the global population fits the diaspora UPG model especially in the North American context. Some (e.g., Ted Esler's comment about this to the reviewer at the recent *Missio Nexus* conference in Louisville, Kentucky in September 2024) have criticized diaspora missiologists such as Tira and myself for giving too much attention and fuel to this perceived smaller demographic segment. It would be good for readers of a future version of Tira's book to be aware of this objection. Since only 3.6% of the world's population live outside of their birth country, how will the 'privileged' and 'distant' diaspora Christian communities work polycentrically not just in geography but among different groups within their own unreached people group or affinity group?



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