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Exploring the role of liberation theology in the African context through the lens of African music

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Exploring the role of liberation theology in the African context through the lens of African music**ABSTRACT**

This paper examined the intersectionality between liberation theology and African music; it ascertains the role of African music in the liberation of Africans and how its connection influences social justice and liberation movements in Africa. It also provides a brief background and typology of African music, and how it plays the role of liberation and consciousness-raising in the life of Africans spiritually and socio-politically, illuminating some exceptional ways in which liberation theology finds expression through music in Africa. Liberation theology emerged as a response to social injustice and oppression, advocating for marginalised communities and addressing other forms of inequality. African music is indigenous to the African in composition, performance and consumption, and it intertwines with liberation theology to liberate and provide hope to the marginalised. The methodology for this study is primarily qualitative and interpretive, with historical, phenomenological, and multidisciplinary elements. Findings reveal that African music fosters a spiritual connection with God, which leads to liberation from bondage. African music also fosters economic, political, social, and therapeutic liberations. It is therefore recommended that the sanctity, beauty, and originality of African music be sustained to ensure the continuity of liberations already achieved, particularly in the political, social, economic, and therapeutic spheres. Festivals and events that showcase values and liberation milestones should be sustained. African music must be protected from the impact of fusion with foreign genres, and finally, departments of African music should be established alongside African studies in institutions of higher learning.

Key words: Africa, music, African music, traditional, liberation, theology, justice, and injustice

A. INTRODUCTION

For a long time, liberation theology has been a powerful force in shaping social and political movements around the world; its impact is reverberating more in the African context. Its first stance was against colonialism, then to the struggle for civil rights. Liberation theology plays a crucial role in advocating for justice, equality, and empowerment among marginalised groups. Liberation theology emphasises justice, equality, and advocacy for the oppressed people; it plays a transformative role in social and political movements across the globe. Within the African context, histories of colonialism, systemic inequality, and cultural erasure remain deeply entrenched; liberation theology offers a compelling framework for confronting injustice and empowering marginalised people (Zhu, 2022).

Africa is a musically rich continent, and the music has penetrated all sections of society; few continents have such a great appreciation for music as the African continent. Music, singing and dancing reach deep into the innermost parts of the African people (Akombo, 2014). African music has a rich tradition, rhythm, and story that have long served as a powerful medium for expressing resistance, resilience, and hope. This article aims to explore the relationship between liberation theology and African music, examine how music reflects theological and social struggles, and actively contributes to the liberation process. From spiritual hymns in church gatherings to protest songs in political movements, African music channels the collective voice of the people, galvanising change and reinforcing cultural values and identity (Gunner, 2019).

While liberation theology has been widely studied within socio-political and religious contexts, there is limited scholarly exploration of how African musical expressions serve as a medium for articulating and advancing its principles. Specifically, it remains unclear how African music reflects, reinforces, and mobilises the theological and social imperatives of liberation theology. This gap raises critical questions about the extent to which music functions as a tool for spiritual empowerment, social justice advocacy, and political transformation in African societies. Addressing this issue is essential to understanding music's role in shaping and expressing the lived experiences, resistance movements, and theological aspirations of marginalised communities across Africa. This article explores the intersection between liberation theology in the African context and African music, highlighting how African music has been utilised as a tool for empowerment, resistance, resilience, and celebration in the pursuit of social justice and liberation.

B. BACKGROUND TO LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Liberation theology is a theological approach that emphasises the liberation of oppressed people from social, political, and economic injustices, particularly in Africa, where colonialism, imperialism and systemic inequalities have long plagued societies; it advocates for justice, equality and empowerment for the oppressed. It stresses the responsibility of Christians to the poor and oppressed of society based upon the perception of the dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God (Zhu, 2022). This nullifies preferential treatment based on race, colour of skin, ethnicity, gender or religion. People are first and foremost seen as humans.

History traces the origin of Liberation theology to activities emerging from the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, which took place in the second and third decades of the 16th century. It was the forces of Christianity and some Christian elements that stood implacably against the inhuman exploitation of the labour of children and women in factories. Christianity also registered strong opposition to the 19th and 20th-century slave trade (Agunwa, 2017).

Extant literature and available historical documents have argued that in more modern times, the Christian religion has played a crucial role in promoting good governance and accountability in the world over (Ajaola & Aderoju, 2023). The church's prophetic stance obligates her to confront and challenge the systems of corruption and injustice which oppress, exploit and deprive the masses by criticising and judging them according to the gospel standard.

Christians are expected to take the lead to destroy all forms of injustice wherever they are found (Omidawura, 2018). This can be done by utilising official statements from ecumenical bodies like the Christian Association of Nigeria, Christian Council of Nigeria, and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, among others. The aim is to disturb the consciences of those who hold to ransom the happiness, livelihood and development of others through religious and socio-economic control. The cheapest and most effective major tool available to all in the fight against all forms of injustices in Africa is music, specifically African music.

C. BACKGROUND TO AFRICAN MUSIC

Scholars differ on what African music is. While some argue that African music is any music by an African either at home or in diaspora (Timothy, 2020), others hold that African music is any music written (composed) on the continent either by an African or by a non-African (Austin, 2013). Akpabot (1998) contends further that African music is any of the musical practice that originates from Africa before contact with external influences such as those from the Arabs, the Asians, Islam, and the West.

African music is simply seen as the music of Africa, produced by Africans either within the continent or outside; it reflects the heritage of the Africans. It is the aggregate of musical expression that characterises black people in Africa, which shows evidence of a common origin, common basic product, internal patterns, and similar contextual relationships. African music is the type that is performed in African societies, which is purely traditional and indigenous to the people; African music is very pure without foreign influence (Ajewole, 2001). For this paper, African music is classified into two groups.

First, there is the traditional African music. Aning (1973) defines Traditional African music sociologically, recognising its ability to withstand the changes identified as cyclic to a certain extent. He sees it as the music associated with traditional African institutions of the pre-colonial era. This music retains an original taste, devoid of foreign additives. It is the music that has survived the impact of the forces of Western and other forms of acculturation.

Ibitoye (2020) lends his voice to this when he contributes that indigenous music which can sometimes be opined or termed as traditional music is a type of music that celebrates and portrays the culture of the people, it becomes a part of the social life of the people in a culture and as such, the euphoria and ecstasy people get is real and present irrespective of location.

Second, there is the African popular music or the African contemporary music. African popular music today refers to the music crafted by both African professional and non-professional musicians all over the world. These compositions started in the late nineteenth century, and they meet the political, economic, spiritual, and social needs of the people (Taylor, 2005). Popular Nigerian music has traditional African music as its roots, and at the same time synchronises its features with Western musical idioms. Traditional music meets community needs while popular music appeals to the needs of people from different communities and ethnic groups, and sometimes with global effects (Forchu, 2019).

This implies that pure traditional African music without foreign influence, traditional African music with fusion of some or all foreign musical elements and contemporary African music are referred to as African music for this paper. Music serves as a basis for education in the traditional African society.

On the whole, music can be viewed ordinarily as an aspect of education which is directed towards training a holistic being, this includes teaching him to know and fight for his rights (Effiong, 2018). Idamoyibo (2012) posits that the Nigerian is known for strong intellectuality, industry, sincerity, integrity, honesty, religiosity, accountability and morality, which are all inculcated through musical activities during moonlight games, folktales at circumcision rites, initiation rites and religious activities, etc.

D. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical theory provides an insightful framework for understanding social and cultural dynamics, particularly in the context of liberation theology and its intersection with African music. Critical theory posits that the structures of oppression must be understood and dismantled to achieve social justice, particularly as articulated by the Frankfurt School, which emphasises the importance of critiquing social structures to foster human liberation and emancipation. Liberation theology, as articulated by scholars such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff, aligns with this perspective by advocating for the poor and oppressed and calling for action against social injustices (Sands, 2018).

Verhoef (2018) highlights the transformational role of African music in facilitating community organising and social change. Music acts not only as art but also as a form of activism, fostering solidarity among individuals in their quest for freedom. This aligns with critical theory's emphasis on questioning and challenging oppressive structures. Black Christian rap and reggae music serve as contemporary

vehicles for liberation theology, where these platforms are used to challenge injustice and encourage consciousness among marginalised groups (Moody, 2010).

E. METHODOLOGY

This poly-methodical strategy, as emphasised by Danfulani (1999), attempts to study phenomena from different angles; watching a masquerade from more than one spot. This provides an opportunity for phenomena to be properly studied from every angle. The methodology for this study is primarily qualitative and interpretive, with historical, phenomenological, and multidisciplinary elements. The qualitative research approach is demonstrated by engaging in narrative, descriptive, and thematic analysis, which explores non-numerical data such as music lyrics, historical contexts, and theological interpretations to derive meaning from African music and liberation theology.

The multidisciplinary aspect of this methodology integrates insights from theology, musicology, sociology, and political science. Historical and Contextual discussion traces the history of liberation theology and the evolution of African music, drawing connections between past events and present realities. The phenomenological approach focuses on human experience and meaning-making, drawing upon lived experiences and how music becomes a medium of expression, spiritual connection, and resistance.

F. MANIFESTATIONS OF LIBERATION THROUGH AFRICAN MUSIC

Liberation through music is manifested in various forms, each of which serves as a unique pathway to freedom, empowerment, and social change, allowing individuals to find their voice. These manifestations are discussed below:

Spiritual Liberation through African Music

Spiritual liberation through music is found in non-verbal communication, where music, dance, and ritual give impetus for achieving limitless religious experience. The idea that music is closely associated with religious and moral thoughts and practices is well established (Jorgensen, 1993). Onwochei (2007) supports this view when he says that music has been part of religious activities and ceremonies globally for ages, and there is hardly any religion that does not include some forms of music in its religious worship. Music plays a sacred role in the religious worship of the traditional African. It is used for the veneration of ancestors and the worship of the gods.

This worship is aimed at obtaining divine favour and sanctions by communicating with ancestors and gods, or spirits. The bond between man, ancestors, spirits and gods is reaffirmed (Agbidi, 2011). Music participation in church is as important as breath to the human soul. Through music, the transcendent, the affable, and the incomprehensible may be encountered as God's spirit brings revelation to the human spirit. Songs and musical instruments are used to praise, acclaim, invoke and conjure during worship. Singing is an important part of humans and who God created them to be. During worship, people are transformed on the inside and filled with the Spirit and devote everything to God.

Religious music inspires the worshippers to express their loyalty to the deity. It also provides a sense of connection to a higher power, which helps an individual release negative emotions and thoughts that might be holding them back. It also offers a sense of peace and comfort, allowing people to free themselves from baggage that has kept them trapped in life. Music is a momentous aspect of worship that is significant to the adoration of God and gods throughout the globe. It is a paramount aspect of worship activity being made to God, gods, spirits and ancestors.

Music brings to worship an opportunity for participation. Here, the hearts of the worshippers are uplifted into the spirit, and they feel a great sense of intimacy with God. Music plays an incredible role in Christian worship and devotion. It inspires individuals to seek a higher purpose and live in alignment with their spiritual beliefs, leading to a sense of freedom and liberation from worldly struggles and challenges of life. African music specifically promotes outstanding virtues of unity in diversity, social cohesion, respect for ancestry and heritage, expressiveness and emotion, education and transmission of knowledge, resilience and hope, and innovation and adaptability, among others. Thus, musical activities in the church serve as a means of creating a rallying point for creating a sense of community and cohesion among Christians (Akinloye, 2022).

Social Liberation through African Music

Liberation is seen in all social vices countered by music, because many people in Africa see particular spirits controlling every form of ungodly act. Music in Africa is a call to service, a medium through which an erring and ignorant person can be shocked back to awareness, inculcate and reinforce social norms and values while some music forms in Africa especially the parabasis, which is usually the end of the story, witnesses the musician telling the moral of the story as well as warning and advising the audience on future courses of action (Mbaegbu, 2015).

Music comes in as a handy tool to use in admonishing the wicked to repent from their evil ways. Songs have been written, referencing hazards and disastrous events, because of the compelling images that can be conjured through such references. Though regarded as entertainment, these songs have a way of promoting disaster risk reduction by enticing listeners to proactively consider their vulnerability (Titus, 2010/2011).

Africans always see in their artists, voices of reason and heralds of positive change, who can look at people and tell them their sins, either directly or philosophically and speak to the Government without fear. Any musician who stands in the gap between his people and the government is considered a hero. Recently, for example, a song trending on social media by Eedris Abdulkareem titled “*Seyi Tell Your Papa*” has projected the artist as a hero, even though banned by the government, the song continues to make waves among people who feel the pain of poverty and hardship in Nigeria.

Asigbo (2009) supports the role of musicians when he describes them as a moral censor, a genealogist, prophet cum visionary, a storyteller and an entertainer, all rolled into one. The roles of music in the life of man range from transferring and building moral values in society to communication and passing down information. Music is used as a means of teaching children, which helps them understand easily. Once the message is passed, it becomes part of the lives of the children, and they can stand their ground about the virtues taught.

Music is the voice of the oppressed; it restores silenced voices, empowers people to express pain and loss, and re-establishes personality and self-worth (Kurdi, 2017). Music monopolises our system when we listen to its melody and lyrics, and usually gives us the power in its creation and performance. Music can be experienced in three ways, namely, listening, performing and composing. Music is used for aesthetic enjoyment in some settings, especially where the audience adopts a contemplative approach to relating to the performance of music. Listening to good music of choice will affect your mood, and make you feel ‘cool’, some music can also make you moody, particularly when some unfortunate events associated with the piece of music come back to memory. It will alter your buying habits, make you buy beyond your budget, and make you spend money beyond normal during celebrations. It can also help relieve pain. It can reduce or increase stress. It can make you work more efficiently. It can even affect your eating habits (Kraeuter, 2011).

A 72-year-old indigenous woman in Jos, Mama Hamsatu, has attained fame through her songs sung during her ‘manual quarry’ work; always singing to ‘ginger her swagger’. The rhythm of her song has inspired her and others to efficiency. The song titled ‘*Takama*’ was produced by a Jos-based music producer, Mr. Kleb and released in January 2021. It became a digital hit, trending as a social media challenge (Onowu, 2021). Music is the perfect way to create a happy condition in one’s mind. When a person’s mood is low, listening to good music and change the moodiness to happiness. One can just relax, close their eyes and by the time the listening period is over, the person is fine.

Political Liberation through African Music

Politics, in the form of established administrative order or aspiration and struggles for the betterment of society, has always been part of the structure of all societies. Those in power do their best to retain and maintain power by oppressing those who are outside the circle. The political reawakening and the quest for self-determination became the impetus for the development of this music, which came along with human casualties. For example, Hachalu Hundessa in Ethiopia and Bobi Wine in Uganda faced severe consequences, including imprisonment and threats to their lives, because of politically charged lyrics and activism (Stein & Abebe, 2023).

There is a political tone to music that cannot be mistaken. In Africa, one cannot talk about the traditional political system without the place of music (Ajewole, 2010-2011). In political organisations, for example, the functions of music are apparent in songs sung in praise of chiefs, but many other manifestations may also occur. Different styles of music are played for the entertainment and listening pleasure of the powers that be. There are praise songs and music to get the best part of the leaders of various communities and various state governors, including any constituted authority. Wealthy men and craftsmen were not excluded (Lomax, 1973).

Politically, today, it is commonplace to find musical jingles being produced for different aspirants in political offices. Some songs come in the form of advice and guidance in the right direction to avoid mistakes in the choices of candidates, as exemplified in the song dedicated to all the ‘shady politicians’ by Tuface Dibia from the track ‘*E be like say*.’ Part of the lyrics read thus:

E be like say dey wan tell us wetin we never hear before..... No be small thing ohhh..... Looking back through the years that we have spent together; it seems you have been playing me all along. So many times, you asked me to put the whole of my trust in you. So many times, you betrayed and played me for a fool..... Another year has come and now you want my trust once more. E be like say them wan tell us another story again..... (AZlyrics, n.d.)

His advice comes in so handy, clearly and strongly, that media houses play it as an anthem whenever the political gladiatorial arena is opened in Nigeria. The campaigns go along with lots of musical concerts and a funfair. Some of the songs are to eulogise the candidates, others to encapsulate the manifestos of the prospective candidates, while others are for taunting opponents.

A commonly sung song in the February 2023 elections period in Nigeria, performed by Timaya, is worded thus: “as e dey sweet us, e dey pain them, as e dey pain them omo e dey sweet us”. Music serves as a base for freedom fighting from oppressors. In the times of oppression, injustice, suppression, and even apartheid, people yearn for freedom. Musicians come in handy to help project the cries of the masses through their songs. An example of this is seen in the song of Majek Fashek dedicated to Nelson Mandela ‘Prisoner of Conscience’ and all the freedom fighters all over the world because Africa must be free:

Now, now, now, Margaret Thatcher, eh, eh, eh, free Mandela. Now, now, now, Fredrick De Klerk, eh, eh, eh, free Mandela. Me want you free Mandela. Me want you free Mandela, Me want

you to free Mandela, me want you to free Mandela, Free Mandela me want you to Free Mandela. Pull up your hand if you are a freedom fighter, me want you to free Mandela, me want you to free Africa. For twenty-seven years he's been sleeping locked in jail. For twenty-seven years Lord he is still lying locked in jail. He left his wife, he left his children, for the sake of Africans...For so many years Lord, Africans got independence, but Africans are still dependent. Sufferation in the land, Nigeria got Independence, but Nigerians are still dependent, frustration in the land, confusion in high places, poverty stricken the nation now. Babangida, eh eh eh free Nigeria. (Maluca, 2022).

One of the liberation functions is to ensure that people are taught and guided on how to ask the “how” and “why” questions because they have a role to play in emancipating themselves. Robert Nesta Marley sings, “Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds.....” (Genius n.d.). Getting out of slavery of any sort is a herculean task, and ‘mental slaves’ must be encouraged to realise that it is possible despite the challenges. Jimmy Cliff sings, “You can make it if you really want.....but you must try, try and try, try and try, you’ll succeed at last” (Genius n.d.). One’s ability to think for themselves in all situations usually stands as a launching pad for liberation from challenges in life, be it spiritual, political or social. It is also expected that once freedom is achieved, one should not use the same strategy to oppress others.

Therapeutic/Emotional Liberation through Music

Music can serve several therapeutic functions for individuals with mental health conditions or physical problems. Robinson & Hatten (2012) see music agree that music has an especially intimate connection with emotions. Some of the therapeutic functions include emotional regulation, pain management, memory enhancement, cognitive function, physical rehabilitation and social expression. Music is a communal property which plays a social, therapeutic or magical role in society (Bunt, 2004). It frees people from the bondage of pain and suffering, and ill-health. The liberation functions of music are succinctly captured thus:

Among others, music facilitates communication more powerfully than spoken words, and it enables meaning to be shared. Music promotes the growth and sustenance of individuals, groups, cultural and national identities. Music can induce physiological, emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses in individuals. Music has therapeutic power. It promotes relaxation, it reduces anxiety and pains.....people variously employ music to alter their moods, reduce stress, and diminish boredom during and after serious and intellectual tasking activities (Babatope, 2012, p.170).

The tones produced on the drums generate a raw or cluster of harmonics, the healing energy of which massages the mind. Hence, experiencing the right type of drum sound and music means undergoing metaphysical management of mental tension. Research indicates that drumming can reduce stress and enhance emotional expression in therapeutic settings, especially for people facing serious health challenges (Harmon & Arpajian, 2020).

A body of research has emerged that sheds light on the intriguing links between music and cognitive functions. Music has been shown to improve memory, attention and focus, emotional regulation, language and communication, motor skills and neuroplasticity. Research has also confirmed that music has been shown to enhance memory in patients with stroke and multiple sclerosis (Ferreri, 2016). This effect varies from person to person because of an individual’s prejudices and preference for different types of music (Thaut, 2010).

The Bible supports the therapeutic liberation function of music as seen in the story of David and Saul:

At that very moment, the Spirit of God left Saul and, in its place, a black mood sent by God settled on him. He was terrified. Saul's advisors said, "This awful tormenting depression from God is making your life miserable. O Master, let us help. Let us look for someone who can play the harp. When the black mood from God moves in, he'll play his music and you'll feel better." Saul told his servants, "Go ahead. Find me someone who can play well and bring him to me. One of the young men spoke up, "I know someone. I've seen him myself: the son of Jesse of Bethlehem, an excellent musician. He's also courageous, of age, well-spoken, and good-looking. And God is with him." So, Saul sent messengers to Jesse requesting, "Send your son David to me, the one who tends the sheep." Jesse took a donkey, loaded it with a couple of loaves of bread, a flask of wine, and a young goat, and sent his son David with it to Saul. David came to Saul and stood before him. Saul liked him immediately and made him his right-hand man. Saul sent word back to Jesse: "Thank you. David will stay here. He's just the one I was looking for. I'm very impressed by him." After that, whenever the bad depression from God tormented Saul, David got out his harp and played. That would calm Saul down, and he would feel better as the mood lifted (I Sam 16:14-23).

Economic Liberation through African Music

Beyond its artistic, emotional and entertainment impact, music has served economic liberation purposes. In Zimbabwe, the music of Mai Charamba and Fungisai Zvakavapano Mashaveve intertwines the issue of land ownership and liberation theology. Their songs advocate for resource control and economic freedom to allow females some opportunities in a male-dominated culture (Rwafa et al., 2013).

Similarly, the songs of Frederic Rzewski bring to light political consciousness, addressing issues such as economic crisis and labour struggles. In this case, music serves as the medium for engaging with and challenging socio-economic structures (Abbinanti, 2010).

Popular African music has an undeniable impact on society. It serves as a means of employment and income for music producers, musicians and marketers; sellers of other products in the market use good music to attract the attention of people for patronage. The music has positive effects on the mood of people (Ferreri, 2016). Music controls the mood of listeners and provides a means of socialisation and relaxation during events.

The fame enjoyed by musicians has translated into lucrative economic deals that are beneficiary to the artists and their communities. Music as an enterprise goes through a lot of processes involving different stages and people. These will range from the writing of the song and production to the release and final consumption by the people. In between, studio producers, music vendors, food vendors, printers of fliers and shirts, electricians, security outfits, media houses, and so on benefit and make their cuts along the way, thereby giving a boost to the economic activities and condition of the society.

People's lives and fortunes have turned over at some time as a result of the economic benefits of music. For example, Wizkid, a young Nigerian Afrobeats musician who is in his early 30s, rose from nothing in the mid-2000s to being one of the scene's biggest names today. In 2008, Wizkid was invited from Nigeria to perform at a 300-capacity nightclub in East London and, after the performance, slept on the event promoter's sofa (Obkircher, 2020).

Ten years later, in 2018 and 2019, Wizkid performed in and sold out the 20,000-capacity O2 Arena in London. The popularity of an artist usually rubs off on their financial status and fame. His single '*One Dance*' with the Canadian rapper Drake was a big success internationally, topping the prestigious

US Billboard Hot 100 chart for ten consecutive weeks in 2016. The song also became number one in 15 different countries, including Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and France (Stets, 2023).

G. THE NEXUS BETWEEN AFRICAN MUSIC AND LIBERATION

An important factor that birthed a classification of African music shifting the paradigm from the indigenous class is the struggle for independence, freedom from marginalization and subjugation; this gave rise to African musical freedom fighters like Robert Nesta Marley, Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, Joseph Shabalala to mention but a few (Noko, 2021). Notably, among the songs of one of the most iconic heralds of the reggae genre of music, Bob Marley and the Wailers, calling for the unity and liberation of the African people, is the song titled ‘*Zimbabwe*’ from the album *Survival* 1979. Part of the lyrics say;

Every man got the right to decide his own destiny, and his judgement there is no partiality, so arms in arms with arms, we’ll fight thus little struggle, cause that’s the only way, we can overcome our little trouble. Bother you ‘re right, you’re right, you’re so right! We gon’ fight, we gonna, we gonna fight, fight, for our rights (Azlyrics, n.d.).

Indeed, no marginalised person will listen to the lyrics of this song over and over again without taking a step to liberate himself/herself. Ngobili (2016) also agrees that it is one of the offshoots of that nationalistic drive and Pan-Africanist movements of the 1950s and 1960s, which gave rise to the struggle for self-determination of the African and Black people all over the world. Different aspects of human existence call for liberation. There is a need for spiritual liberation, giving people the power to resist the urge to commit evil, to strife and live a pious and chaste life; remain committed to the ways of righteousness despite challenges.

Political liberation themes in songs will push people towards the direction of holding their leaders accountable for injustices done, and also call them to better governance for the good of all citizens. Citizens will be liberated socially and economically when there is stability and good governance. Music articulates the pain of oppression and gives voice to the voiceless. Every opportunity is a teachable moment within the African society, values are transmitted through different mechanisms such as storytelling and oral tradition, where moral lessons and cultural values are taught.

These values are taught through narratives, rituals and ceremonies such as weddings, funeral rites, rites of passage where the values of social cohesion; other societal values are taught through music, social commentaries through protest songs to address injustices, political issues, to raise awareness, community identity and solidarity taught through dance and participation; and lastly among many others, intergenerational transmission of values from older generations to younger generations.

African music has always been more than mere entertainment. It keeps a living record of the history, struggles and hopes of Africa. This music has formed a support base during the dark days of colonialism, civil wars, apartheid, neo-independent movements, and neo-self-colonisation by African leaders. African music has helped people to resist oppression and to unify people. Every form of resistance goes along with music. For example, during the END SARS protest of 2020 in Nigeria, wooden and iron platforms were erected where songs were played across the regions where the protests happened. Protested unified as a body to cry out for justice.

H. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. African music is already a natural tool in the hands of Africans where knowledge, wisdom, and skills are transmitted from one generation to another; its sanctity, beauty, and originality must be sustained to ensure the continuity of liberations already achieved, particularly in the political, social and economic spheres. This can be done by regularly organising festivals and events that will showcase values and milestones attained.
2. Without a doubt, the traditional aspect of African music is gradually fading as a result of the impact of fusion with foreign genres; however, to preserve its originality, traditional ‘gatekeepers’ should ensure its survival through proper supervision of its practice in its original form.
3. Departments of African music should be established by the Government alongside African studies in institutions of higher learning. These departments are to ensure that relevant curricula are developed for teaching theories and practice of African music.
4. Individual musicians within Africa should constantly speak against societal ills through their music; by this pressure will continue to be mounted on the government to live up to expectations.

I. CONCLUSION

Music forms an integral and undisputed part of the daily life of man and society as a whole. Music comes into play where emotions are involved, it bridges the gap where non-verbal communication is required and where social integration needs to be established or enhanced. It therefore serves as a link for the understanding of some of the other aspects of human actions, whether it is religious, political, social, or cultural. African music serves as a tool for liberation, resistance, resilience and connecting people to their heritage and empowering them to fight for equality and freedom; to also be able to hold government accountable. Liberation theology finds a vibrant and dynamic platform for advocacy and transformation through the celebration of traditional rhythms and lyrics that reflect the aspirations of African people. This paper inspires hope, solidarity, and resilience in the face of oppression and injustice.

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Title:

Liberation theology and African church hymnody: the case of Negro spirituality

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Liberation theology and African church hymnody: the case of Negro spirituality

ABSTRACT

The African church is conversant with Western hymnody as a result of colonialism. Hardly could one discover a song of African origin in their worship. Some are merely translated forms of Western hymns into African indigenous languages without minding the miscommunication that arises among tonal languages. Many African worshippers are ignorant of hymnody of African origin; a hymnody that inculcates their reality and identity through tonal and pentatonic music, theology, beliefs, and culture, which can foster effective worship among them. The paper argues that there are problems and concepts associated with the African church which only a true African hymnody could address, such as injustice, marginalisation, discrimination, and spiritual warfare. All these problems are liberation-based. The ancient hymnody of African origin is the Negro spiritual, which expressed the travails of African slaves transported to the New World during the period of slavery. It is a reflection of African reality. As Western hymnody is functional in Western churches to reflect and inculcate their values and culture, so the hymnody of African origin can portray and inculcate biblical culture through the contextualisation of liturgy in their gatherings. Upon this the paper is written. The research methodology is descriptive, consulting various literature, books, and journals to reveal what different authors have written about the issues in order to know their views and perspectives, which serve as leverage for a new contribution to the field of knowledge. The paper recommends that hymns of African origin be featured in African church worship to aid contextualisation and indigenisation of liturgy.

Keywords: Liberation Theology, African church hymnody, Negro spirituality, African church

A. INTRODUCTION

The African church is a microcosm of Western church as a result of evangelism by the Western mission. Her pattern of worship follows that of the western culture such as music as in instrumentation, the tonality, dance, dressing, and even cultural values. African musical instruments are devilish in Western perspective and are forbidden in worship services. Anything "black" signify darkness because of this there is "White Jesus" despite the fact that Jesus Christ was of African origin.

The Western theology favoured slavery in which Christianity in Marxism was seen as state apparatus to control the citizenry by the state actors as in "Slaves, obey your master!" in the bible. The Western dressing was recommended in worship leadership at the expense of indigenous dressing. Darwinism, a theory that is dehumanizing to Africans was a dominating philosophy in the Western church hymnody which discriminates the black from their White counterpart such as the hymn, "Nothing but the Blood of Jesus" (As in the portion of the music which says, "Precious is the flow that makes me WHITE as snow"). The black was believed to be of the descent of the Apes and were treated as animal. All these discrimination lasted for centuries before the emancipation of the slaves through the abolition act.

A hymnody of African origin is Negroes spiritual, which is the reflection of African slaves' calamity in the hand of the slave masters. It is a reflection of African culture as in musical style and instrumentation, theology and belief system. It is centred on the plantation experience in the hand of slave masters.

The major theme of the music is "liberation" from the travails such as marginalization, discrimination and injustice. It gave hope to the African slaves even in their calamity, as it was a mean of channelling out the emotions. It made the scripture meaningful to them in liking their travails to that of Israel in Egypt and with the life of Jesus Christ in birth, suffering, death and resurrection in which they were referred to as "Easter" people. Upon this centred Liberation theology, on which the African church hymnody is based with the Negroes spiritual as a case study.

How heart breaking would it be to see on a fateful day a foreigner come to buy the natives (land owners) with the collaboration of some of their relations and native leadership by force to be ferried to a foreign lands for hard labour as slaves? How painful would it be to see siblings sold to different slave masters without the hope of meeting again? How painful would it be to be deprived of ones' freedom? All the enigmatic questions are stemmed out of the African slavery experience before the emancipation was declared. They are the causes of liberation theology. Liberation theology is a derivative of African slavery experience; an experience that is unpalatable whose reminiscence is still lingering.

B. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Liberation: The word is derived from the root word, "liberate" which is verb. It means to free someone from feelings or conditions that makes their life unhappy or difficult; to free prisoner, a city, a country etc. So, "Liberation" is a process of freeing someone from any calamity (Longman, 2001). It is the deliverance of slaves from the slave masters as in the narrative of the Negroes in which the African slaves were set free from their yokes under the oppression of their slave masters that is the Europeans. It is an act of getting independence from the colonial master.

Theology: It is the knowledge about God which may be systematically or disorganized (Wayne, 1944:23). It is thinking about God through all natural evidences and revelations in the environment. It is the divine revelation through all sorts of theological arguments that may be appealing to man such as cosmological, ontological, Christological, retribution, orderliness of universe argument etc.

Bed-Rock: It is the basic ideas, and principles of a belief etc. (Longman 2001). Bed-rock is the solid foundation on which a philosophy for certain endeavour or belief is built; it is the anchor for shaping and structuring a composition. It is the main motive and objective of the musical composition; the direction of address or the beacon of a piece of musical work. It is the centrifugal force that holds or binds together a musical composition in the centre of attraction, and the score card for the evaluation of a piece of music validity and reliability.

Hymnody: The is derived from the root word, "Hymn" which is a song of praise to God; while the "Hymnody" the study about songs of praise to God (Longman 2001). It is the study of the origin of a musical composition; the historical background such as the author, the composer, the era and event or story in which the composition is derivative and evolutionary. It is the historical bases of the sacred vocal music which guides its performance in Christian liturgy.

Negroes-Spiritual: Negro is the old version of a word meaning a black person which is now offensive; negroes(plural); while "spiritual" is a religious song of the type sung originally by the black people of the United States of America (Longman 2001). It is the song of disinherited Africans shipped away from their fathers land during the slave trade. It is a song of the slave that portrays African identity which originated

from the sugar cane plantation to increase their productivity, channel out their emotions and invincible church organized by the slave as an alibi for their escape from their slave masters.

Church: The Church is the community of all true believers for all time (Wayne 1994: 853). It is the assembly of God's people bond by faith in Jesus Christ. They are the people called out of the world for the glory of God.

C. OVERVIEW OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Liberation theology is theology that centred on the liberation of poor, oppressed, from the oppressor. It is based on the biblical view of a rich man and Jesus disposition to rich and the poor in the secular world. The theology is based on social justice to help the marginalized. The theological idea originated in the 70s by the Catholic Church in South America although predated by the Negroes clamour for emancipation led by the abolitionist. In 1980, Pope John Paul II emphasized helping the poor (www.u.tube.com).

The criticism against the idea even from the Roman Catholic faithful in the Europe is the secularization of Christianity at the expense of heavenly rewards; and seen as pollicisation of Christianity. The theology exists because of the plight of farm workers in the hand of their masters. It is the earthly liberation of the poor and political approach to Christianity to strengthen the relation of secular world which is to deliver the oppressed, and to help the marginalized (www.u.tube.com).

The theology was needed among the African Christians in the past century because of their oppression in slavery. During the period they were subjected to hardship in the hands of slave masters. A documentary, "Transatlantic Trade: Slave and Suffering" revealed that 12 million of Africans were sold to slavery while 2 million died on the journey. This began between 16c -19c with collaboration of almost thirty countries.

There was a prominent structure which is described as "Trianglatory"; that is European slave traders brought ship from the Europe to enslave the Africans; sold them to North America, and Caribbean with the help of natives (leadership and relations). It is recorded that Europeans were not the first originators of slavery; it was an act predating their advent by the natives. The Portuguese were the people that turned slave trade to a serious business in 15c; they would come to the West Africa to buy slaves through trade by barter. They gave whiskey, gunpowder, and weapons in exchange for the slaves. (www.u.tube.com).

There was a depot in Lagos and Senegal West Africa which was named as point-of-no-return; any slave who got to the place had no hope of returning back home. Portuguese were the first to export slaves to Spain followed by French and others. Elion Collins, the custodian in slave trade reservatory in Senegal said that slave trade would not be possible if not for the connivance of some natives, an excuse given by the Europeans who don't support African reparation fine demanded from the West. There was a Cape-Coast castle in Senegal which was rebuilt by the British in 19c. The castle was a church with a basement where slaves were kept. The slave trade was also supported by the half- cast of Portuguese-African descents. These people would come with their affluence to purchase slaves in Africa. (www.u.tube.com).

The slaves suffered a lot by being forced and sold as goods. It is even recorded that Africans were reduced to a mere goods. The slaves' suffered shackles in hands and legs. They were used in North America for sugar- canes product and man-power for the Caribbean in their industries. Slave were subjected to all forms of inhuman treatment such as raping of female among them, drilling and padlocking of their mouths so that they would not talk or eat from the sugar cane. (www.u.tube.com).

According to William (1990: np),

For almost a century black North Americans had little or no contact with American Christianity. From the landing of the first African at James town in 1619 until the society for the probation of

the faith began its work of evangelizing the Slaves in 1701, black salvation remained outside the concern of North American Christians. By contrast, Brazil, Jamaica, Haiti, the Caribbean, and South America less rigid social structure allowed contact with tribal groups and the mixture of Christianity and variety form of African religions. Among the Caribbeans, South America, and Maroon Slave population, distinctive cultural traits survived for centuries almost untouched. But when Christianity was introduced to the Slaves of North America due in part to high and relentless contact with their masters and in part to a desire to make Christianity the servant of the master's agenda, slaves enthusiastically embraced Christianity, in particular the protestant traditions and suppressed their ancient practices.

There was discrimination against the slaves. The white demeaning the black through the social Darwinist missionaries who referred the Africans "rude barbarians," dark benighted "pagans" and heathens. This is reflected in their missionary hymn, "From Green Land's Icy Mountain", "Over the Ocean Waves". Also, they did not see people as being equal before God. They were not allowed to sit on the same pew with white worshippers. At a point, they were driven to the gallery; even at that they were still seen as plagues.

Richard Allen, founding father bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal, a slave narrated his experience:

A number of us usually attended St. George church in Fourth Street and when the coloured people began to get numerous in attending the church, they moved us from the seats we usually sat on and placed us around the wall, and on Sabbath morning we went to church and the sexton stood, and told us to go, and we would see where to sit. We expected to take the seats over the ones we formally occupied below, not knowing any better. We took those seats. Meeting had begun, and they were nearly done singing, and just as we got to the seat, the elder said, ' Let us pray ". We had not being long on our knees before I had considerable scuffling and low talking. I raised my head up and saw one of the trustee - - - - - having hold of the Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him up his knees and saying, 'You must not kneel here," Mr. Jones replied, ' Wait until prayer is over - - - - -;and I will get up and trouble you no more'. With that he beckoned one of the trustee- - - - - to come to his assistance - - - - - By the time prayer was over, and we all went out of the church in a body and they were no more plagued with us in the church"(quoted in Williams 1990).

This shows that Christianity was not introduced to the African slaves out of love of Christ but for the selfish function they expected from them especially a way of taming them by teaching them obeisance to their masters from the scripture so that they would not run away and even be producing baby slaves in slavery.

The tribulation caused the African black worshippers to pull out of the church and form the First African Church. Formation of the black peoples' church was not the end of the tribulation; despite the formation of the church, the white counterparts still interfere with African church affairs. They said that Africans did not know how to worship God. Yet, they didn't want to worship with them or belong to the same association where they will be equal and be discussing together. So, they decided to organize a conference for African Methodist preachers, under the patronage of the white Methodist bishops, with the hope of achieving their selfish end. The more the Africans were persecuted, the more they grew in worship. They referred to African church as "coloured brethren"(Longman 2001).

Another sect from Methodist Episcopal was originated to eradicate racial discrimination in the church. This sect was called, "The United Methodist church". Their aim was to have both Black and

White worship together. After some time, some white in the church wrote their mother church, Methodist Episcopal that they could no more tolerate worshipping with Black worshippers.

So, their mother who herself was interested in racial segregation advised them to divide the church into jurisdiction through vote. At the end of the vote, Black were marginalized from the white by vote for separate jurisdiction for Black. They sang the song, "We Are Marching to Zion" while the Black delegates remained seated, and some were weeping. Just as the elders of Israel said, "To your tent Israel" (1Kg 12: 16); so was the reaction of the Black (Longman 2001).

There is need for liberation theology because of various act of injustice in the contemporary time such as gender inequality, tribal and religious marginalization, racial stratification between the rich and the poor in the rule of law, religious tolerance, social injustice, difference in wages and salaries of workers, and colour bar.

D. AFRICAN CHURCH

The African church is highly dedicated and fast growing church compared with the West. For example, in South Africa, 94% come for mass compared with American against challenges and oppression. It is believed that African church is doing so well and invariably the feature of the church. African church is surmised to be doing well in evangelism because of the attributes such as primacy of super natural unlike the West.

Nevertheless, they believe in Jesus Christ as the saviour of the world and efficacy of the Holy Spirit. The church has distinguished message. The African church hold fast the theology and moral orthodoxy not deviating from church teaching through acculturation of the gospel by not bending the church culture but shape the contextual culture to the scriptural culture. African church is committed to evangelizing the wider culture such as polygamy, a major cultural challenge. African church praises in public and criticizes in private the issues related to the church figures such as disagreement and vision in a constructive way. The African church encourages moral virtues even in the face of opposition and hostility (www.u.tube.com).

The perspective of the West towards this virtues is that the African church could do such exploit because they are poor, uneducated and seek divine intervention for economic reason. It is believed that African church priesthood is for economic reason so also is secularism.

E. AFRICAN- AMERICAN HYMNODY: THE NEGROES' SPIRITUAL

The African slaves didn't forget their culture in the foreign land. They paralleled their narrative with that of the Israelites with the exception of "Singing the songs of their God in a foreign land". Negroes' spiritual is otherwise named as black hymnody. This was formed during the slavery plantation hard labour in "invisible church" and when they were ostracized from the White Church. Some spiritual were formed during the camp-meeting. The songs are called song of Zion. The African slaves' songs reflect the beauty of African culture which is embedded in them. According to Augustus,

I can hardly express the pleasure it afford me to turn in that part of the gallery where they sit and see so many of them with their psalm or hymnbook, turning to the part then sung and assisting their fellows, who are beginners, to find the place, and then all breaking out in torrent of sacred harmony, enough to bear away the whole congregation to heaven"(Williams 1990).

The songs are theologically sound because they portray raw theology of the African slaves which is "Liberation Theology" which came out of tribulation experience (although, it may not be

systematically). The Negroes' songs speak on life and death, suffering and sorrow, love and judgement, grace and hope, justice and mercy. For example:

Song of hope and grace: Example of this is "I Will Overcome" The song was composed by C.A.T. The Negroes' knew that though they may be passing through a tough time victory would come. The song kept them alive in the face of persecution to the point that they even did not fear death in which death was seen as a means of liberation.

Suffering and sorrow: Example of this is "Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child". It was not really a melancholy song but a song through which Negroes expressed and channelled out their negative emotion. It is believed that it had therapeutic effect on the slaves, even with crying because it is believed that bottled emotion is suicidal. It is a song of reflection on gracious act of God because it is believed that a person that is singing is not singing about the present experience but a reflection on the past which is even therapeutic.

Love and judgment: Example of this is "My Eyes Have Seen The Glory". It is called "Battle Hymn of Republic" written by Julia Ward Howell. The song talks victory over the enemies and God's redemptive power. It also shows God's love in faithfulness to his promises. The tune is an American camp-meeting tune (McClain 1990:45). They believed in the law of retribution in which they saw the hands of God in whatever they passed through and his divine vengeance for his people over their enemies as "Easter" people they trusted.

Negroes' spirituality is African in nature. It follows African rhymes, scale, spontaneous with call and response style with a dancing style called "A Shout". "Camp-meeting" was an important basis for the growth of what we are now known as spiritual. These songs whether sung by blacks or whites were essentially music of the country side.

The blacks brought special qualities to their spirituals, a background of field hollers and ecstatic character of their African musical heritage." He said further that the music tended to be of the call-and-response type, this common structure so common in African traditional music, allows great freedom, no books are needed, for the chorus is easy to pick up and the solo calls can be improvised on the spot.

However, all this was accomplished by hand-clapping and foot-stamping, creating a Christian protest music of distilled and concentrated ecstasy. Andrew made it known that their music is accompanied by a dance call, "A Shout ". It was referred to as sanctified dance against the criticism they had for the secular social dancing which was seen as sinful" (Wilson-Dickson 1992:194).

According to Bailey, the same spiritual was also the antecedent for evangelical and gospel hymns. He made it known that it was developed in the early decade of the 19c. It is evangelical in spirit but focused especially on winning souls through conversion. While its primary use was in revival, it was taken over by Sunday schools, Christian Associations and churches that in general were made up of less educated members to whom literary form and quality had little appeal compare with emotion(of Negroes Spiritual spontaneous presentation) (cf. Albert 1950:482).

F. IMPORTANCE OF NEGROES SPIRITUAL

Transformation: It provides nourishment for the weary souls and folks who too frequently felt and we're "motherless " or "fatherless" or "childless". Metaphorically, there was always music in the air during the period for the healing of slavery wounds while the experience was even interpreted and seen through a positive perspective. It could serve as a therapy for people with mental health this day. It could be used as message to the church through choral rendition in Christian worship. It could be used as prelude, offertory

even postlude especially in remembrance service to make the story vivid in the heart of the people and never pray for such experience again.

Emotional Release: It serves a therapeutic role in emotional expression which may be positive or negative for bottled emotion is suicidal. At running singing through the body, the affected parts are touched and healed. People that are suffering from bi-polar depression could find a remedy through it. As it is known in the doctrine of ethos, it could exert its power in influencing the mood of the depressed ones.

Symbolism: Negroes' spiritual is patterned after the biblical stoic experiences like that of Jesus Christ and His mother, Virgin Mary. The slaves saw their tribulation as the symbolism of that of Jesus Christ. As they imagined the suffering of the saviour, it created positive transformation in them. Example of this is "Were You There When They Crucified My God". Other is: "Mary Born a Baby". This gave the troubled mother who lost their children to slavery hope as Mary too had similar challenges with King Herod (Arthur 1992:24).

Reflecting on the historical background of the Negro spiritual could console people who are passing through a challenging situations. It would give them hope that God who changed the story of slaves to good could do likewise to them.

It serves as national identity: As it is known that culture is part of identity, Negroes' spiritual preserves and portrays the African slaves' identity, such as music (the rhythm and the scale).

Also, is the languages of the people. The songs were usually be a spontaneous music based on the narration of the slaves' harrowing experience or be a truncated fashion of western language revival slave masters' hymns; especially their music at encounter with Methodism of Charles Wesley. Likewise, Negro spiritual reflects the biblical culture. It is a full gospel on its own because it summarizes the whole scripture through its theme. It could instil the knowledge of the bible in the minds of the people being scriptural and theologically sound.

Negroes' spiritual has impact on the American camp-meeting music (also called "camp-meeting spirituals) with the legacy of spontaneous singing. During the age of great awakening and evangelical revival, Charles Wesley and his counterparts, black and whites worship together.

According to Hustad, it is possible that both cultures contributed to spontaneous singing in the brush arbour meetings and that black continued the tradition after the white moved to new forms of "composed" music (cf. Donald, 1993).

The similarity between camp-meeting songs and black spirituality is shown by Ellen Jane Lorenz Porter in her lecture "The Persistence of the Primitive in American Hymnology". She presented the fact that the song, "Where Are the Hebrew Children?" is found in both the North and the South and among the blacks.

Where, are the Hebrew children, (repeat).

Who were cast in the furnace of fire?

Safe now in the promise land.

(Ref.) By and by we'll go home to meet, (repeat twice)

Way over in the Promised Land.

2. Good Elijah, 3. Prophet Daniel, 4. Weeping Mary,

5. martyred Stephen, 6. Blessed Jesus, etc.

Many of the camp-meeting songs also became "secular" in a reversal of the traditional revivalist metamorphosis, secular to sacred. Few of the Negroes' spirituals are attached as appendices (Donald 1993).

G. LIBERATION THEOLOGY AS BED-ROCK OF AFRICAN CHURCH HYMNODY

The first African church is the African Methodist Episcopal Church, founded by Richard Allen. It was created in reaction to the negative and distasteful experience they had at St. George's Methodist Church where they experienced racial segregation and discrimination in the church. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) has the longest and most informative hymnological history among the Black Protestant denomination which were founded in North America.

An excellent compilation of a cross-section of the African- American Hymnody resulted in the Bicentennial Hymnal (1984). The founding date of the hymnal was calculated from the year 1887 when Richard Allen and his fellow worshipers withdrew from St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, in protest against racial discrimination. The hymns passed through a series of revisions such as 1801, 1818, 1837, 1876, 1892, 1941, 1954 respectively.

Richard Allen compiled fifth-four classic and folk hymns titled "A Collection of Spiritual Songs and hymns, selected from various authors and made popular Eileen Southern in the early 1970s. Southern made an in-depth research on the hymnal and commended it for several reasons: First, it was an original compilation of Allen, instead of using the official Methodist hymnal, second, it was the first published black denominational hymnal. Third, it was the first published book to include "wondering chorus". The bishop used to endorse the hymn to buy because of competition with existing ones. Choirs began to develop rapidly throughout the period the 1837 hymnbook was in use. The choir were taken among the congregation which was first objected (McClain 1990).

Turner's book being the first hymnbook to be published by the denomination following the civil war was highly significant. Many thousands of the hymnbooks were sold. The old hymn gave way to the new and the children of the freedom can sing a new song from their own church book. God, according to Turner is a Negro. Turner included anti-slavery songs, orthodox Wesley hymn and revival songs which he called "The Old Zion Songs". Twenty of the revival songs were credited to Ira D. Sankey's gospel song collections which began to appear in print in 1875.

Two decade after the creation of the first hymnal, Rev. Charles E. Stewart criticized the church hymnody. As one of musically and theologically trained minister of the church, he felt that the hymnal should contain pieces that can stand the test of time. For example, "Battle Hymn of the Republic" "Onward Christian Soldiers", and Luther's famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God". All the hymns centred on liberation theology (McClain 1990:45).

H. CONCLUSION

The Negroes' spiritual (Black Hymnody) are the song that reveal the history of African-American slaves traumatic experience of slavery. It shows what some Africans had suffered yet remained undaunted in their tribulation. They believed that God knew about what they were passing through and would deliver them at his own time. African slaves saw their predicament as a parallel or in congruent to that of Lord Jesus Christ experience on the cross.

The Negroes also identified their condition with that of the Israelites and believed in freedom which would come at physical death and reign with Jesus Christ in eternity. The unpalatable condition drew them closer to their God. They believed at last that God is God of the oppressed as well as the oppressor; that is the slave and the slave owner. Negroes' spiritual is a kind of hymnody that was imported from the emancipated African slaves with some Charles Wesley revival hymnody to the Africa in collaboration with the western missionaries.

Furthermore, It is recorded that the first African slaves were brought in 1619 to Virginia and all such human trafficking was outlawed by vote of the Congress in 1807; although, many slaves were brought in illegally thereafter. Not until the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the war between North and South, and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 were the slave finally free. It took another century for freedom to be transformed into the beginning of first class citizenship (1964) (John 1964: 19).

However, the historical background perusal of the Negroes spirituality reveals that the hymnody is centred on liberation theology, a core African church theology. As a result of this such hymnody was appropriate in their worship. It would make the African church active and their worship experience dynamic.

It is a pity that there is dearth of Negroes spiritual in today's worship songs with exception of few excerpt from it. It is seldom in use while some are not compiled along with the contemporary sacred vocal music. The paper exposes the importance of it. As all other western music used in worship services have their historical background such as a tune of music dedicated to idol; the origin which is even primitive to that of negroes spiritual the negroes spiritual has likewise and should be accepted by the global hymn societies.

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Biblical exegesis and African beliefs and practices

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Biblical exegesis and African beliefs and practices

ABSTRACT

Biblical exegesis and African religious practice have remained an ongoing exercise in academic disciplines, particularly in biblical studies. The effort towards African hermeneutics is not exhausted. There are still a lot to unveil in this aspect. In the contemporary African Christianity, biblical exegesis and African hermeneutics are highly indispensable in understanding of the Christian Scripture and suitable application of biblical text among African users of the Bible. The major aim of this study is to evaluate the relationship between African religious and cultural practices and biblical interpretation. The inability of daily users of the Bible, especially ordained priests and their equivalents to engage in biblical exegesis is a big challenge to Africans in the 21st century. One of the dangers of this problem is misunderstanding and misinterpretation of biblical text as well as deception of Christian followers in great number. The mass ignorance of the daily users of the Bible, and poor knowledge and historical development of African belief and practice is an issue that needs urgent attention. It is not exaggeration that family crisis and social chaos are part of Africans' life as a result of poor interpretation and application of biblical texts. The researcher posits that adequate knowledge of biblical exegesis is required for suitable application of biblical texts in different aspects of human endeavour in relation to African religious practices in African milieu. The Methodology used in this work is historical-critical method of biblical exegesis. Data are collected and analysed qualitatively.

Key words: Bible, Exegesis, African Religion, Belief, Practice

A. INTRODUCTION

Afro-biblical hermeneutics is needed for biblical interpretations done in Africa especially by Africans. Exegesis of the biblical text is not only a crucial and interesting exercise in biblical studies, but an indispensable effort towards understanding a biblical text under investigation. Reading and comprehending the Bible is different from reading an article or letter from a friend or organization. This is why Hayes and Holladay (1934 p.14) posit that "biblical exegesis belongs to the category of specialized exegesis. It cannot be treated as a recent novel or contemporary magazine which usually considers contemporary readers." Studying the Biblical text(s) from its original context is a herculean task which requires much effort. Biblical exegesis is an effort towards giving a balanced understanding of a biblical pericope for suitable application in a certain milieu. A proper understanding of any biblical text is impossible until its exegetical study is carefully undertaken. Barr (1992) avers that exegesis is a crucial aspect of biblical studies, as it enables readers to grasp the original meaning of the text, which is essential for accurate interpretation and application.

Exegesis is incomplete if it is not applied in a particular setting for absorption for numerous purposes. The essence of biblical exegesis is usually for human development and sustenance of community or society growth and development. It is on this note that hermeneutics becomes a very vital aspect of biblical exegesis. Africa is one of the social settings for biblical hermeneutics. For decades, biblical scholars have applied the exegetical findings of their investigated biblical texts in African soil.

African belief(s) and practice(s) predominantly encompass the way of life and behaviour of Africans which are influenced by their faith in the Supreme Being, and in accordance with perennial custom(s). Biblical exegesis is more interesting when it finds itself in addressing human need in the contemporary dispensation. Nthamburi and Waruta (1997 p.40) contend that “unless an African is enabled to understand Scripture in his/her own cultural patterns, the Scripture will not only lose its validity but its authoritative relevance as well.” In addition, Kuwornu-Adjaottor (2012 p.10) opines that good Biblical exegesis is required and Afrobiblical hermeneutics is needed for biblical interpretations done in Africa especially by African(s).

The thrust of this paper is to examine the nexus between biblical exegesis and African religious belief and practice. In this study, biblical exegesis is explored in relation to its hermeneutics in African soil. This study intends to contend that proper biblical exegesis has a lot to contribute to Africans and towards a better Africa and African(s). While library research is used in this paper, qualitative method is used to collect and analyse data for this study. The sources of data collection is mainly from secondary sources such as online articles, journal articles, textbooks, published and unpublished materials and so on.

B. UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

It is necessary to examine what the term “exegesis” implies before taking a study on biblical exegesis. According to Hayes and Holladay (1934), the term “exegesis” itself comes from the Greek word *exegeomai* which basically meant “to lead out of.” When applied to texts, it denoted the “reading out” of the meaning. The noun, therefore, could refer to “interpretation” or “explanation. The Greek meaning of the word indicates the process of drawing out the meaning from the text rather than imposing one's own interpretations onto it. Exegesis is a crucial aspect of biblical studies, as it seeks to uncover the author's intended meaning, the historical and cultural background, and the relevance of the text to contemporary readers.

Exegesis involves a range of methods and techniques, including philological analysis, historical research, literary criticism, and theological reflection. Philological analysis involves examining the language, grammar, and syntax of the text to understand its original meaning. Historical research involves studying the historical context in which the text was written, including the social, cultural, and political background. Literary criticism involves analysing the text's literary structure, style, and genre to understand its literary significance.

Theological reflection involves considering the text's theological themes, motifs, and implications for Christian doctrine and practice. According to Bultmann (1941), a prominent biblical scholar, exegesis involves a “demythologization” of the text, stripping away its mythological and magical elements to reveal its historical and cultural significance. This process is essential to understanding the text's original meaning and its relevance to contemporary readers.

Biblical exegesis is the critical analysis and interpretation of the biblical text, aiming to understand its original meaning and significance. It involves a thorough examination of the text's linguistic, historical, cultural, and literary context, as well as its theological and philosophical implications.

In the world of the Bible, Barr (1961 p.5) opines that exegesis is “the interpretation of the Bible as a product of its own time and culture, and as a document which has a message for our own time and culture”. Similarly Jacobs notes that “the Bible is not a monoculture book.” (p. 6). By engaging in biblical exegesis, scholars and readers can gain a deeper understanding of the text's meaning, significance, and relevance to their lives. Pobee says it simply: “the Church is never welded to any particular culture, even

if it is rooted in every culture in order to be able to speak to those who share in this. Consequently, theology, whether African or European, has the task of thinking revelation anew in each cultural situation” (p. 57) and “the Bible itself is not a-cultural” (p. 153).

Biblical exegesis refers to the critical interpretation and explanation of biblical texts, encompassing various methodologies and approaches that have evolved over time. This practice is essential for understanding the meanings and implications of Scripture within its historical, literary, and theological contexts. One of the foundational approaches to biblical exegesis is the *peshat*, which emphasizes the plain or literal meaning of the text. It is argued that this method requires a thorough examination of the linguistic and grammatical aspects of the scripture, followed by an analysis of its literary and historical contexts (Vargon, 2001).

This approach is crucial for establishing a baseline understanding of the text before exploring deeper or more allegorical interpretations. In addition to *peshat*, other forms of exegesis include *midrash*, which is a traditional Jewish interpretive method that seeks to make biblical texts relevant to contemporary issues and contexts (Kern-Ulmer, 2008).

Midrashic interpretations often involve creative storytelling and can provide insights into the moral and ethical dimensions of the scriptures. Similarly, inner-biblical exegesis, as discussed by Tjin (2022), involves interpreting one biblical text in light of another, highlighting the interconnectedness of the biblical narrative and its reception within different historical contexts. Theological interpretation also plays a significant role in biblical exegesis, particularly within Christian traditions.

According to Dunn (2007), scholars like Raymond Brown have explored the concept of *sensus plenior*, or “fuller sense,” which posits that biblical texts can convey deeper meanings when viewed through the lens of Christological understanding. This method reflects the belief that the scriptures are not merely historical documents but are also divinely inspired texts that reveal God’s ongoing revelation to humanity.

Moreover, the evolution of biblical exegesis has been influenced by various historical and cultural factors. For instance, the Carolingian Renaissance saw a shift towards more fluid and anthological commentaries, which integrated patristic models and adapted them to contemporary theological concerns (Matis, 2022).

This transformation illustrates how exegesis is not static but rather a dynamic process that responds to the needs and contexts of its interpreters. In contemporary scholarship, there is a growing recognition of the importance of integrating ethical considerations into biblical exegesis. In his work, Niditch (2023) emphasizes the relevance of biblical texts to modern ethical dilemmas, thereby bridging the gap between ancient scripture and contemporary moral discourse. This approach underscores the ongoing significance of biblical exegesis in addressing pressing social and ethical issues today.

Conclusively, biblical exegesis encompasses a variety of interpretive strategies that aim to uncover the meanings of scripture within its historical, literary, and theological contexts. From the literal interpretations of *peshat* to the more nuanced readings of *midrash* and theological interpretation, exegesis remains a vital practice for understanding the complexities of biblical texts and their relevance to both ancient and modern audiences.

C. DOING BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

Embarking on the task of analysing a biblical text from its original context is engrossing but arduous. Biblical exegesis is a multi-step process that involves a thorough analysis of the biblical text. The following are the steps involved in doing biblical exegesis:

1. Textual Analysis: The first step in biblical exegesis is to examine the text itself, paying attention to its language, grammar, syntax, and literary structure. This involves analysing the text's words, phrases, and sentences to understand their meaning and significance. According to Hubbard (1989), a biblical scholar, the first step in exegesis is to read the biblical text carefully and accurately, with a view to understanding its literal meaning.

Redaction criticism is another effort towards understanding the literary content of a biblical text. Redaction criticism is an effort towards determining the difference between the first draft or original manuscript and edited version(s). Redaction criticism is a method of biblical criticism that focuses on the relationship between the text and its editing history. It involves analysing the text to determine how it was edited and compiled, and what this reveals about the intentions and goals of the editor(s).

The major parts in redaction criticism include redactor, redaction, redactional layer and redactional seams. The redactor is the editor or compiler of the text. They are responsible for selecting, arranging, and editing the material(s). Redaction is the process of editing and compiling the text. Redactional layer is the layer of the text that reflects the redactor's editorial decisions. Redactional seam(s) is the points in the text where the redactor has made significant changes or insertions (Ebeling, 1964).

2. Historical Contextualization: The second step in biblical exegesis is to place the text in its historical context. This involves studying the social, cultural, and political background of the time period in which the text was written. This helps to understand the author's intentions, the audience's assumptions, and the historical events that influenced the text.

According to Wrede (1901 p.9), a German biblical scholar, "the historical context is the basis of the interpretation of the text".

3. Cultural Analysis: The third step in biblical exegesis is to analyse the cultural context of the text. This involves studying the cultural values, customs, and traditions that are reflected in the text. This helps to understand the text's cultural significance and its relevance to contemporary readers.

According to Geertz (1973), culture is a system of meaning that is shared by a group of people and is transmitted from one generation to the next. In some cases, the cultural analysis of the text is explained using another nomenclature called "Sitz-im-Leben". "Sitz-im-Leben" is a German term used to designate situation in life of a biblical text. It studies the socio-cultural practice(s) prevalent at the time of the events that took place in the text. Socio-cultural analysis of a biblical text helps an exegete to decide suitable setting for application of the findings of his or her exegesis.

4. Literary Analysis: The fourth step in biblical exegesis is to analyse the literary structure and style of the text. This involves examining the text's genre, tone, and literary devices, such as metaphors, similes, and allusions. This helps to understand the text's literary significance and its intended meaning.

As noted by Frye (1957), the literary structure of a text is a reflection of its meaning and significance. In addition, literary criticism of a text offers the opportunity to refer to the original manuscript of the text to determine the actual genre of the selected *pericope*. It gives the exegete the opportunity to discover if the literary unit is an imperative or a plea, including other elements.

5. Theological Reflection: The final step in biblical exegesis is to reflect on the text's theological themes and implications. This involves considering the text's relevance to Christian doctrine and practice, as well as its significance for contemporary readers.

According to his theological view, Barth (1934) avers that the Bible is a theological text that is meant to be interpreted theologically. It is very crucial at this juncture to infer that theological interpretation of a biblical text is entirely different from personal position of a pulpit preacher.

Theological reflection is never the same with faith based interpretation of a biblical text. Theological reflection of a biblical text considers objectively, the implication of the study text in relation to human relationship with God. In other words, theological reflection of the text considers the relevance of the study text to man and his understanding of God. It can either enhance or totally change man's perception or idea of God on certain issues or realities, depending on the exegetical discoveries from the text.

African theologians such as Ukpong (2000) advocates "reading with the eyes of the poor," integrating African cultural symbols (e.g., communality, ancestral veneration) into exegesis. Oduyoye (2001) attempts close reading of texts like Hagar's story (Gen 16) through Ghanaian Akan concepts. Dube (2000) reads Matthew 15:21–28 (Canaanite woman) as resistance to missionary paternalism. The theological reflection either gives elements of support or directly opposes already existing Church doctrine and traditional practices.

6. Close Reading: A very important part of biblical exegesis that must be given maximum attention while doing the exegesis of biblical text is the close reading. Close reading of the text involves details explanation of the selected literary unit. Reading the chosen text closely must take into consideration, analysis of the text from its original context. In this regard, proficiency in the original language of the text is essentially required.

It is compulsory that the exegete must have at least basic knowledge of biblical language(s). Proficiency in Hebrew and Greek languages is the prerequisite for study of any given biblical passage(s). If a study is taken on selected text from the Old Testament, the researcher who is the exegete must be familiar with Hebrew language; if it is selected text from the New Testament, the researcher (the exegete) must be familiar with Greek language.

The only eligibility for reading any biblical text closely is at least basic knowledge of Hebrew and Greek languages. Anyone who does have knowledge of these two languages is automatically disqualified from attempting a close reading of any biblical text. This contention is based on the reality that most translations of the Bible to other languages and dialects are from Hebrew and Greek Bibles respectively.

In the close reading, meticulous attention is given to Hebrew words if the study text is from the Old Testament or Greek words if the study text is from the New Testament. It is here that the researcher proves his or her expertise in biblical exegesis. The contextual meaning and implication of the Hebrew words or Greek words are extensively analysed. The findings of the exegesis are usually emerged from close reading of the text. Without the close reading of the text, it is likely that there could be no new discovery from the study text.

D. AFRICAN RELIGION/AFRICAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND PRACTICE

Traditional Religion is often used to designate that type of religion that is built upon the belief and cultural practice of people of a given locality. The practices of this kind of religion are usually based on what is handed down to subsequent generations by their forebears.

Traditional religious practices have been a well-known religion among people of different continents of the world. The influence of traditional based religion is often common and perennial tradition of a particular group of people over certain period of time.

However, there has been an ongoing debate about the suitable nomenclature for this type of religion. Whereas some scholars object that it should properly be described as Traditional Religion and African Traditional Religion when referring to Africans, some contend that it is better called Indigenous Religion and African Indigenous Religion when referring to Africans. Adamo (2011 p.2) gives an interrogation regarding this debate thus: “Is there anything called African Traditional Religion(s) (ATR) at all?”

During the early days of missionaries, travellers, anthropologists and historians, there was no acceptance of any existence of anything called African history and ATR(s), despite the fact that they struggled with the adherents of this religion and tried to condemn what they thought never existed. Consequently, the one without history cannot have religion (Fage 1970 p.1) and (Denis 2006 p.312).

According to Mercado (2004/2005), some anthropologists posit that “untutored” Africans cannot know God as the idea of God is philosophical. The missionaries surmised that in the early days, Africans were not fully human; they prohibited polygamy, initiation rites, ancestor worship and other indigenous practices. For them, Africans could not have known God since they were not fully human as the missionaries thought.

Moreover, during the postcolonial era, it has come to be established that there is what may be called ATR(s); however, there is no unanimous agreement as to whether it is religions in the plural or religion in the singular. Mbiti (1970) proposes that it should be religions in the plural. His reason is that Africans are notoriously religious and there are different beliefs and traditions according to ethnic groups. There are so many ethnic groups as there are many traditional religions. Furthermore, he argues that AIR does not have one origin or one historic movement and that the beliefs amongst the different communities differ greatly.

In contradiction to the foregoing, Idowu (1973) argues for the singular use, because of the common racial origin of the Africans and the similarities of their culture and religious beliefs. Because the real cohesive factor in religion in Africa is the living God, it should be African religion instead of religions. Shorter (1975) in Adamo (2011) proposes that African religion can be spoken in the singular, because of the basic unity of African religious systems: Although they (African religious systems) were separate and self-contained systems, they interact with one another and influenced one another to different degrees. This justifies our using the term African Traditional Religion in the singular to refer to the whole African religious phenomena, even if we are, in fact, dealing with multiplicity of theologies.

African traditional religious practice is believed and practiced through oral transmission. Bonsu (2016) avers that African traditional religion relies on the oral transmission. Thus, doctrine tends to be more flexible than it is in text-based religions like Christianity and Islam, and it changes according to the immediate needs of its followers. Awolalu (1975 p.2) states that African traditional religion “is not written on paper but in people’s hearts, minds, oral history, rituals, shrines and religious functions”.

E. TENETS OF AFRICAN RELIGION

Tenets of ATR/AIR encompass series of beliefs and practices advocated in Africa among Africans. Some major tenets of African religious practice include the following:

- 1. Belief in Supreme Being:** Africans anchor their belief in the existence of the Supreme Being. This Supreme Being is regarded as the “Creator or God the Creator” in African thought. This Supreme Being is considered the ultimate source of all things including life, power and wisdom.
- 2. Ancestor Veneration:** Ancestors in African religion are believed to play active role in the lives of their living generations. Idowu (1973) posits that ancestors are highly revered in African cultures, and their spirits are believed to continue to play an active role in the lives of their descendants. Ancestors are departed members of the living. They are often called “the living dead”. They offer services such as protection, guidance, wisdom, wealth and so on to the living.
- 3. Spirits and Spiritual Beings:** In ATR/AIR, there is a wide belief in the existence of spiritual beings including spirits and other supernatural entities. These spiritual beings possess power and other capable qualities beyond human control.
- 4. Ritual and Sacrifices:** Ritual and sacrifices are elements used in ATR to interact with divine beings. Rituals and sacrifices are used as votive offering to appease deity/deities. Africans use them in some cases to honour ancestors, and to seek favour such as blessing of various sorts, protection and healing from divinity.
- 5. Community and Interconnectedness:** Man does not live in isolation, hence inter-personal relationship is inevitable in African religion and culture. Individual members of human society in Africa relate in various ways in the family, clan, and tribe and so on.
- 6. Respect for Nature and the Environment:** It is recognized that Africans have regard for nature and natural environment. The essence of dwelling in harmony with natural world is emphasized in African religious practice. Similarly, Hallen (2003) avers that African religions often emphasize the interconnectedness of all things, and the need to live in harmony with nature and the environment.
- 7. Cyclical View of Time:** Cyclical view of time in African religion and practice is demonstrated in such a way that events and experience are taken as part of larger cycle of birth, growth, decay and rebirth. According to Parrinder (1967), African cultures often have a cyclical view of life and death, with death seen as a natural part of the cycle of life.
- 8. Importance of Elders and Tradition:** Elders in African religious practice are believed to be the custodians of tradition, culture and spiritual knowledge. Mbiti (1969) asserts that elders are highly respected in African cultures, and their wisdom and experience are sought after.
- 9. Holistic View of Health and Wellness:** African religion adopts the holistic view of health and wellness. ATR/AIR recognizes the connection between physical emotions and spiritual wellbeing.
- 10. Emphasis on Harmony and Balance:** Harmonious living among people living in society is highly maintained in African religion. It emphasizes the relevance of keeping mutual relationship and balance in all aspects of life. The mutual relationship is between and among individuals, communities and the natural environment.

F. WESTERN INFLUENCE ON AFRICAN RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND PRACTICES

Influence of western culture on ATR began at the time of European colonization in African land. Many African countries including Nigeria were greatly influenced to accept foreign religion at the expense of their indigenous religious practices.

During the colonial era, European colonizers sought to impose their own religious beliefs and practices on the indigenous populations of Africa. This led to the suppression of traditional African religions and the imposition of Christianity and Islam. Many African leaders and intellectuals were forced to convert to Christianity or Islam, and traditional African religious practices were seen as “pagan” and “heathen.”

The Western influence on African religious belief and practices had a profound impact on traditional African religions. Many traditional African religions were suppressed, and their practices were seen as "pagan" and "heathen."

The imposition of Christianity and Islam led to the loss of traditional African religious practices and the suppression of indigenous cultural identity. Few Examples of the western influence on African culture and belief are examined using the following tribes in Africa.

Igbo people

The arrival of Western colonizers and Christian missionaries in the 19th century brought significant changes to Igbo religious and cultural practices. Upon arrival of these people with exploitative mind, they suppressed traditional Igbo practices, labelling them as “heathen” and “backward”.

The adoption of Western culture led to loss of Igbo cultural heritage including rich Igbo language and decent dressing code. The Igbos continue to struggle to reconcile their valued traditional practices with modern influences. Perpetual division between the elites and unsophisticated is as a result of western urbanization that came with Christianity.

The arrival of Christianity, facilitated by European missionaries, led to the rejection of some Igbo traditional beliefs, which were labelled as “pagan” or “devilish”. Missionaries strived to end practices like human sacrifice. Many Igbo people converted to Christianity, although traditional religious practices persist. Christianity took over many functions of sacred specialists in Igbo traditional religion (Uchendu, 1965).

Today, many African societies are grappling with the legacy of Western influence on their religious belief and practices. Many people are seeking to reclaim their traditional spiritual practices and cultural identity, while others are embracing Christianity and Islam as a way of life. The blending of traditional African religions with Christianity and Islam has created a unique cultural syncretism that is characteristic of many African societies.

Western education, introduced by missionaries, attracted many Igbo due to the establishment of schools offering free education and healthcare. Western education was seen as a means of destroying indigenous Igbo ways of life. English became the language of instruction in schools, sometimes leading to the banning of Igbo in homes.

Modernity, driven by Christianity, education, urbanization, and industrialization, has altered Igbo cultural values. Traditional values like community life, hospitality, and human relations have been affected. Western culture is sometimes regarded as a superior civilization, leading to the perception that Igbo customs are primitive.

In addition, colonialism has had a detrimental effect on the social, political, and economic status of traditional Igbo women. The British used Igbo people as tools for territorial growth, which overturned

the centuries-standing democracy of Igbo culture, replacing local leaders with chieftaincies, challenging Igbo leadership and organization (Nzegwu, 2006).

Yoruba People

In terms of religious practice of the Yoruba, missionaries associated it with “idol” worship without considering its moral values. Some view Western religion positively, crediting it with ending immoral practices like human sacrifices and the killing of twins. Many Yoruba are now Christians or Muslims, but aspects of their traditional religion still exist.

Modernization, essentially imitating Western culture, has significantly impacted Yoruba music, dance, and language. There's a growing tendency to prioritize the English language, potentially endangering the Yoruba language. Western culture has influenced moral laxity among contemporary Yoruba. Western education has affected traditional and cultural beliefs (Idowu, 1962).

However, there are few positive Influences of Westernization on the Yoruba socio-cultural practice. Western religion is seen by some as a tool to reintegrate Yoruba youths affected by social destabilization. The universal moral attitude of Western religion has transcendental ethical values that create social solidarity among the Yoruba.

Hausa People

Islam has been a significant influence in Hausa society since as early as the 14th century, brought by traders and missionaries from the West and elites converting from the east. The merging of religions has been characteristic of Hausa society for centuries, with a climate of tolerance and respect for religious diversity. Some Hausa groups still engage in Animist rituals, and some minorities have recently embraced Christianity.

During the colonial era, Western education was limited in the north because Christian mission work was prohibited there. There was a mistrust of Western education and the values associated with it. The Boko script, a Latin alphabet, was implemented by British and French colonial authorities and made the official Hausa alphabet in 1930. Today, millions of Hausa-speaking people who can only read and write in Ajami (Arabic script) are considered illiterate by the Nigerian government (Last, 1967).

The British colonial rule led to an uneven distribution of Western education between the North and South. Colonialism is blamed for the backwardness of the Hausa people in society. Fulani and Hausa cultural similarities have allowed for significant integration between the two groups and are often classified as “Hausa-Fulani”. Many Fulani living in Hausa regions cannot speak Fulfulde and speak Hausa as their first language (Hountondji, 2002).

G. INTERPLAY BETWEEN BIBLICAL EXEGESIS AND AFRICAN CULTURAL PRACTICES

Biblical exegesis within the African context has evolved to incorporate indigenous beliefs and practices, creating a rich tapestry of interpretation that reflects the unique cultural and spiritual landscapes of the continent. This intercultural exegesis allows for a more profound engagement with biblical texts, as African scholars and theologians seek to understand scripture through the lens of their own traditions and experiences.

One significant aspect of this development is the rise of intercultural biblical exegesis, which emphasizes the importance of context in interpreting both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Scholars such as Loba-Mkole (2007) argue that African contexts are not merely settings for applying exegetical conclusions but are integral to the interpretation process itself, providing epistemological privilege to local perspectives.

Loba-Mkole (2008) posits that this approach aligns with the inculturation hermeneutic, which seeks to bridge the gap between biblical texts and African cultural expressions, thereby making the scriptures more relevant to contemporary African believers. Moreover, the integration of African traditional beliefs into biblical interpretation has led to a re-evaluation of concepts such as salvation and eschatology.

For instance, Kibaara (2022) discusses how African traditional rituals influence the understanding of salvation among African Christians, suggesting that these rituals subconsciously shape their worldview and interpretation of biblical narratives.

Similarly, Agboada (2023) highlights the parallels between eschatological themes in African traditional religions and Christian eschatology, indicating that these indigenous perspectives can enrich theological scholarship in Africa. The dialogue between African traditional beliefs and biblical texts is further exemplified in the work of Gharbin (2023), who employs dialogic hermeneutics to explore the concepts of love in both Johannine literature and Akan culture.

This comparative approach not only enhances the understanding of biblical love but also affirms the value of African cultural insights in theological discussions. Such intercultural engagements demonstrate that African biblical hermeneutics is not a mere adaptation of Western methodologies but a distinct and vital field of study that contributes to the global discourse on the Christian Scripture.

Furthermore, the post-colonial context of African biblical scholarship has prompted a critical examination of the historical and ideological frameworks that have shaped biblical interpretation on the continent. West (2009) notes that African biblical hermeneutics often operates in opposition to missionary-colonial narratives, advocating for interpretations that reflect the lived realities and spiritual heritage of African communities. This critical stance is essential for developing a more inclusive and collaborative approach to biblical scholarship that honours both the text and the cultural contexts from which it is read.

Biblical exegesis in Africa is characterized by a dynamic interplay between scripture and indigenous beliefs, resulting in a rich and contextually relevant interpretation of biblical texts. By embracing intercultural exegesis and recognizing the significance of local traditions, African scholars are not only enhancing their understanding of the Bible but also contributing to a broader theological discourse that respects and incorporates diverse cultural perspectives.

H. RELEVANCE OF BIBLICAL EXEGESIS TO THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF AFRICAN BELIEFS AND CULTURE

The relevance of "Biblical Exegesis and African Beliefs and Practices" lies in its effort to contextualize the Christian faith within the African socio-cultural context. It addresses the struggles African converts face in reconciling their Christian beliefs with their African identity. This field of study seeks to make the Bible more relatable and applicable to the lives of African Christians by interpreting it through an African lens, using familiar languages, illustrations, and cultural references.

Biblical exegesis facilitates cultural contextualization. It emphasizes the importance of interpreting the Bible within the African context, as opposed to a Western one. This involves understanding the text in light of African worldviews, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions. It is helpful in addressing contemporary issues. It grapples with issues relevant to African Christians, such as polygamy, poverty, HIV/AIDS, and women's leadership in the church. Family and societal chaos created by wrong interpretation of some biblical narratives can be curbed through adequate and balanced exegetical analysis of such narratives.

Biblical exegesis empowers African voices. It promotes African agency in biblical interpretation, correcting the historical trend of interpreting the Bible through extraneous cultural and ideological conditioning. Besides, it gives room for promotion of inclusivity. This denotes that biblical exegesis seeks to make Christian faith appealing and relevant to all Africans, including the poor and marginalized. It enables development of African Christian theology. It contributes to the development of an authentic African Christian theology rooted in African experiences and perspectives.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the outcome of the study, the researchers recommend the following:

1. Biblical exegesis should be the concern of every user of the Bible especially student theologians and certified theologians.
2. The two major languages of the Bible (Hebrew and Greek) must be priority in the study of Theology.
3. African Religion and Culture should be studied and observed to understand its values and tenets.
4. African religion and culture should not be disregarded and treated with contempt as if it has nothing to offer to the society.
5. Every possible effort should be made by Africans (Igbos) to transmit valuable Africa cultural practices to younger and subsequent generations.
6. Preachers of Biblical messages should link findings of exegesis of biblical text to suitable African socio-cultural practice with the sole aim of retaining moral rectitude among members of the contemporary society.
7. Biblical exegetes should endeavour to use their discoveries from biblical exegesis to discourage vices and promote and imbibe virtues.

J. CONCLUSION

The ability to understand the context of biblical text is dependent on the expertise of the exegete on Biblical exegesis. Proficiency in biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek respectively is highly indispensable in the exercise of biblical exegesis. It is really difficult to comprehend the original intention of biblical narrative if one is a novice to biblical exegesis.

Close reading of biblical text makes it easy to make new discoveries from the study of a biblical text. But it is only sufficient knowledge of Hebrew and Greek languages that makes the close reading feasible.

The value of cross-cultural interpretation recognizes the potential of the African context to enhance the understanding and interpretation of biblical texts. Cross-cultural biblical interpretation offers original interpretative insights and challenges professional biblical scholarship. The importance of context highlights that there is no superior context or culture when it comes to biblical interpretation. The potential for authentic theology affirms that an African biblical hermeneutic approach is a possible route to developing an authentic African Christian theology. In addition, the significance of indigenous beliefs acknowledges the enduring significance of indigenous worldviews, beliefs, and practices in Africa.

The need for contextualization of biblical interpretation in Africa makes the identity and presence of Jesus more real to the Church in Africa. Moreover, proper knowledge of African religion and culture is required for African hermeneutic of the Bible. Hence, there is need to pay attention to African religious tenets and values through formal studies. Such study would offer learners the opportunity to understand the nature and provenance of African religion and culture. Effort should be made to connect contextual message of the Bible to social reality in African milieu.

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Title:
Ecological perspective in
Genesis 1:26-30 as an
approach to environmental
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Ecological perspective in Genesis 1:26-30 as an approach to environmental stewardship

ABSTRACT

Africa faces a mounting environmental crisis manifested in deforestation, pollution, erosion, and unregulated exploitation of natural resources. This paper investigates these ecological challenges through a theological lens, specifically examining Genesis 1:26–30 to articulate a biblically grounded ecological ethic. The study identifies the root of the problem as a dual disconnection: humanity's alienation from both God and creation, fuelled by anthropocentric misinterpretations of Scripture that justify environmental degradation. The paper examines how re-reading Genesis 1 from an ecological perspective can inform Christian responsibility toward environmental stewardship in Nigeria. The methodology employed is a contextual and theological analysis of the Genesis creation narrative, engaging biblical exegesis and African contextual realities to discern theological insights relevant to ecological conservation. The findings reveal that the Genesis text promotes a theology of responsibility rather than dominion, where humanity functions as a steward rather than a master of creation. The biblical mandate to "have dominion" is reframed as a call to care, preserve, and sustain the created order in partnership with God. This reinterpretation challenges exploitative attitudes and the intrinsic value of all creation. In light of these findings, the paper recommends a transformative theological education that integrates environmental ethics, active church involvement in ecological advocacy, and partnerships between religious institutions and environmental agencies. The Nigerian church can become a prophetic voice and practical agent in addressing the country's ecological crisis by reorienting theology to support environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Environmental Stewardship, Genesis 1:26–30, Ecological Theology, Creation Care, Africa, Anthropocentrism

A. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has ushered humanity into an era of extraordinary ecological challenges. From soaring global temperatures and widespread deforestation to polluted oceans and mass extinction of species, the scale of environmental degradation has reached alarming proportions. Once perceived as inexhaustible, the earth's ecosystems are now under critical threat, and the consequences are global, far-reaching, and in some cases, irreversible. Scientists, international policy-makers, and grassroots movements have all acknowledged these crises' urgency, yet meaningful and unified action remains staggeringly slow. This inertia signals a crisis of policy and science and a moral and spiritual failure. At the heart of today's environmental collapse is a growing recognition that the current trajectory of consumption and exploitation is unsustainable and that humanity must re-evaluate its role within the larger web of life. One of the critiques of the environmental crisis is that it stems from a disjointed worldview. This paradigm alienates humans from nature, treats the earth as a mere resource, and elevates economic growth over ecological integrity. The dominant narratives of modernity have promoted a mechanistic view of the world where nature is commodified and human mastery over it is glorified. Consequently, many societies have internalised an anthropocentric ethic that sees humans as the end of creation, with the non-human world reduced to utility and instrumentality.

Such ideologies have led to the exploitation of forests, the contamination of rivers, the poisoning of the atmosphere, and the disruption of delicate ecological balances.

In contrast to these prevailing narratives, recent decades have witnessed a growing interest in holistic approaches that emphasise interdependence, reciprocity, and ethical responsibility toward the natural world. Environmental ethics, ecotheology, and ecological economics are among the interdisciplinary efforts to integrate ecological sustainability with social justice and spiritual meaning.

These fields argue for a fundamental shift from domination to stewardship, ownership to kinship, and consumption to conservation. The environmental movement, once the domain of scientists and activists, has expanded to include philosophers, theologians, educators, and faith leaders who collectively seek to redefine humanity's place in creation. The growing ecological consciousness among faith-based groups is not merely a trend but a moral imperative.

As climate change intensifies and natural resources dwindle, an urgent need to cultivate a new ethic that reorients humanity toward sustainability, justice, and mutual flourishing. The call is not only to protect endangered species or conserve biodiversity, but to fundamentally reimagine the human story as one that is interwoven with the earth's narrative. This reimagination requires that humanity see themselves not as conquerors or consumers but as caretakers and companions of the planet.

The crisis of the environment, therefore, is not just ecological or political; it is spiritual. It calls into question the values underpinning modern civilization- individualism, consumerism, and technological supremacy- and a return to values that honour simplicity and reverence for life. It compels societies to move beyond short-term gains and toward long-term responsibility. This shift demands an ethical vision informed not only by empirical data but by moral values, one that embraces the ecological crisis and seeks holistic solutions.

The urgency of the environmental crisis demands manifold responses that engage the intellect and the conscience. Through analytical discourse and biblical exegesis, the research contributes to the growing field of eco-spirituality and environmental ethics, addressing a gap in scholarship that separates ecological concerns from moral and religious inquiry. It is a constructive critique of the anthropocentric paradigms that have dominated environmental discourse, advocating instead for a theocentric or ecocentric vision that affirms the sacredness of all life.

The study catalyses thought and transformation in daily practice. It is a call to awaken to the reality that how we treat the earth is a matter of values, and that caring for the planet is a scientific necessity and a spiritual mandate. Therefore, this research provides theoretical and practical pathways for institutions and individuals committed to the flourishing of life on earth. Through this integrated lens, environmental stewardship becomes not a burdensome obligation but a joyful vocation in reverence, responsibility, and hope.

B. ECOLOGICAL CRISIS IN AFRICA

Africa's ecological crisis has become a defining concern of the 21st century. This crisis manifests in multiple, interconnected ways, including deforestation, desertification, and biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate change impacts. As a continent rich in natural resources yet burdened by developmental challenges, Africa finds itself at a crossroads where environmental sustainability is in direct tension with economic survival and growth.

The ecological degradation witnessed today results from the historical, political, economic, and social trajectories that have African nations since colonial times. This necessitates a holistic and

contextualised response integrating indigenous knowledge systems, faith-based values, scientific research, and political will.

One of Africa's most visible aspects of ecological crisis is widespread environmental degradation from resource exploitation. From the expansive forests of the Congo Basin to the savannahs of West Africa, unsustainable logging, mining, and agricultural practices have stripped ecosystems of their vitality.

For instance, Afolayan and Ajibade (2020, p. 142) observe that over 55% of Nigeria's original forest cover has been lost due to unregulated human activities. Similarly, the Congo Basin continues to face severe deforestation due to legal and illegal timber extraction and expanding agriculture (Ndoye & Awono, 2010, p. 68). The environmental cost is high as these ecosystems are critical to biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, and the livelihoods of indigenous populations.

The continent is also bearing the disproportionate brunt of global climate change. While contributing minimally to global carbon emissions, African countries suffer the most from its consequences. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and recurrent droughts have become common across the continent.

In East Africa, prolonged droughts have disrupted agricultural cycles and livestock grazing, leading to food insecurity and economic destabilisation (Ochieng, 2019, p. 74). West and Central Africa have seen increased incidences of flooding, causing displacement and spreading diseases. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022) confirms Africa's heightened vulnerability due to its dependence on climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture and water resources.

According to Adamu and Salami (2017, p. 118), the Sahel region, where changing rainfall patterns have reduced cereal yields and pasture productivity, aggravates poverty and conflict.

Rapid urbanisation and poor waste management also contribute to the ecological crisis in African cities. Urban areas are expanding rapidly, without adequate planning or infrastructure. Informal settlements, lacking proper waste disposal systems, have become epicentres of pollution. Ofoezie et al. (2022, p. 2) show how solid waste clogs drainage systems, leading to flooding and contamination of water bodies.

Moreover, air pollution from the widespread use of biomass fuels such as charcoal and firewood causes health problems and contributes to environmental degradation. Nguema (2021, p. 96) notes that indoor air pollution from cooking with biomass is a leading cause of respiratory diseases among urban poor populations.

Biodiversity loss is another critical aspect of the ecological crisis. Africa is home to an extraordinary range of flora and fauna, many of which are endemic. However, habitat destruction, overexploitation, invasive species, and pollution have led to declines in biodiversity. Protected areas are increasingly threatened by human encroachment for agriculture, settlement, and development.

In East Africa, for example, populations of large mammals have declined dramatically due to habitat fragmentation and illegal poaching (Western et al., 2009, p. 202). The African Biodiversity Collaborative Group (2020, p. 9) warns that this biodiversity loss undermines ecosystem resilience and the ability of nature to provide essential services such as pollination, water purification, and climate regulation.

Africa's ecological crisis is not without socio-economic implications. Environmental degradation directly affects agriculture, the backbone of most African economies and the primary source of livelihood for rural populations. Farmers face reduced yields and increased vulnerability as soil fertility declines and water becomes scarce. This leads to food insecurity, malnutrition, and rural poverty.

Moreover, environmental stress triggers migration, placing pressure on urban centres struggling to cope with population growth and inadequate infrastructure. Ibeanu (2008, p. 35) discusses how environmental degradation in regions like the Lake Chad Basin has led to displacement and conflict over diminishing resources. This rural-to-urban migration fuels cycles of poverty and environmental degradation in urban peripheries.

While many African nations have developed environmental policies and ratified international treaties, implementation remains weak. Agbakoba and Nwauche (2006, p. 173) argue that corruption, lack of political will, and poor institutional coordination hinder effective enforcement. These policies mirror Western models that do not consider Africa's socio-cultural and ecological realities. Muneza (2022, p. 43) points out that environmental laws in many African countries fail to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge and exclude locals from decision-making processes.

This alienation reduces the effectiveness of conservation efforts and limits buy-in. Before the advent of colonialism and industrialisation, African societies practised environmentally sustainable livelihoods through rotational farming, sacred groves, communal land management, and taboos against overexploitation. Millar (2003, p. 52) notes that these systems promoted a respect for nature and maintained ecological balance. In many African cultures, land and nature are considered sacred, and humans are seen as stewards rather than exploiters of creation.

Abegunde (2018, p. 60) notes that African traditional religions embed environmental ethics in rituals and cosmology, encouraging sustainable interaction with the natural world.

Faith-based and moral values also play an essential role in African environmental stewardship. Religious institutions wield influence and mobilise for ecological justice. Churches, mosques, and traditional religious leaders raise awareness about environmental degradation and encourage behaviours that promote sustainability. Integrating spiritual and ethical values into environmental education and policy helps create a culture of care for creation.

According to Paul Muneza (2022, p. 47), faith-based ecological ethics create a holistic and context-sensitive response to the ecological crisis. Therefore, Africa's ecological crisis is a multifaceted challenge that demands a multidimensional response. It requires rethinking development paradigms, empowering, strengthening governance, and integrating traditional knowledge and ethical values into environmental policies.

The urgency of the crisis cannot be overstated. Without immediate and sustained action, the continent risks ecological collapse and social and economic destabilisation. African scholars and policy-makers must take the lead in crafting solutions for the continent's unique ecological, cultural, and historical contexts.

C. EXEGESIS OF GENESIS 1:26–30

The passage Genesis 1:26–30 is situated within the Priestly creation narrative (Gen. 1:1–2:3), widely recognised for its highly structured and formal literary style. Scholars such as Gordon Wenham (1987, p. 15) identify this section as part of a liturgical and poetic tradition that organises the cosmos' origin into a symmetrical six-day scheme, culminating with the Sabbath rest. This segment, specifically verses 26–30, marks the conclusion of the sixth day, which stands as the climactic act of creation.

Unlike earlier creative acts that speak in direct and commanding language ("Let there be light"), here the divine speech becomes more deliberative with the phrase "Let us make," suggesting a different mode of divine activity and intention (Walton, 2001, p. 129). The passage functions as a literary climax, the significance of humanity's creation as the apex of God's creative work.

The purposeful progression of the narrative from the formation of the environment (days 1–3) to the filling of creation (days 4–6) is an ordered cosmos designed for habitation and governance. This literary form asserts that humans occupy a unique and honoured place within creation’s hierarchy.

Verse 27 exhibits characteristic Hebrew poetic parallelism, an artistic literary technique that conveys the message through repetition and balanced syntax. The verse reads: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” This tripartite structure highlights the significance of being made in the divine image and the inclusivity of this identity by explicitly mentioning both male and female.

According to Claus Westermann (1984), such repetition stresses the sacred nature of human creation, using the verb *בָּרָא* “create” thrice to the intentionality and uniqueness of humankind’s origin (pp. 157–159). The parallel construction mirrors forms throughout the Hebrew Bible, where balance and repetition function to understand and retain central truths.

By placing “male and female” at the end of the verse, the text deliberately affirms the equal dignity and shared image-bearing status of both genders, which has important implications for biblical anthropology and ethics (Clines, 1968, p. 67).

Structurally, the narrative of creation in Genesis 1 unfolds in two triads: the first three days involve creating the domains (light/darkness, sky/waters, land/vegetation), while the second three days focus on filling these domains with inhabitants (sun/moon/stars, birds/fish, animals/humans). Humans appear as the final creatures, assigned dominion over the rest of creation, a deliberate literary pattern (Sarna, 1989, p. 12). This placement is not accidental but deliberate, signifying that humans are the intended stewards of the created order.

The passage entrusts humanity with dominion (v. 28), an authority coupled with responsibility to “rule over” the fish, birds, and animals, indicating a custodial role. Moreover, the provision of “every plant yielding seed” and “every tree with seed in its fruit” as food for humans and animals (vv. 29–30) points to a harmonious relationship between creation’s inhabitants, predicated on divine provision and stewardship.

Syntactical Analysis of Genesis 1:26-30

A syntactical analysis of this passage enables a closer examination of the grammatical and literary features that its meaning, particularly the divine-human relationship and humanity’s role within creation. This passage features imperative forms, coordinate clauses, and divine speech acts that collectively frame the mandate of dominion and stewardship.

a. The Divine Declaration: “Let Us Make Humanity...” (v.26)

Verse 26 opens with a unique syntactical feature in the creation narrative: using the plural pronoun in the divine declaration, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness.” This plurality in the divine speech marks a distinct moment of deliberation and communal intent within the Godhead.

The Hebrew pronouns *נַעֲשֶׂה* “let us make,” and *בְּצַלְמֵנוּ* “our” have attracted varied scholarly interpretations. As noted by Heiser (2015), one prevalent view is that this plural form refers to a divine council or heavenly assembly with which God consults before creation. In ancient Near Eastern thought, divine councils were common, where the chief deity deliberated with lesser spiritual beings before acting in the cosmos. This interpretation situates the biblical narrative within its cultural milieu that God’s creative act is not arbitrary but occurs within a relational context of divine governance (Heiser, 2015, p. 65).

From a grammatical perspective, the plural represents the “plural of majesty,” a way of expressing the transcendence and sovereignty of God (von Rad, 1972, p. 58). Christian interpreters see this phrase as an early indication of the triune nature of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in conversation (Kidner, 1967, p. 52).

Jewish scholars and historians of religion frequently connect this wording to the Ancient Near Eastern concept of a divine council, where God consults with a heavenly assembly before action, a motif also evident in Ugaritic texts and other contemporaneous cultures (Heiser, 2015, pp. 39–41).

Alternatively, some scholars interpret the plural pronouns as a majestic plural, a grammatical device used to express the grandeur or authority of a singular entity, rather than implying actual plurality within God’s nature. Westermann (1984, p. 122) argues that the plural form conveys divine majesty and power rather than plurality of persons, the transcendent dignity of God as Creator. Though this interpretation is rather than strictly linguistic, the continuity of biblical revelation is understood within Christian doctrine.

Regardless of interpretative tradition, the phrase indicates the weightiness and deliberateness of creating humankind and its distinguished status and purpose.

Beyond the plural pronouns, the verb form *נַעֲשֶׂה*, meaning “let us make,” appears in the cohortative mood, which conveys intention, determination, and deliberation. Wenham (1987, p. 38) explains that the cohortative verb introduces a deliberate decision by God to create humanity with a distinct purpose, that human creation is not accidental or spontaneous but a resolute act of divine will.

The cohortative mood captures the unfolding plan of creation, signalling that humans are made with intentionality to fulfil a particular role. The phrase “in our image, after our likeness” further amplifies this intentionality through syntactical parallelism. The Hebrew words “image” and “likeness” appear as a synonymous parallelism, the weight of humanity’s unique status.

Kidner (1967, p. 48) asserts that “image” the representative nature of humans as God’s vice-regents on earth, while “likeness” refers to the moral and spiritual resemblance to God, marking humans as distinct from other creatures. Completing the divine declaration is the purpose clause that outlines humanity’s vocation: to exercise dominion over the fish, birds, livestock, and all the earth. This clause grammatically links the creation of humans with their assigned function within the created order.

The verb “have dominion” indicates stewardship and governance rather than exploitative control. Scholars like Clines (1968, p. 207) note that this dominion has a fiduciary responsibility to care for and manage creation in a way that honours its divine origin. These syntactical features, therefore, are not merely linguistic but foundational for understanding humanity’s role in creation from an ecological perspective.

b. Imago Dei: Identity and Responsibility (v.26–27)

Verses 26–27 unfold within the creation of Genesis 1, marking the culmination of the divine creative act. The verb *וַיַּבְרָא*, “and He created,” is noteworthy for its perfect tense form coupled with the waw-consecutive, indicating a sequential, decisive, and deliberate creative action. This conveys that creating humanity is not incidental but purposeful, which made humans hold a distinct place in the created order (Sarna, 1989, p. 9). The verb’s subject is *אֱלֹהִים*, the majestic plural for God, further underlining the divine sovereignty at work.

The direct object *אֶת-הָאָדָם*, “the man” or “humankind,” is prefixed by the accusative marker *אֶת*, which explicitly marks the entire entity as the object of creation. This specificity affirms the unique ontological status of humans as fully constituted beings fashioned by divine intention.

The phrase בְּצַלְמוֹ, “in His image,” functions as a prepositional phrase describing the manner of creation, indicating that the human God’s image or representation constitutes humanity’s very being. The suffix pronoun -י refers to God, connecting the divine origin directly with human identity.

The noun “image,” is a term embedded in Ancient Near Eastern royal ideology, where kings were seen as the physical and political representatives of deities on earth (Kaiser, 1990, p. 134). This contextual background understanding of the significance of the phrase: human beings are created as God’s representatives or vice-regents in creation.

The syntax places “image” immediately after “God,” firmly linking the divine and human identities in a way that transcends mere physical resemblance, implying functional authority and responsibility (Beale, 2011, p. 63). The parallel phrase בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים, “in the image of God,” follows immediately, employing synonymous parallelism, a common feature in Hebrew poetry and prose that means through repetition and variation (Waltke & O’Connor, 1990, p. 58). This literary device, the indelible nature of the divine image in humanity, prevents any dilution or misinterpretation of the concept.

Further syntactic analysis shows a shift from singular to plural pronouns and verbs with ecological implications. The singular אֹתוֹ, “him” in אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ, “He created him” is immediately succeeded by the plural אֹתָם, “them” in אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתָם זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, “male and female He created them.” This transition is deliberate, and the divine image is not restricted to a singular male figure but is embodied collectively in both males and females. The conjunction וְ “and” linking זָכָר, “male” and נְקֵבָה, “female” syntactically unites both genders, asserting the inclusive nature of divine image-bearing and conferring equal ontological dignity on all humans regardless of gender (Brueggemann, 1982, p. 18).

The human vocation to bear God’s image thus extends to all humanity collectively, forming a communal responsibility toward the created order. The plurality of a relational ontology is that human identity is not merely individualistic but inherently social and interconnected. This communal aspect of the *imago Dei* is found in ecological stewardship, where relationality and interdependence are foundational principles (Berry, 1999, p. 52).

The importance of these syntactic features further relates to human responsibility in creation. Being created *in His image* does not merely confer status; it entails the duty to exercise stewardship of divine care, justice, and creativity. The explicit verbal repetition of בָּרָא, “created” God’s creative authority and by extension the delegated authority to humans to maintain and steward creation (Schmid, 2006, p. 109).

The syntactic construction mirrors the relational and functional dimension of humanity’s role: as image-bearers, humans act as God’s agents, ruling over and tending the earth in ways that mirror God’s sustaining governance. The divine image is a marker of ontological dignity that transcends gender and social status, simultaneously serving as the foundation for ecological responsibility.

The linguistic features thus provide a basis for interpreting human beings as both reflectors of divine character and stewards of the natural world, a mandate with ethical and environmental implications.

c. Dominion and Subduing: Terms of Trust, Not Tyranny (v.26, 28)

Verses 26 and 28 contain two pivotal verbs related to humanity’s role over creation: הָדָר, “to have dominion”) and שָׁבַע, “to subdue.” These verbs form the core of the divine mandate regarding human authority over other creatures and the earth itself.

A careful syntactical examination of these terms within their immediate context and the canonical usage reveals an understanding of these commands as calls for responsible stewardship rather than

unbridled exploitation. In Genesis 1:26, the verb *יָרְדוּ*, a form of *הָרָה*, is used: *וַיֵּרְדוּ*, translated as “and let them have dominion.” The verb appears imperfect, indicating a future, ongoing action. This syntactical form points toward an active, continuous exercise of dominion by humanity over “the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the livestock, all the earth, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen. 1:26).

The scope of this dominion (encompassing all living creatures and the earth) linguistically the comprehensive nature of human responsibility. Yet, *הָרָה* in the Hebrew Bible frequently denotes not only rule but governance with a sense of justice and care (e.g., Psalm 72:8). As Waltke (2007, p. 204) explains, *הָרָה* suggests “to rule with wisdom and care,” marking it as an ethical stewardship rather than exploitative dominance.

Verse 28 expands the mandate by introducing *שָׁבַב*, a verb meaning “to subdue, to bring into subjection.” The verse states, *וַיִּכְבְּשֶׁהָ*, “and subdue it.” The verb appears in the imperative form, commanding action, yet syntactically balanced by the parallel verb *יָרְדוּ* “and have dominion.”

The root *שָׁבַב* frequently appears in biblical contexts involving military conquest or land subjugation (e.g., Joshua 10:40). However, within the creation context, the imperative calls for subduing the earth to enable human flourishing without destruction. Wenham (1987) states that the verb here must be understood “within the creation order as establishing human responsibility to bring order and sustainability to the earth, not to exploit or devastate it” (p. 51).

Syntactically, the verbs *הָרָה* and *שָׁבַב* are coordinated by the conjunction *וְ*, indicating complementary actions: to “have dominion” and to “subdue.” The pairing in parallel syntax of the meaning implies a balanced governance—dominion without subjugation is incomplete, and subduing without authority is ineffective. This parallelism suggests that humanity’s role is authoritative and custodial, exercising power within the boundaries of care and maintenance.

d. The Blessing of Vocation (v.28)

Verse 28 is a critical juncture in the creation narrative, marking the transition from the act of creating humanity to assigning its vocational purpose within the created order. The verse is framed by a divine blessing, followed by a series of imperatives that define human responsibility. The opening verb *וַיְבָרֶכֶה*, “and He blessed” is in the waw-consecutive imperfect form, which in Hebrew narrative indicates a consequential or sequential action following the creation of human beings in the preceding verses (Waltke & O’Connor, 1990, p. 254).

This blessing signifies divine approval and empowerment for the tasks ahead, making the ensuing commands normative and foundational. The syntactical construction places emphasis on God’s speech by the clause *וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים*, “and God said to them” wherein the divine name *אֱלֹהִים* is repeated. This repetition is a syntactic marker of authority and solemnity in ancient Hebrew narrative (Alter, 1996, p. 19).

The commands are presented in a series of imperative verbs, connected primarily by the conjunction *וְ* “and” indicating a sequence of related but distinct directives that constitute the human mandate.

The first imperative, *פְּרוּ*, “be fruitful,” is a Qal imperative addressing an active, ongoing process of fruitfulness. This verb, understood in a biological sense, can also be interpreted to include productivity in cultural, social, and spiritual realms (Walton, 2001, p. 105). The immediate parallel command, *רבו*, “multiply,” is likewise an imperative plural, the call to numerical increase and expansion. The syntactical pairing of these verbs in Hebrew poetry and prose frequently connotes blessing and prosperity (Sarna, 1989, p. 14).

Following these, the imperative מלא, “fill,” takes the verb root מל (male) and applies it to the earth אֶת־הָאָרֶץ. The accusative marker אֶת identifies the definite direct object that the filling is not random but purposeful and directed toward the entirety of the earth’s surface (Brueggemann, 1982, p. 42). Syntactically, this verb calls for spatial occupation and responsible inhabitation, a divine intention for humanity to extend its presence worldwide.

The subsequent verbs כבֹּשׁה and רָדוּ, “subdue it” and “rule,” respectively, further define the human vocation by describing an active exercise of authority over the earth. כבֹּשׁה is a Piel imperative with the 3rd person feminine singular suffix referring back to the earth הָ, indicating a causative action of bringing the earth into submission or harnessing its potential (Hamilton, 1990, p. 171).

The verb רָדוּ, an imperative plural, calls for governance or dominion, and when combined with the objects that follow, expands the scope of human authority to include animals and natural resources. The phrase הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׁת עַל־הָאָרֶץ lists the domains over which humans are instructed to exercise dominion: the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every living creature that moves on the land.

The syntactic parallelism and repetition of the preposition עַל “over/in” structure a comprehensive scope that includes aquatic, aerial, and terrestrial life forms (Walton, 2011, p. 112). This parallelism not only defines the breadth of human stewardship but also poetically the totality of creation entrusted to humanity.

The imperative verbs are counterbalanced by an overarching understanding that creation belongs to God. This is syntactically implied rather than explicitly stated in the verse but is foundational to proper interpretation (Psalm 24:1). Thus, the commands to “fill,” “subdue,” and “rule” are understood within a covenantal that responsible stewardship rather than exploitative domination (Moberly, 2009, p. 65).

Scholars have noted that the Hebrew verbal system here conveys ongoing and future-oriented action (Waltke & O’Connor, 1990, p. 255). This suggests that the vocation of humanity is not limited to initial acts but entails continual responsibility.

e. Provision and Vegetarian Harmony (v.29–30)

The opening of verse 29 states, וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, “And God said”), resuming the divine speech pattern that commands and blesses the newly created order. The structure here is clear and deliberate, marking a divine provision following the vocational mandate of humanity in verse 28.

The direct object in verse 29, “seed-bearing plants” and “fruit trees bearing fruit with seed in it” show the provision of renewable, life-sustaining food sources (Sarna, 1989, p. 18). The phrase, “they shall eat” is in the Qal imperfect form, conveying ongoing habitual action and a sustained relationship between creatures and their food. This verb links the divine provision with human reliance on plant-based sustenance, suggesting an ideal diet in God’s original intention.

The syntactical clarity that food comes “from every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth” stresses the universal scope of this provision, framing it as adequate for humanity.

Verse 30 extends this provision explicitly to the animal kingdom, stating that “to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth” God gives “all the green plants for food.” This inclusive syntactical construction parallels verse 29 but shifts the focus from seed-bearing plants and fruit trees to all green vegetation, the provision for non-human life.

The repetition of the verb “to give” links these verses, God’s role as the provider. These verses articulate an original ideal of ecological harmony and vegetarian provision, a non-violent food web that contrasts with post-fall realities of predation and death. This vision is an ontology of peace and mutual flourishing within creation, consistent with later prophetic imagery of the wolf dwelling with the lamb

(Isaiah 11:6–9). Syntactically and semantically, the verbs and objects build a picture of sustenance that is abundant, continuous, and non-destructive (Hamilton, 1990, p. 179).

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The concept of human identity within the context of divine creation forms a foundational pillar for understanding ecological stewardship from a perspective.

The assertion that humanity is created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) carries implications for how humans relate to themselves, other creatures, and the environment at large. This identity is both ontological and functional, entailing a unique status and a divinely conferred responsibility to exercise stewardship over creation. This stewardship is not a license for exploitation but a covenantal trust that demands ethical engagement grounded in the character and purpose of God.

Mugambi (2002, p. 154) notes that the plural divine pronoun in the creation narrative (“Let us make”) points to a relational understanding of God that has implications for human identity. This plural form signifies the communal and dynamic nature of the Godhead, which becomes the model for human existence, social, relational, and participatory. This relational ontology challenges Western individualistic models by showing that identity and responsibility are realised in and through environmental interaction.

The communal dimension is crucial in framing stewardship as an ethical mandate that integrates social and ecological concerns. Bevans and Schroeder (2004, p. 120) argue that African contexts especially reveal the inseparability of human life and environment, suggesting that an environmental ethic must include the well-being of the ecosystem alike. This integrated view resists any dualistic separation of humans and nature for a stewardship that respects the integrity of creation.

Further, Kanyoro (2006, p. 98) critiques Western interpretations of dominion as a license for unrestrained control over nature and how these interpretations have historically contributed to environmental degradation and African socio-economic inequalities. She advocates for a recovery of African indigenous knowledge and values, which view humans as caretakers within a network of life that includes spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions. This stewardship is framed as a sacred trust, demanding respect, humility, and mutual care, rather than domination and exploitation.

As Mbiti (1990, p. 72) explains, the African traditional worldview is ecological and spiritual, with humans perceived as part of a larger cosmic order that includes ancestors, spirits, animals, and the land. This worldview has a sense of accountability whereby human actions have spiritual and communal consequences. The human role is thus that of a mediator who maintains balance and harmony within this cosmic order. Failure to uphold this responsibility disrupts social and ecological equilibrium, leading to disharmony and suffering. In this context, the plural divine pronoun also signals collective responsibility.

Kanyoro (2006, p. 101) states that stewardship in African theology is a shared practice, necessitating participation and governance that promotes justice and equity. Environmental care thus becomes a collective commitment, involving multiple stakeholders, including families and governments. This collective approach contrasts with privatised notions of resource management and foregrounds social accountability.

Moreover, the identity of humans as created in God’s image implies moral accountability, not only to fellow humans but to God. This accountability includes a duty to God’s justice, mercy, and care in environmental interactions. As Phiri and Nadar (2006, p. 27) contend, African theology insists that ecological responsibility cannot be divorced from issues of social justice, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development.

Thus, environmental stewardship is inseparable from pursuing human dignity and rights, making it a holistic ethical imperative. The mandate to steward creation is grounded in the divine image and is also a critique of exploitative capitalist and neoliberal models that prioritise economic gain over ecological health. African scholars such as Nkomazana and Kgosimore (2015, p. 89) argue that sustainable development in Africa requires a reorientation toward values that recognise the sacredness of life and the environment for an economy that respects ecological limits as a necessity for Africa's sustainable future.

Another issue discovered from this study is the mandate for sustainable dominion. The mandate to "fill the earth and subdue it," cited from the creation narrative, has traditionally been interpreted in ways that support human dominion over nature. However, a closer linguistic examination reveals a more understanding that frames this mandate as a call to responsible and sustainable stewardship rather than unchecked exploitation (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990, p. 119). This notion is not equivalent to wanton destruction or exploitation but implies governance that respects the created order and sustains its integrity. It involves the human role as the caretaker who exercises power with restraint, wisdom, and accountability. The mandate implies an principle of ordering creation in a way that flourishes for all life forms.

African theologians and ethicists contribute significantly to this mandate: dominion should be understood within relational responsibility. Kanyoro (2006, p. 99) challenges dominant Western interpretations that have historically justified environmental degradation under the guise of dominion. She insists that biblical dominion must be read alongside principles of stewardship, hospitality, and respect for the intrinsic value of creation. Such an approach with African indigenous ontologies, where humans are custodians rather than land owners (Hoppers, 2006, p. 45). This custodianship entails a moral duty to sustain ecological balance and promote the welfare of future generations.

Moreover, African ecological ethics underline the principle of *ubuntu*, a holistic sense of interconnectedness among humans, other creatures, and the environment (Ramose, 2002, p. 123). This philosophy suggests that dominion must be exercised to promote communal harmony and mutual flourishing rather than individualistic control.

Human authority over nature is legitimate only when it is in harmony with the cosmic order and respects the dignity of all life forms. This approach provides a corrective to exploitative development models that have led to environmental degradation across the continent.

The ecological imperative embedded in the mandate also entails maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services that sustain life. Mung'ong'o and Oduor (2012, p. 67) argue, African environments have traditionally been managed through balanced and sustainable practices, such as sacred groves and rotational farming systems.

These traditional systems embody an understanding that the earth is a gift entrusted to humanity, not a resource to be depleted recklessly. The mandate, therefore, calls for the restoration and conservation of ecosystems damaged by modern anthropogenic activities. Climate change and environmental crises are facing Africa, and there is an urgent need for a renewed understanding of sustainable development. Nkomazana and Kgosimore (2015, p. 90) stress that embracing a tenet of sustainable dominion is essential for addressing deforestation, land degradation, and water scarcity.

Economic growth and development risk becoming self-destructive without a theology that grounds human authority in care and respect for creation. Thus, this mandate must be the foundation for policies and practices that harmonise ecological preservation with human well-being (Chirenje 2013, p. 105).

Therefore, the command to “fill the earth and subdue it” must be understood as a mandate for sustainable dominion, responsible stewardship, ecological balance, and respect for the created order. This interpretation, supported by linguistic and African ethical perspectives, challenges exploitative tendencies and calls for a transformative ethic that sustains both the environment and humans.

There is also a provision indicative of a peaceful ecological order. The ecological narrative outlined in verses 29 and 30 is a providential arrangement whereby humans and animals share in a plant-based provision. This ordering is a state of original harmony in creation, one marked by mutual flourishing and nonviolence. The portrayal of this harmonious provision as a foundational ecological ideal is critical for contemporary environmental ethics and sustainable living. The text emphasises plant-based sustenance for humanity and animals in an ecological economy where predation and violence are absent.

This vision starkly contrasts current ecological realities characterised by resource scarcity, habitat destruction, and food insecurity, particularly pronounced in many African contexts (Beasley, 2014, p. 122). The peaceful coexistence depicted functions as a normative paradigm on how human consumption patterns and environmental interactions might be with this original ecological peace.

From a perspective, this provision signals a world ordered by divine intention, where the sustenance of all creatures is interdependent and balanced. As Tilley (2008, p. 58) suggests, the text embodies a covenantalism in which creation’s well-being is intrinsically linked to human stewardship and ethical responsibility. This challenges anthropocentric exploitative attitudes, proposing instead an ecological ethic that values life in its diversity and interrelatedness.

African ecological thought provides additional layers of meaning to this peaceful ecological order. Many African indigenous cosmologies emphasise harmony and balance between humans and nature, viewing the earth as a relational system where each element supports the others (Odejide, 2009, p. 77). This worldview has the biblical depiction of provision, where human survival depends not on domination but on participation within a balanced ecological system.

The emphasis on plant-based provision also has critical engagement with contemporary African environmental challenges such as deforestation, overgrazing, and soil degradation, which undermine the capacity of ecosystems to sustain life (Ogundiran, 2016, p. 143). As implied in the text, sustainable use of vegetation encourages agricultural practices that are attuned to ecological limits and promote regeneration rather than depletion.

Traditional African agro ecological practices, including intercropping and agroforestry, illustrate the practical application of this principle, maintaining soil fertility and biodiversity (Njoya & Agama, 2010, p. 95)- the notion of a peaceful ecological order on human dietary practices and their environmental impact. Current global environmental discourse focuses on the ecological costs of meat-heavy diets, including greenhouse gas emissions, and water use (Steinfeld et al., 2006).

Nkrumah (2017, p. 110) argue for culturally sensitive approaches to food systems that integrate traditional plant-based diets with modern sustainability concerns.

The text also points to a holistic ecological balance where food provision extends beyond mere survival to encompass the flourishing of all creatures. According to Moyo (2013, p. 212), sustainable environmental management in Africa must be grounded in principled paradigms that recognise the intrinsic value of all life forms and promote coexistence. The peaceful order depicted in the text is a corrective to anthropocentric paradigms that have historically justified environmental exploitation. In addressing the modern challenges of environmental degradation and food insecurity, the model of peaceful is a foundation for stewardship practices prioritising ecological balance, biodiversity respect, and equitable resource distribution.

E. APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Environmental stewardship constitutes the deliberate engagement of humans in the responsible management and care of the earth's ecosystems. It entails an ethical, cultural, and spiritual commitment to preserve the integrity and sustainability of the natural world for current and future generations. In Africa, environmental stewardship is by mandates, indigenous worldviews, and socio-economic realities, forming a foundation for a holistic and sustainable approach.

The concept of stewardship within Africa is based on the understanding that humanity's role in creation is divinely delegated and inherently relational. African Christian theology views stewardship as a sacred trust, God's character of care, justice, and sustenance (Nyasha, 2014, p. 23). Stewardship, therefore, is an active participation in God's ongoing creative and sustaining work, not a privilege for dominion devoid of responsibility.

Eze (2008) articulates a relational ethic wherein humans are perceived as caretakers integrally connected to all life forms. This interconnectedness is not merely ecological but also spiritual, the divine origin and sustenance of all creation. He insists that this stewardship compels a respect for the intrinsic value of every creature, as all are parts of a divinely ordered cosmos sustained by God's providence and grace. This view is consistent with a non-anthropocentric understanding of creation, where the welfare of the environment and non-human life forms is essential to the flourishing of the whole.

Moreover, the communal dimension of stewardship within African thought cannot be overstated. As Bujo (2001) explains, African religious and cultural worldviews conceive of human beings as members of a cosmic one that includes ancestors, nature, and the divine. This ontology contrasts sharply with Western individualistic paradigms that isolate human beings from the natural world.

From the African perspective, environmental stewardship is a collective responsibility based on solidarity and mutual care. It implies that harm done to the environment disrupts social harmony and spiritual well-being, affecting the entire (Bujo, 2001, p. 46). In this light, environmental stewardship is a duty to God and a moral imperative to one's and future generations.

Thus, the foundation of stewardship in Africa integrates divine mandate, communal ethics, and respect for the integrity of creation into a holistic. Consequently, African theologians argue that stewardship involves transforming human attitudes and practices according to God's intentions for creation (Magesa, 2014, p. 78). Such stewardship is therefore a form of discipleship, God's justice and mercy in how humans relate to the environment.

Another approach is Indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) which is foundational in developing sustainable environmental stewardship strategies across Africa. In centuries of observation, interaction, and adaptation to local ecosystems, IEK encompasses a body of wisdom, practices, and beliefs that sustain ecological balance (Fry, 2016, p. 112). These indigenous systems are embedded in social and spiritual, creating a holistic worldview where nature and humanity coexist in a mutually beneficial relationship.

Many Africans maintain sacred groves and forests for spiritual purposes and critical ecological functions, such as biodiversity conservation, watershed protection, and climate regulation (Akinyemi & Ogundele, 2019, p. 89). Such sacred natural sites are preserved through customary laws and taboos that forbid indiscriminate exploitation, a communal ethic of care and respect for nature that transcends utilitarian considerations.

Traditional agroforestry techniques, crop rotation, and soil conservation methods employed by indigenous farmers demonstrate sophisticated knowledge of sustainable resource management adapted to local climatic and soil conditions (Tibebe, 2015).

Odora Hoppers (2002) argues that the marginalisation or outright neglect of IEK in contemporary environmental governance undermines local agency and risks the imposition of Western scientific paradigms that are ill-suited to Africa's socio-cultural realities and ecological contexts. Such top-down models ignore the ecological relationships known to indigenous people, leading to resistance and failed conservation efforts (Odora Hoppers, 2002, p. 67).

Thus, integrating IEK with scientific knowledge is not merely an additive process but a necessary epistemological shift that respects pluralistic knowledge systems—the synergy between IEK and modern environmental science provides practical benefits. For example, indigenous fire management practices have been recognised for their role in reducing wildfire risk and maintaining biodiversity, which are valuable for contemporary ecological management (Mistry et al., 2020).

Likewise, indigenous water harvesting and soil fertility techniques provide adaptive strategies for coping with climate variability that complement technological interventions (Berkes, 2018). The empowerment of local through participatory conservation approaches, stewardship in cultural identity and social cohesion (Pretty, 2003). Masoga and Molefe (2017) argue that policies integrating IEK ownership of environmental initiatives are critical for their long-term success and sustainability.

Also, effective environmental stewardship in Africa requires more than policy and technological solutions; it necessitates widespread public awareness and education that an intrinsic sense of ecological responsibility. Education is vital for cultivating ecological literacy, equipping individuals with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to engage sustainably with their environments (Ogutu, 2015, p. 48).

This ecological literacy is crucial for understanding environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion, empowering us to make informed decisions and adopt sustainable practices. However, formal education systems across the continent lack comprehensive integration of environmental education in curricula, particularly at primary and secondary levels. Incorporating environmental studies into formal schooling nurtures early awareness of the interconnectedness between human activities and environmental health, future generations' attitudes toward sustainability (Makinde, 2017).

Beyond formal schooling, informal education through workshops, public campaigns, and media is critical in reaching diverse populations, primarily rural areas with limited access to formal education (Wamukonya, 2018).

Faith-based organisations (FBOs) and local traditional leaders are influential in promoting environmental awareness and action in African societies. Given the high prevalence of religious adherence across the continent, environmental messaging framed within spiritual and moral paradigms tends to resonate with many individuals (Kanyama & Akullo, 2020). These organisations operate at the grassroots level, blending religious teachings with ecological principles, stewardship as a moral obligation and part of a divinely ordained mandate. For example, the African Faith and Justice Network has shown how education linked with environmental ethics inspires congregations to participate in reforestation and waste management initiatives (Munyua, 2016). Capacity building is essential for translating awareness into tangible stewardship practices. This involves equipping members with practical skills in sustainable agriculture, natural resource management, water conservation, and renewable energy utilisation (Mungai & Kamau, 2019): training programs that are context-specific and culturally sensitive, ownership of environmental projects, sustainability and local relevance. The link between education, awareness, and environmental stewardship also intersects with issues of gender and youth empowerment. Women and young people constitute a proportion of those directly dependent on natural resources and are thus critical

stakeholders in conservation efforts. Targeted education and capacity-building programs that include these groups help to dismantle social barriers and enable participation in environmental (Oduro & Boakye, 2020).

Furthermore, environmental stewardship in Africa requires governance structures and coherent policies that facilitate the sustainable management of natural resources and accountability in their use. The continent's environmental challenges are compounded by institutional weaknesses, including limited enforcement capacity, governance deficits, and competing economic priorities that undermine conservation efforts (Nhamo, 2017, p. 88).

These systemic problems within public administration and political will manifest in inadequate regulatory oversight and weak implementation of environmental laws. Effective stewardship depends on strong legal and institutional mechanisms that articulate clear mandates for environmental protection, define roles and responsibilities, and provide sanctions for non-compliance (Ostrom, 2009).

In many African countries, environmental legislation exists but suffers from gaps between policy formulation and enforcement, due to resource constraints and corruption (Nhamo, 2017).

Multi-level governance approaches encouraging cooperation between national governments, local authorities, civil society organisations, and indigenous peoples have shown promise in addressing ecological problems. These multi-stakeholder partnerships facilitate the pooling of resources, knowledge sharing, and conservation objectives with local socio-economic realities (Agyeman & Okyere, 2021, p. 61). For example, -based natural resource management (CBNRM) initiatives in Southern Africa illustrate how decentralisation and local participation improve accountability and ecological outcomes by empowering people to manage resources sustainably (Fabricius et al., 2001).

Policy coherence that integrates environmental conservation with poverty alleviation and economic development is critical for sustainable outcomes. Africa's developmental needs place pressure on natural resources, making it necessary to balance growth with ecological sustainability (Agyeman & Okyere, 2021). This integration demands that environmental policies cannot be developed in isolation but with national development plans, poverty reduction strategies, and international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063 (Mafongoya et al., 2020).

International partnerships and donor-funded programs provide technical assistance, funding, and capacity-building for African environmental governance. However, these initiatives must be context-sensitive and locally led to avoid perpetuating dependency or disregarding indigenous knowledge and priorities (Chanza, 2013).

Strengthening institutional support also involves political will and leadership prioritising ecological health over short-term economic gains.

E. CONCLUSION

This study sought to examine the ecological perspective inherent in the creation narrative of Genesis 1:26-30 and its application as a foundation for environmental stewardship, particularly within the African context. Through exegetical analysis, the passage reveals a mandate that establishes humanity's unique identity as image-bearers of the divine, endowed with authority and responsibility over creation. This stewardship is not one of exploitative dominion but of sustainable, relational care grounded in divine intention and ongoing providential sustenance.

The study shows that human stewardship involves an ethic of responsible dominion, which calls for the maintenance of ecological balance and respect for the integrity of all created life. Providing plant-based sustenance for humans and animals illustrates an original creation order characterised by harmony

and mutual flourishing, a normative ecological model contrasting with the degraded realities of post-fall environmental crises. Moreover, the divine speech acts within the passage continue divine involvement in creation and human participation in this ongoing creative and sustaining activity.

In the African context, these implications are as follows: Integrating indigenous ecological knowledge with contemporary scientific approaches provides a culturally relevant and pragmatic pathway toward sustainable environmental management.

The communal orientation of stewardship in African cosmologies is interconnectedness and shared responsibility, thereby enriching global discourses on environmental ethics. The study recognises the critical role of education, governance, and institutions in operationalising stewardship mandates.

Public awareness, capacity building, and policy coherence with ecological and socio-economic objectives are essential to mitigate the continent's environmental challenges. Individuals' spiritual and moral renewal emerges as a dimension, religious worldviews attitudes and motivate sustainable behaviours that transcend utilitarian concerns, framing environmental care as a moral vocation.

The findings affirm that addressing Africa's environmental crises requires a holistic approach that harmonises principles, indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and socio-political strategies. This integrated model holds promise for ecology and sustainable development. This study advocates for environmental stewardship as a sacred trust and a practical imperative that demands commitment, communal engagement, and transformative action. Embracing this stewardship paradigm contributes to healing the planet, sustaining livelihoods, and securing the well-being of current and future generations within Africa and beyond.

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Title:
Impact of materialism on the
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Impact of materialism on the contemporary Nigerian church

ABSTRACT

Materialism has significantly impacted the Church in recent times, leading to a shift in focus from spiritual growth to material wealth. This study aims to evaluate the causes and effects of materialism in today's ecclesiology. It also focuses on Christian teaching on materialism. The research methodology adopted in this study includes descriptive and phenomenological methods. It is observed that materialism is characterized by an excessive desire for wealth, possessions and worldly comforts, which contradicts biblical teachings on contentment and worship. Materialistic attitudes can distort Christian values, leading to a focus on prosperity and success as the yardstick for measuring the goodness of God, rather than spiritual growth and humanitarian service. It is discovered that the contemporary Church through her ordained leaders place emphasis on materialism. The negative impact of materialism in today's Church has brought about a slight division between the poor and the rich. The penetration and exaltation of wealth in Church, the poor are neglected and exploited while the rich are honoured and pampered. This attitude had deteriorated the core mission of the Church from its nascence. In order to salvage the Church in particular, and the society at large, the Church through ordained and lay leaders are expected to prioritize spiritual growth and development, develop a sense of contentment, recognising that true fulfilment comes from God, not material possessions.

Keywords: Impact, Materialism, Contemporary Church, Nigeria

A. INTRODUCTION

The historical mission of the church has been to foster spiritual growth, community unity, and service to humanity. However, the increasing entanglement of the church in Nigeria with materialistic ideologies has raised concerns about its focus and integrity. In many instances, the prioritization of wealth accumulation and prosperity theology has overshadowed core biblical teachings, leading to shifts in the perception of the church's role in society. This phenomenon has prompted debates on whether the church is succumbing to secular influences or adapting to contemporary realities (Eze, 2022).

Materialism's infiltration into ecclesiology, the theological study of the nature and structure of the church has led to significant changes in leadership dynamics, worship practices, and community relations. Leaders are often evaluated based on their material success, while congregations may measure their spiritual progress by their financial prosperity. These developments threaten to distort the gospel message, prioritizing material wealth over spiritual richness and fostering a culture of competition and individualism. The study of materialism's effect on contemporary Church is crucial for understanding the challenges and opportunities facing the modern church. It seeks to explore the implications of this trend for church theology, leadership, and mission, providing a framework for reclaiming the spiritual essence of ecclesiastical life in a materialistic age (Adenrian, 2020).

The contemporary church stands at a critical juncture, where the pervasive influence of materialism challenges its foundational principles and mission. Materialism, characterized by the excessive value placed on material possessions and wealth, has infiltrated not only the personal lives of believers but also the theological, structural, and operational dimensions of the church. This development raises critical questions about the church's role as a spiritual institution and its capacity to resist secular influences while maintaining its focus on the Kingdom of God.

One of the critical issues arising from this materialistic influence is the alteration of ecclesiastical priorities. Church leaders and congregations often find themselves focusing on financial growth, the acquisition of properties, and the enhancement of physical infrastructures at the expense of spiritual development and community service. This shift has led to the commercialization of worship, where success is measured by the size of the congregation, the opulence of church buildings, and the wealth of its leaders rather than the depth of spiritual growth and human development among its members.

Another significant concern is the impact of materialism on the ethical and moral integrity of the church. The pursuit of wealth has, in some cases, led to corruption, exploitation, and a loss of accountability within ecclesiastical structures. Instances of financial scandals, misuse of church funds, and unethical fundraising practices have not only

The problem is further compounded by the influence of modern consumer culture, which promotes the idea that personal identity and worth are tied to material possessions. This cultural shift has led many believers to prioritize personal wealth over spiritual growth, reducing the church to a platform for individualistic pursuits rather than a collective body dedicated to God's mission on earth (Olajide, 2019).

The study will also explore strategies for reclaiming the spiritual essence of the church in a materialistic age, providing insights for church leaders, theologians, and believers on how to navigate this pressing issue.

Phenomenological method is the research method used in this study. It is a research method that seeks to understand the meaning and structure of conscious experience or perception (Hussel, 1913). Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that was developed by Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher, in the early 20th century (Van Manen, 2014).

Data were collected through secondary sources and were analysed qualitatively. The methodology is apt for this study because the issue of exemplary leadership is one of the experiences of the contemporary Church. The goal is to uncover the essence or core meaning of a phenomenon as experienced by participants, free from external assumptions or interpretations.

B. CONCEPT OF MATERIALISM

Materialism is a philosophical viewpoint asserting that the physical world is the fundamental reality and that all phenomena, including consciousness, thoughts, and emotions, are the result of material interactions. According to materialism, the mind, ideas, and other abstract entities are not independent from the physical world but are reducible to physical processes.

Materialism stands in contrast to idealism, which emphasizes the primacy of the mind or consciousness over the material world. Materialism has been a central theme in various intellectual traditions, from classical philosophy to modern science. In this context, materialism can be divided into several forms, each of which contributes to our understanding of the relationship between mind and matter. These forms include metaphysical materialism, dialectical materialism, and scientific materialism (Marx, 1844).

The roots of materialism can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy. Pre-Socratic philosophers, such as Thales and Heraclitus, proposed that the fundamental substance of reality is material. Thales, for instance, posited that water was the essential substance from which everything else derived (Russell, 1945).

Heraclitus, on the other hand, believed that change and the flow of material elements underlie all of existence. The more developed philosophical system of materialism emerged in the works of philosophers such as Democritus and Epicurus. Democritus is best known for his theory of atomism, which proposed that all matter is composed of indivisible particles called atoms (Graham, 2008). Epicurus further developed this idea, positing that the soul itself is made of atoms, which challenges the idea of a separate, immaterial realm.

C. CAUSES OF MATERIALISM

Materialism, a philosophical belief that physical matter is the fundamental substance of reality, is also commonly associated with a focus on material possessions and wealth as the primary indicators of success and happiness. This tendency can be observed across various societies, driven by multiple factors ranging from cultural and societal pressures to psychological needs and economic systems.

Below, we examine the primary causes of materialism, with a focus on psychological, societal, economic, and media influences.

Psychologically, materialism often emerges as a coping mechanism to fulfil unmet emotional or psychological needs. Research suggests that individuals who experience lower self-esteem or a lack of personal fulfilment may resort to acquiring material possessions in an attempt to enhance their self-worth or status.

A study by Kasser and Ryan (1993) found that people who prioritize materialistic goals, such as wealth or status, tend to experience lower levels of happiness and higher levels of anxiety, suggesting that materialism is often driven by deeper emotional deficiencies.

Economic systems, particularly capitalism, further embed materialism into the fabric of everyday life, promoting the accumulation of wealth as a primary goal. Finally, the media—especially social media—intensifies these pressures by constantly showcasing idealized, materialistic lifestyles.

Understanding these causes is crucial in addressing the negative effects of materialism, such as decreased well-being and environmental harm (Richins, 2013).

D. CHRISTIAN TEACHING ON MATERIALISM

The Bible provides numerous passages that warn against materialism and encourage believers to focus on spiritual treasures. In Matthew 6:19-21, Jesus instructs:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (NIV)

This passage underscores the transient nature of earthly possessions and urges Christians to invest in heavenly, imperishable rewards. It reflects the central Christian principle that devotion to God and His kingdom should take precedence over the accumulation of material wealth.

Similarly, 1 Timothy 6:10 warns of the dangers of greed: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.” (NIV). Here, the Apostle Paul highlights how an unhealthy attachment to money can lead

to moral corruption and spiritual downfall. It is not wealth itself that is condemned but the love of wealth that displaces God from the centre of one's life.

E. THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Jesus' ministry often addressed the tension between spiritual and material concerns. In the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21), a wealthy man hoards his goods, only to die suddenly without enjoying or using his wealth for meaningful purposes. Jesus concludes the parable by saying: "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God." (NIV)

This teaching illustrates the futility of materialism when it is detached from a relationship with God and a commitment to serving others. Christians are called to use their resources for the benefit of others and the glory of God, rather than selfishly hoarding them.

In practical terms, Christian teachings advocate for a life of contentment, generosity, and stewardship. Hebrews 13:5 advises: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" (NIV) This verse encourages believers to trust in God's provision rather than striving endlessly for material gain. Contentment, coupled with gratitude, fosters a sense of peace and reliance on God.

Generosity is another hallmark of Christian teaching. In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul writes: "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

F. MANIFESTATIONS OF MATERIALISM IN THE CHURCH

Materialism in the Church is evident in several ways. Firstly, the pursuit of opulent church buildings and facilities has become a hallmark of many Christian denominations. While maintaining a conducive environment for worship is essential, the emphasis on extravagant designs often reflects societal values rather than spiritual priorities (Foster, 2020).

This trend raises questions about the allocation of resources that could otherwise address pressing social and humanitarian needs. Secondly, the "prosperity gospel" movement exemplifies materialism within contemporary ecclesiology. This theology equates faithfulness with material wealth, teaching that financial prosperity is a sign of divine favor (Bowler, 2013). Such teachings shift the focus from spiritual virtues like humility and service to individualistic pursuits of wealth, fostering consumerist attitudes among believers.

G. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH'S MISSION

The infiltration of materialism undermines the Church's mission to prioritize spiritual transformation and social justice. For instance, excessive focus on material wealth can alienate marginalized groups who cannot meet the implicit standards of affluence promoted in certain church contexts (Volf, 2011).

Furthermore, materialistic tendencies can distort the Church's witness, as society increasingly perceives religious institutions as commercial entities rather than spiritual havens. Theologically, materialism challenges core Christian teachings on stewardship and the sacrificial nature of Christ's ministry.

The Gospel repeatedly emphasizes contentment, generosity, and the dangers of excessive attachment to wealth (Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Timothy 6:10). A materialistic ecclesiology risks contradicting these principles, leading to a dissonance between doctrine and practice.

H. EFFECTS OF MATERIALISM

One significant effect of materialism is its correlation with lower life satisfaction. Studies have consistently shown that individuals who prioritize material wealth tend to report lower levels of happiness and contentment.

For instance, Kasser (2016) highlights that materialistic values are associated with diminished well-being because they distract individuals from intrinsic goals such as personal growth, relationships, and community involvement. The relentless pursuit of possessions can lead to a cycle of dissatisfaction, as the initial joy of acquiring an item often fades quickly, leaving individuals yearning for more. Moreover, materialism can strain interpersonal relationships.

People with high materialistic tendencies may prioritize possessions over people, leading to shallow or strained social connections. Roberts et al. (2014) found that materialistic individuals often experience higher levels of conflict in their relationships, as their focus on possessions may foster feelings of envy, competition, or neglect among peers and loved ones. This diminished relational quality can further contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Another critical effect of materialism is its impact on mental health. The pressure to acquire and maintain possessions can lead to stress, anxiety, and depression. A study by Dittmar et al. (2014) found that materialism is linked to increased psychological distress because it encourages individuals to base their self-worth on external factors.

When possessions fail to bring lasting happiness or status, individuals may experience feelings of inadequacy or failure. This reliance on material goods for validation can also perpetuate unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as compulsive shopping or excessive debt accumulation.

Materialism, the belief that material wealth and possessions are the highest values and the primary indicators of success, has profound effects on both the family unit and broader society.

While materialism may drive economic growth and technological advancement, its influence on human relationships, well-being, and social structures can be detrimental. This essay explores the effects of materialism on the family and society, drawing on relevant research and observations.

Effects on the Family. Materialism can have several negative impacts on the family dynamic, particularly in the areas of relationships, communication, and emotional well-being. One of the most significant consequences is the distortion of family values. When family members prioritize material wealth over emotional bonds and meaningful experiences, the fundamental purpose of family relationships: love, support, and connection, can be undermined.

The societal impact of materialism is equally concerning. One major consequence is the erosion of social cohesion and a decline in the sense of community. In a materialistic society, individuals are often judged by their economic status, leading to increased social stratification and inequality. This divide can breed resentment and conflict among different social classes.

According to Twenge and Kasser (2013), the rise in materialistic values over the past few decades has been accompanied by a decline in social trust and a weakening of social bonds. People become more focused on personal gain and less inclined to engage in collective efforts that benefit the community.

Materialism also contributes to environmental degradation, as the demand for material goods leads to overconsumption and unsustainable resource use. The global shift toward consumerism has put immense pressure on natural resources, contributing to issues such as climate change, deforestation, and pollution (Richins, 2013). In societies where materialism is prioritized, the long-term consequences for both the environment and future generations are often overlooked.

I. SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS OF MATERIALISM

One potential solution is to adopt a compatibilist approach, which seeks to reconcile materialism with the concept of free will. Compatibilism argues that free will is not about being exempt from causality but about being able to act according to one's desires and reasoning without external coercion.

Philosophers like Dennett (2003) argue that materialism does not necessarily eliminate free will, as human actions can still be considered free if they align with internal desires and intentions, even if those desires have physical origins. This approach maintains that humans can still be morally responsible for their actions, as long as they can reflect on and act upon their desires in a meaningful way.

Again is to adopt a naturalistic approach to meaning, which suggests that meaning can be derived from human experiences, relationships, and contributions to society, even within a materialist worldview. Philosophers like Dawkins (2006) have argued that, while the universe may not offer an inherent, preordained purpose, humans can create meaning through their actions and the pursuit of knowledge.

This is similar to existentialist perspectives, where individuals are responsible for creating their own meaning in a world that does not provide it inherently. Materialism, then, does not negate the possibility of meaning; rather, it challenges individuals to find purpose through engagement with the world around them.

J. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Church should use material possessions and wealth in ways that honour God and benefit others rather than prioritizing personal gain.
2. The church should reaffirm the Church's role as a sacramental and mystical body of Christ.
3. The leaders of the Church should provide insight into biblical teachings on material possessions.
4. Christians should endeavour to cultivate contentment with what they have and practice generosity.
5. Wealthy individuals especially Christians should view their resources as entrusted to them by God, hence use them responsibly.

K. CONCLUSION

The effect of materialism in ecclesiology is profound, often leading the Church to prioritize wealth and institutional power over its spiritual mission. This shift can undermine the Church's moral authority, diminishing its role as a voice for justice and compassion. Materialism can also foster inequality within the Church, concentrating resources and power among a few, while distancing it from the needs of the marginalized. While materialism can result in corruption and hypocrisy, it also serves as a call for the Church to return to its core spiritual values and social justice mission. Ultimately, the Church must navigate the tension between material needs and spiritual purpose, ensuring its focus remains on serving both God and humanity.

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Title:

The role of a female spouse in pastor's ministry

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The role of a female spouse in pastor's ministry

ABSTRACT

The role of a pastor's wife (female spouse) is vital, particularly in a pastor's Christian ministry. It is observed that this crucial role is usually overlooked in the recent time. This study thus examined the role of a pastor's wife in supporting her husband's ministry, addressing a significant knowledge gap in existing literature that often neglects the experiences and contributions of pastors' wives. The scope of the study is limited to pastors' wives serving in various Christian denominations, focusing on their personal experiences, challenges, and contributions to ministry. The paper sought to explore the ways in which pastors' wives support their husbands, identify the challenges they face, and examine their contributions to the church's spiritual growth. A phenomenological research approach was employed, involving in-depth interviews with pastors' wives. The study found that pastors' wives provide emotional support to their husbands, build relationships with congregants, and contribute to the church's spiritual growth. Despite challenges such as maintaining a public image, managing ministry demands, and lacking recognition, they play a crucial role in the success of their husband's ministry. The study suggests that churches recognize and appreciate pastors' wives' contributions. Churches should provide them with support and resources and encourage them to develop their own ministries. By acknowledging and supporting their contributions, churches can foster a more effective and harmonious ministry.

Keywords: Role, Female Spouse, Pastor's Ministry, Support and Spiritual Growth.

A. INTRODUCTION

The pastoral ministry is a sacred calling that requires dedication, perseverance, and a deep commitment to serving the Lord and His people (1 Timothy 4:12; 2 Timothy 4:2). Within the fabric of church ministry, the role of a pastor's wife is often shrouded in mystery and misconception (Lee, 2017). Despite being an integral part of the ministerial team, the pastor's wife is frequently overlooked and underappreciated (Malony, 2005). However, her contribution to the success of her husband's ministry cannot be overstated (Doherty, 2018). As a vital partner in ministry, the pastor's wife plays a multifaceted role that extends beyond her marital relationship. She is a source of emotional and spiritual support (Knox, 2011), a builder of relationships with congregants (Hybels, 2004), and a contributor to the church's spiritual growth (George, 2015). Yet, despite her significance, the pastor's wife often faces unique challenges that can impact her effectiveness in ministry (Frame, 2017).

This research seeks to explore the role of the pastor's wife in supporting her husband's ministry, examining the ways in which she contributes to the church's overall success. Adopting a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013), this study aims to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of pastors' wives. Through in-depth interviews with pastors' wives, supplemented by oral interview materials gathered from some pastors, and members of the church.

This research will examine the role of pastors' wives in supporting their husbands' ministry, including their experiences, challenges, and contributions. By examining the biblical, historical, and contemporary contexts of the pastor's wife, this research aims to promote a deeper understanding and appreciation of the pastor's wife's ministry and to encourage churches to recognize and support her invaluable contributions.

B. DESCRIPTION OF A FEMALE SPOUSE IN PASTOR'S MINISTRY

A female spouse in pastor's ministry is tantamount to wife of a pastor who is in active ministry in a Christian group. A pastor's wife is a woman who is married to a pastor or a minister of a church. She is often referred to as a partner in ministry, as she plays a vital role in supporting her husband's work (Olson, 2000, p. 123). The pastor's wife is not only a helpmate to her husband but also a servant of the Lord, using her gifts and talents to bless the church and its members (Ephraim Okeke, Oral interview, April 27 2025). A pastor's wife is often expected to be a woman of strong faith, integrity, and compassion. She is called to be a spiritual leader, guiding and nurturing the women and children of the church (Titus 2:3-5). She is also expected to be a supportive partner to her husband, encouraging and enabling him to fulfil his ministry.

According to Oppong and Abu (1987), a pastor's wife is "the wife of a male pastor or minister who is recognized by the church or congregation as the spiritual leader" (p. 123). They further emphasize that the pastor's wife is not only a partner to her husband but also a key figure in the church, playing a crucial role in supporting the spiritual and social needs of the congregation. She assists her husband in his God - given task and thus is also a co- pastor in the divine task given to him (Faith, 2008: 14). Even though titles are good and scriptural, she does not necessarily have to bear title like deaconess, pastor, evangelist etc. Before she can be effective as a pastor's wife. In fact, she is a co- pastor alongside her husband. As a wife, she is meant to assist her husband in the work of the ministry in every way possible. She has a lot to do with how effectively the pastor, who is her husband, perform his duties. Faith Oyedepo notes that "being a pastor's wife is a calling in itself. It is a calling from God, not from man. It is important to understand at this point that it is not just a calling but also a High calling" (Faith, 2008, p. 14).

In many churches, the pastor's wife is seen as a vital part of the ministry team. She may be involved in various aspects of church life, such as teaching, counselling, and outreach (Ephraim Okeke, Oral interview April 27th 2025). She may also be responsible for managing the parsonage, caring for her family, and supporting her husband's ministry through prayer and encouragement (MacArthur, 2004, p. 187). In summary, a pastor's wife is a woman who is called to be a partner in ministry, supporting her husband's work and using her gifts and talents to bless the church and its members.

C. OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE OF A FEMALE SPOUSE IN THE PASTOR'S MINISTRY

A pastor's wife plays a multifaceted role in supporting her husband's ministry, serving as a partner, helper, and encourager. According to the Bible, a pastor's wife is called to be a helpmeet, assisting her husband in various aspects of ministry (Gen 2:18, KJV). As a spiritual support, a pastor's wife provides emotional and spiritual support to her husband, helping him to stay focused on his ministry (Dillow, 1987, p. 156). She also participates in church activities, events, and ministries alongside her husband, serving as a ministry partner.

In addition, a pastor's wife offers guidance and counsel to her husband, helping him navigate challenging situations (Crabb, 1997, p. 234). She also represents the church and her husband in various

settings, such as community events and conferences (Cloud & Townsend, 1992, p. 187). Furthermore, a pastor's wife provides motherly care and mentorship to women and children in the church, serving as a role model (Eldredge, 2001, p. 145). She also assists with administrative tasks, such as managing schedules and coordinating events. As an intercessor, a pastor's wife prays for her husband, the church, and its members, seeking God's guidance and protection (Alcorn, 2001, p. 211). Finally, she encourages and supports her husband, helping him to stay motivated and focused on his ministry.

D. BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF A PASTOR'S WIFE (FEMALE SPOUSE)

The Bible provides valuable insights into the role of a pastor's wife, offering guidance on her responsibilities, characteristics, and relationships. According to the biblical account, a pastor's wife is expected to be a helpmeet to her husband, assisting him in his ministry (Genesis 2:18, Ephesians 5:22-24). In 1 Timothy 3:11, the Bible describes the qualities of a pastor's wife, stating that she should be "worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything." This verse highlights the importance of a pastor's wife being a woman of integrity, known for her wisdom, kindness, and reliability (Crabb, 1997, p. 123).

Proverbs 31:10-31 provides a biblical portrait of a virtuous woman, who embodies many of the qualities expected of a pastor's wife. This passage describes a woman who is diligent, compassionate, and wise, using her gifts and talents to bless her family and community (MacArthur, 2004, p. 156). In Titus 2:3-5, the Bible instructs older women, including pastor's wives, to mentor and teach younger women, sharing their wisdom and experience. This passage emphasizes the importance of pastor's wives being spiritual mothers, guiding and nurturing others in their faith (Eldredge, 2001, p. 187).

In conclusion, the Bible provides a clear understanding of the role of a pastor's wife, emphasizing her importance as a helpmeet, a woman of integrity, and a spiritual mother. By embracing these biblical perspectives, pastor's wives can fulfil their roles with confidence, wisdom, and grace.

E. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE ROLE OF A PASTOR'S WIFE (FEMALE SPOUSE)

Throughout history, the role of a pastor's wife has been shaped by various cultural, social, and theological factors. In the early Christian church, the pastor's wife was often seen as a partner in ministry, working alongside her husband to spread the Gospel (Grenz & Olson, 1992, p. 123). During the Reformation, the role of the pastor's wife underwent significant changes. Martin Luther's wife, Katharina, was a strong advocate for women's education and played an active role in supporting her husband's ministry (Luther, 1960, p. 156). Similarly, John Calvin's wife, Idelette, was known for her piety and her support of her husband's theological work (Calvin, 1960, p. 187).

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the role of the pastor's wife became more formalized. Many pastor's wives were expected to manage the parsonage, care for their children, and support their husband's ministry through various charitable and educational activities (Westerhoff, 1994, p. 201). In the 20th century, the role of the pastor's wife underwent significant changes. Many pastor's wives began to pursue their own educational and career goals, while still supporting their husband's ministry (Olson, 2000, p. 234). Today, the role of the pastor's wife is increasingly recognized as a vital part of the ministry team, with many churches providing support and resources for pastor's wives.

F. CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE ON THE ROLE OF A PASTOR'S WIFE (FEMALE SPOUSE)

In contemporary times, the role of a pastor's wife has evolved to encompass a wide range of responsibilities and expectations. According to Olson (2000: 123), a pastor's wife is no longer just a supportive partner, but a vital part of the ministry team (p. 123). She is often expected to be a leader, teacher, and counselor, using her gifts and talents to bless the church and its members. Many contemporary pastor's wives are also expected to be involved in various aspects of church life, such as worship, outreach, and community service (Kostenberger & Jones, 2010, p. 156). They may also be responsible for managing the parsonage, caring for their family, and supporting their husband's ministry through prayer and encouragement.

In addition, contemporary pastor's wives are often expected to be spiritually mature, emotionally intelligent, and relationally skilled (Crabb, 1997, p. 201). They are called to be role models, demonstrating a deep commitment to their faith, their families, and their communities (Tit 2:3-5). Despite the many demands and expectations placed upon them, contemporary pastor's wives are also finding new opportunities for ministry and service. Many are pursuing theological education, starting ministries, and engaging in community outreach (Eldredge, 2001, p. 234). In conclusion, the contemporary perspective on the role of a pastor's wife is one of partnership, leadership, and service. She is a vital part of the ministry team, using her gifts and talents to bless the church and its members.

G. ROLE OF A PASTOR'S WIFE IN THE MINISTRY OF HER HUSBAND

A pastor's wife plays a vital role in supporting her husband's ministry and ensuring the smooth operation of the church. She is expected to provide spiritual support to her husband, being his partner in prayer and ministry (Ephesians 5:22-24). As a woman of strong faith, she encourages and enables her husband to fulfil his ministry. According to Emeka Eberé (oral interview, 7th February, 2025), the role of a pastor's wife is multifaceted and requires a deep understanding of the scriptures. Mary Ugwuja (oral interview, 7th February, 2025) emphasized the importance of prayer in supporting her husband's ministry, stating that "prayer is the backbone of our ministry."

According to Martha Eze (Oral interview, 2nd February, 2025), a pastor's wife should be a "spiritual partner, a helper, and a supporter" to her husband. In addition to spiritual support, a pastor's wife is also expected to provide emotional support to her husband, being a source of comfort and encouragement in times of stress and difficulty. In terms of emotional support, Josephine Eze (oral interview, 7th February, 2025) noted that "being a listening ear and a source of comfort" is crucial in helping her husband navigate the challenges of ministry. She is called to be a "helpmate" to her husband, supporting him in his ministry and being a "safe haven" for him (Calista Onah, Oral interview, 7th February, 2025). This emotional support is crucial in helping her husband navigate the challenges of ministry. A pastor's wife is also responsible for managing the home and family, creating a warm and welcoming home environment (Titus 2:3-5). According to Uchechi Onah (oral interview, 7th February, 2025), managing the home and family is a critical aspect of being a pastor's wife, requiring "balance, prioritization, and a deep commitment to family values."

According to Eberé (Oral interview, 3rd February, 2025), a pastor's wife should be a "woman of wisdom, compassion, and strength" in her role as a homemaker and mother. Also, Precious Nnabuike (oral interview, 7th February, 2025) emphasized the need for "empathy, wisdom, and a deep understanding of the scriptures" in order to provide effective support to women in the church. This involves balancing the demands of family life with the demands of her husband's ministry. Furthermore, a

pastor's wife is expected to participate in church activities, using her gifts and talents to bless the church and its members (Oluchi Ugwu, Oral interview, 3rd February, 2024). She may be involved in various aspects of church life, such as teaching, counselling, and outreach. According to Kosisochukwu and Jane (Oral interview, 4th February, 2025), a pastor's wife should be a "partner in ministry, working together with her husband to build up the church".

Finally, a pastor's wife is often expected to provide counsel and guidance to women in the church, using her wisdom and experience to support and encourage them (Titus 2:3-5). According to Mary Ugwuja (Oral interview, 4th February, 2025), a pastor's wife should be a "spiritual mother" to the women in the church, providing guidance, support, and encouragement. Also, Ngozi Asadu (oral interview, 7th February, 2025), highlighted the importance of participating in church activities, stating that "it helps to build relationships, foster community, and support my husband's ministry." Regarding providing counsel and guidance, this involves being a role model, demonstrating a deep commitment to her faith, her family, and her community.

H. QUALITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PASTOR'S WIVES

Effective pastor's wives possess certain qualities and characteristics that enable them to support their husbands and contribute to the success of the ministry. According to the researcher's, effective pastor's wives demonstrate a deep commitment to their faith, their husbands, and the church community. Spiritual maturity is a key characteristic of effective pastor's wives. They prioritize their own spiritual growth through prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with other believers (Piper, 1997). This spiritual maturity enables them to provide emotional and spiritual support to their husbands, as well as to other members of the church community.

Effective pastor's wives are also known for their emotional intelligence. They possess excellent communication skills, which enable them to build strong relationships with their husbands, church members, and other leaders within the church (Cloud & Townsend, 1992). They are empathetic, compassionate, and able to navigate complex emotional situations with wisdom and sensitivity. In addition to spiritual maturity and emotional intelligence, effective pastor's wives demonstrate a strong commitment to their roles as partners in ministry. They prioritize their responsibilities as wives, mothers, and homemakers, while also finding ways to contribute to the ministry through various forms of service (Hughes, 2002).

Effective pastor's wives are also adaptable, resilient, and able to navigate the challenges of ministry life with flexibility and poise (Redford, 2011). They are able to balance multiple responsibilities, manage stress, and maintain a sense of humour, even in the midst of difficult circumstances. In conclusion, effective pastor's wives possess a unique combination of qualities and characteristics that enable them to support their husbands and contribute to the success of the ministry. By prioritizing their spiritual growth, developing emotional intelligence, and demonstrating a strong commitment to their roles as partners in ministry, effective pastor's wives play a vital role in promoting healthy churches and effective ministry.

I. CHALLENGES FACED BY PASTOR'S WIVES

One of the significant challenges faced by pastor's wives is balancing personal and ministerial responsibilities. They have personal responsibilities that demand their attention, including caring for their families, managing household chores, and attending to personal businesses (Mintle, 2008). However, the demands of the ministry often obstruct their ability to attend to these personal needs. They are expected to

be role models, participate fully in church functions, and provide support to their husbands. At the crossroads of personal and ministerial responsibilities, pastor's wives face a daunting challenge. If they prioritize their personal responsibilities, they risk being labelled as lazy, unkempt, or unfruitful. Conversely, if they devote too much time to ministry, they may neglect their personal responsibilities, leading to negative consequences for their families.

Another challenge faced by pastor's wives is coping with criticism and scrutiny. They are often subjected to intense criticism and scrutiny, with church members expecting them to embody unrealistic standards of behaviour and performance (Harrison, 2013). As Adeniyi notes, "church members often expect the pastor's wife to be a superwoman, who can handle everything perfectly, without any flaws" (Adeniyi, 2015). This expectation can lead to undue pressure on pastor's wives, causing them to feel like they are under a microscope. Every aspect of their lives, including their speech, dress, and personal relationships, is monitored and judged. This can be overwhelming and may lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

Building relationships with church members is also a significant challenge faced by pastor's wives. Despite the challenges of criticism and scrutiny, they must strive to build relationships with church members, which requires sacrifice, patience, and understanding. According to Mintle, "building relationships with church members requires a pastor's wife to be willing to listen, to care, and to give out her own needs and desires" (Mintle, 2008). This sacrifice can be emotionally and physically draining, as pastor's wives strive to meet the varied needs of their congregation. However, building relationships with a diverse group of people, each with their unique attitudes and demands, can be a daunting task (Thomas, 2019).

Nancy Chimezie, a pastor's wife, shared her experiences on the challenges of being a pastor's wife. According to Nancy (Oral interview, 25th February, 2025), being a pastor's wife requires spiritual maturity, emotional intelligence, and a deep commitment to serving others. Nancy emphasized the importance of prayer in supporting her husband spiritually and her own spiritual growth. She also highlighted the need for emotional support, stating that being a listening ear and a source of comfort is crucial in helping her husband navigate the challenges of ministry.

In addition, Nancy noted that effective time management and prioritization are necessary to balance her responsibilities as a pastor's wife and homemaker. She also stressed the importance of church involvement, providing counsel to women in the church, and building relationships to support the ministry.

Overall, Nancy's experiences provide valuable lessons for pastor's wives navigating the challenges of ministry life. Her commitment to prayer, emotional support, and church involvement serves as a model for others to follow. As Nancy emphasized, "Being a pastor's wife is a challenging but rewarding role that requires spiritual maturity, emotional intelligence, and a deep commitment to serving others." In conclusion, pastor's wives face numerous challenges that can impact their personal and ministerial lives. It is essential to recognize and support these women, providing them with the resources and encouragement they need to thrive in their roles.

J. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study and for the strategic importance of the role of a pastor's wife played in the ministry of her husband, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Pastoral training centres should incorporate comprehensive training programs that address the unique challenges faced by pastor's wives, including stress management, boundary setting, and emotional intelligence.
- ii. Churches should provide them with support and resources, and encourage them to develop their own ministries. By acknowledging and supporting their contributions, churches can foster a more effective and harmonious ministry.
- iii. Pastor's wives should emphasize spiritual growth: prioritize their personal spiritual growth through regular prayer, Bible study, and fellowship. This will enable them to provide effective spiritual support to their husbands and the church.
- iv. Pastor's wives should balance family and ministry responsibilities: They must strike a balance between their family responsibilities and ministry obligations. Prioritize your family's needs while also supporting your husband's ministry.
- v. Pastor's wives should engage in church activities: They should participate in church activities, such as teaching, counselling, and outreach to support their husband's ministry and build relationships with church members.
- vi. Pastor's and church leaders should recognize and appreciate the pastor's wives: Acknowledge the vital role of the pastor's wife in supporting the pastor's ministry and the church. Express gratitude and appreciation for her contributions.
- vii. Church Leaders should provide opportunities for spiritual growth: Offer training, workshops, and conferences to help pastor's wives grow spiritually and develop their leadership skills.
- viii. Churches and denominations should develop support systems: Establish support systems, such as mentorship programs, support groups, and retreats to help pastor's wives navigate the challenges of their role.
- ix. Church congregations should strive to create a supportive and inclusive environment for pastor's wives, recognizing that they are not only the wife of the pastor but also a vital member of the church community.

K. CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the vital role pastor's wife played in the ministry of her husband. The role of a pastor's wife is multifaceted and crucial to the success of her husband's ministry. Pastor's wife provides spiritual, emotional, and practical support, enabling her husband to fulfil his ministerial duties effectively. By prioritizing her own spiritual growth, managing her time wisely, and engaging in church activities, a pastor's wife can be a valuable partner in ministry, fostering a positive and supportive church community.

However, this study has also highlighted the significant challenges faced by pastor's wives, including balancing personal and ministerial responsibilities, coping with criticism and scrutiny, and building relationships with church members. Despite these challenges, the role of a pastor's wife remains vital, requiring dedication, sacrifice, and a deep commitment to serving others. Empowering pastor's wives through training, support, and recognition is essential for promoting healthy churches and effective ministry.

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APPENDIX 1

ORAL INTERVIEWS

S/N	Names	Status	District	Location	Date/Year
1.	Emeka Ebere	Pastors wife	Living faith (winners chapel)	Nsukka	February 3 rd 2025
2.	Uchechukwu Elias	Sectional leader	Deeper life church	Nsukka	February 3 rd 2025
3.	Kosisochukwu	Member	Assemblies of God	Nsukka	February 4 th 2025
4	Mary Ugwuja	Teacher/ Pastors wife	Anglican communion	Nsukka	February 4 th 2025
5	Calista Onah	Teacher / pastors wife	Assemblies of God	Enugu	February 7 th 2025
6	Martha Eze	Pastors wife/ trader	Anglican communion	Nsukka	February 2 nd 2025
7	Josephine Eze	Pastors wife/ trader	Assemblies of God	Nsukka	February 7 th 2025
8	Uchechi Onah	Pastor's wife	Assemblies of God	Nsukka	February 7 th 2025
9	Precious Nnabuike	Member	Salvation ministry	Enugu	February 7 th 2025
10	Ngozi Asadu	Member	Assemblies of God church	Nsukka	February 7 th 2025
11	Nancy Chimezie	Pastors wife	Flame city	Nsukka	February 25 th 2025
12	Adaeze Omeke	Pastor's wife	Chapel of fire ministries	Nsukka	February 22 nd 2025
13	Emeka Ebere	Pastors wife	Living faith (winner chapel)	Nsukka	February 7 th 2025
14	Ephrahim Okeke	Pastor	Assemblies of God	Nsukka	April 27 th 2025



Title:
The church and exemplary leadership in the 21st century

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The church and exemplary leadership in the 21st century

ABSTRACT

Exemplary leadership in the Church in the contemporary time is a major concern. Significance of exemplary leadership in the contemporary church is highlighted. The study aims to explore the Christian teaching on exemplary leadership, core exemplary leadership in the contemporary Church. The solutions to the problem of exemplary leadership are highlighted. The research methodology used in this study is phenomenological method. The study finds out that exemplary leaders possess a unique combination of traits, including emotional intelligence, spiritual maturity, and a strong sense of purpose. They are able to inspire and motivate their followers, foster a sense of community and belonging, and promote a culture of innovation and growth. The findings of this study have important implications for church leaders and organizations. They highlight the need for leaders to preserve servant leadership as a measure for transformational leadership skills, including their emotional intelligence, spiritual maturity, and ability to inspire and motivate others. By doing so, leaders can create a positive and productive work environment, foster a sense of community and belonging, and promote a culture of innovation and growth.

Keywords: Church, Exemplary, Leadership, Century

A. INTRODUCTION

Exemplary leadership within the Church is characterised by integrity, vision, adaptability, and the capacity to serve as a moral compass. Leaders are called to embody Christ-like qualities while simultaneously addressing the unique needs of their congregations. This dual role presents significant challenges, especially in an age marked by rapid globalization, secularism, and the proliferation of digital communication. Thus, understanding what constitutes exemplary leadership in this context is vital for sustaining the Church's relevance and effectiveness (Greenleaf, 1977). The contemporary Church operates within an environment shaped by diverse cultural expectations, economic disparities, and shifting values. Leaders are not only tasked with shepherding their congregations but also with engaging the broader community in ways that reflect the Gospel. This requires a balance between tradition and innovation, as well as the ability to foster unity amid diversity. According to Conger, Riggio and Jahnke (2019), exemplary leadership transcends administrative functions, focusing instead on servant leadership, discipleship, and the cultivation of spiritual maturity within the body of Christ.

The Church today faces a myriad of challenges that threaten its role as a spiritual and moral anchor in society. These include the decline in church attendance, waning trust in religious institutions, and the growing influence of secular ideologies. Compounding these issues are internal struggles such as leadership scandals, generational divides, and the lack of clear vision within some congregations. Amid these challenges, the need for exemplary leadership has never been more critical.

A key problem lies in the apparent disconnect between traditional models of leadership and the evolving expectations of modern congregations. While the Bible provides timeless principles for godly leadership, the application of these principles requires contextual adaptation to address contemporary realities (Marshall, 2004). Many church leaders struggle to bridge this gap, leading to disillusionment among followers and a diminished capacity to fulfil the Church's mission effectively. Therefore, the major thrust of this research is to examine.

The study used phenomenological method. Phenomenological method is a qualitative research approach that focuses on the subjective experiences and meanings of individuals or groups. It is a research method that seeks to understand the meaning and structure of conscious experience or perception (Hussel, 1913). Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that was developed by Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher, in the early 20th century (Van Manen, 2014). Data were collected through secondary sources and were analysed qualitatively. The methodology is apt for this study because the issue of exemplary leadership is one of the experiences of the contemporary Church

B. CHRISTIAN TEACHING ON EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP

Exemplary leadership in Christian teaching is rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who exemplified servant leadership, humility, integrity, and a heart for others. According to Christian ethics, exemplary leadership encompasses the following below:

Servant Leadership

At the heart of Christian leadership is the concept of servant leadership, as exemplified by Jesus Christ. In Matthew 20:25-28, Jesus teaches His disciples that true leadership is not about lording over others but about serving them. "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:26-28, NIV). This teaching challenges leaders to view leadership as an opportunity to serve others, rather than a means to gain power or prestige (Welch, 2012).

Humility

Another key characteristic of exemplary Christian leadership is humility. In Philippians 2:3-4, Paul writes, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (NIV).

Integrity and Righteousness

Christian leaders are expected to lead with integrity, righteousness, and a commitment to God's truth. In Proverbs 4:25-27, the Bible encourages leaders to "Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways" (NIV). This teaching reminds Christian leaders to remain faithful to God's principles, avoiding the temptation to compromise their values for personal gain or worldly success (Welch, 2012).

Accountability

Lastly, Christian leaders are called to accountability. In Hebrews 13:17, leaders are reminded, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as those who must give an account" (NIV). Christian leadership involves understanding that leaders are not above reproach; they are accountable to God for their actions and decisions. This accountability ensures that leaders maintain a high standard of conduct, aligning their actions with biblical teachings.

C. EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP IN CHURCH

Exemplary leadership within the church is vital in fostering spiritual growth, community development, and organizational effectiveness. Church leaders, who may include pastors, priests, deacons, and lay leaders, are expected to model Christ-like behaviour, create an atmosphere of spiritual formation, and guide their congregations toward fulfilling the mission of the Church. Exemplary leadership is built on qualities such as humility, integrity, service, vision, and adaptability. This paper explores key aspects of exemplary church leadership, citing relevant scriptures and contemporary scholarly perspectives (Northouse, 2018).

Servant Leadership: The Core of Exemplary Church Leadership

One of the foundational principles of exemplary church leadership is *servant leadership*, a concept drawn from Jesus Christ's own example. In Mark 10:45, Jesus states, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (NIV). This teaching reshapes traditional leadership concepts, emphasizing that true leaders serve others rather than seeking personal gain or power.

Church leaders are called to embody this principle by putting the needs of their congregation first and humbling themselves for the sake of others. In his seminal work on servant leadership, Greenleaf (1977) contends that leadership should not be about accumulating power, but about empowering others to achieve their full potential. Thus, leaders who exhibit humility, compassion, and a heart of service set a powerful example for their communities.

Integrity and Accountability: The Foundation of Trust

Exemplary leaders must also embody integrity and accountability. Integrity is crucial for maintaining trust, which is foundational for any leadership role, especially within the Church. The Apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of integrity in leadership in 1 Timothy 3:2-3, where he outlines the qualities of a church overseer, including being “above reproach” and “not violent but gentle.” The moral uprightness of a leader directly influences their ability to inspire and guide others.

Accountability ensures that leaders remain grounded and that their actions align with biblical teachings. According to Marshall (2004), ethical behaviour and transparency in leadership are essential to gaining the respect of congregants and maintaining a harmonious church environment. Church leaders are accountable not only to their congregation but also to God, which provides them with the moral framework for decision-making.

Adaptability: Leading Through Change and Challenges

Church leaders must also demonstrate adaptability, especially in times of crisis or transition. The Church, like any organization, is subject to change—whether it be shifts in cultural norms, demographic changes, or unexpected challenges. Adaptability enables leaders to navigate these changes effectively.

D. EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

Exemplary leadership in the contemporary church involves navigating the complexities of modern society while remaining true to biblical principles. Church leaders today face the dual challenge of addressing spiritual needs while engaging with a diverse and evolving congregation. Key characteristics of exemplary leadership include servant leadership, vision, integrity, and adaptability, all of which are crucial in guiding the Church toward its mission in the modern world.

Servant Leadership: A Christ-Centred Model

Servant leadership, rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ, remains foundational in contemporary church leadership. In Mark 10:45, Jesus models leadership by stating, “*For even the Son of Man did not*

come to be served, but to serve" (NIV). This principle emphasizes that true leadership is about serving others, not seeking power or prestige. Church leaders must prioritize the needs of their congregants and lead with humility, creating a nurturing environment for spiritual growth. Greenleaf (1977) highlights that effective leaders empower others, enabling them to reach their potential and contribute meaningfully to the church community.

Visionary Leadership: Guiding the Church with Purpose

Contemporary church leaders must also possess a clear vision that aligns with the mission of the Church. Proverbs 29:18 asserts, *"Where there is no vision, the people perish"* (KJV), underscoring the importance of visionary leadership. In today's rapidly changing cultural landscape, church leaders must articulate a vision that connects with the diverse needs of their congregation, balancing tradition with innovation. Visionary leaders inspire their community to engage in ministry, outreach, and discipleship, fostering a sense of collective purpose (Welch, 2012). They are also instrumental in leading the Church through societal challenges while keeping the gospel message at the core of their mission.

Integrity and Accountability: Building Trust

Integrity remains a hallmark of exemplary leadership. Church leaders must uphold ethical standards and maintain accountability, as they are role models for their congregation. Paul's instructions to church leaders in 1 Timothy 3:2-3 highlight the importance of being *"above reproach"* and *"gentle"*. Leaders who maintain high ethical standards build trust and credibility within their community. Marshall (2004) notes that transparency and accountability ensure that leaders remain faithful to their responsibilities and are better equipped to handle the challenges of modern ministry, such as financial integrity and interpersonal relationships within the church.

Adaptability: Navigating Change in a Diverse World

The contemporary church must also be adaptable, especially in the face of shifting cultural norms, technological advancements, and changing demographics. Church leaders today must respond to these changes without compromising the gospel message. The Apostle Paul's approach to contextualizing the gospel in 1 Corinthians 9:22 demonstrates the need for adaptability in ministry. Leaders must embrace innovation, such as using digital platforms for worship and outreach, while remaining faithful to the core values of the Church. Leadership that is adaptable fosters a dynamic, responsive church that meets the needs of both current and future generations (Kouzes and Posner, 2012).

E. SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS OF EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP

Exemplary leadership, while vital for family and societal progress, can face several challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Issues such as poor communication, lack of emotional intelligence, resistance to change, and burnout are common barriers. However, addressing these challenges through targeted strategies can enhance the impact of exemplary leadership.

One of the primary solutions is fostering open and transparent communication. Leaders who communicate clearly and listen actively can prevent misunderstandings and build trust within their teams or families. According to Hackman and Johnson (2013), effective communication not only clarifies expectations but also fosters an atmosphere of respect and inclusivity. Leaders who prioritize communication create environments where ideas and feedback flow freely, promoting collaboration and problem-solving.

Another solution is developing emotional intelligence (EI). Emotional intelligence, which involves understanding and managing one's emotions while empathizing with others, is crucial for leadership success. Goleman (1998) argues that leaders with high EI are better equipped to handle

conflict, motivate others, and make sound decisions under pressure. To improve EI, leaders can engage in regular self-reflection, empathy-building exercises, and conflict resolution training, ensuring they are responsive to the emotional needs of their teams.

Resistance to change is another obstacle to exemplary leadership, particularly in fast-evolving environments. Leaders can overcome this resistance by adopting a transformational leadership style that emphasizes motivation and vision over authority. Bass and Avolio (1994) suggest that transformational leaders inspire followers by articulating a compelling future and empowering them to contribute toward achieving it. Providing clear, consistent messaging and involving others in the decision-making process can help mitigate fear and foster adaptability.

Lastly, preventing burnout is essential for maintaining the effectiveness of exemplary leadership. Leaders often bear heavy emotional and physical burdens, which can lead to exhaustion and diminished performance. One solution is for leaders to model self-care practices, prioritize work-life balance, and delegate responsibilities. According to Maslach and Leiter (2016), organizations that support leaders in managing their workloads and provide avenues for stress relief can maintain a sustainable leadership culture, allowing leaders to be more effective in the long term.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges of exemplary leadership involves fostering communication, developing emotional intelligence, embracing change, and preventing burnout. These solutions not only strengthen leadership capabilities but also enhance the overall well-being and effectiveness of individuals and communities.

F. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, examining exemplary leadership in the contemporary church requires a balanced approach that combines spiritual integrity with practical leadership skills. Effective leaders must model ethical behaviour, communicate transparently, and cultivate emotional intelligence to address the diverse needs of their congregations. By embracing continuous learning and adapting to societal changes, church leaders can maintain relevance and effectiveness in guiding their communities. Ultimately, exemplary leadership within the church plays a vital role in fostering faith, unity, and social responsibility in the modern world.

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