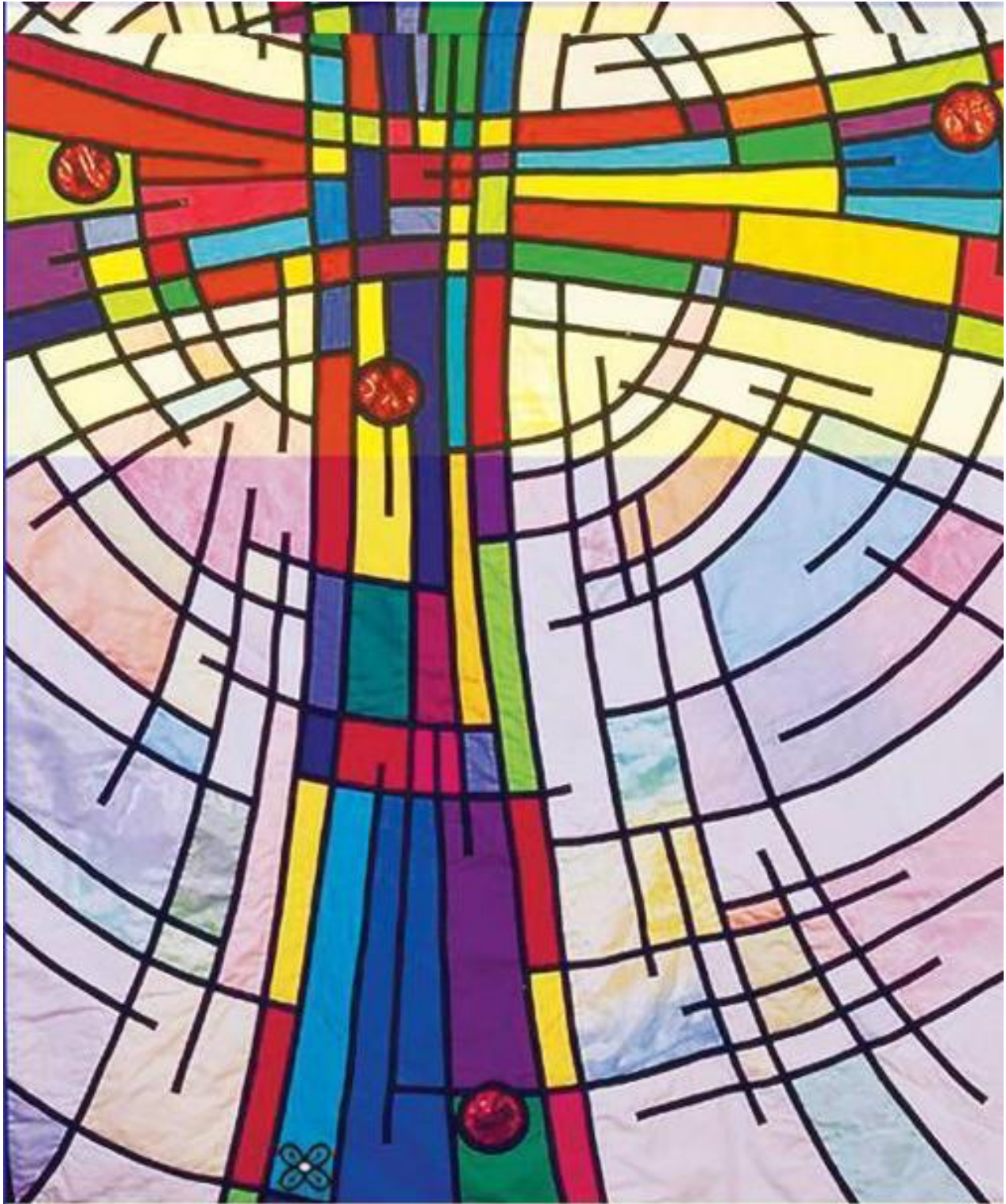


**PENTECOST JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY AND MISSION (PJTM)**



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## Contents

|                                                                                                                                                      |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Editorial</b>                                                                                                                                     | vi  |
| <b>Articles</b>                                                                                                                                      |     |
| <i>Discourses on Slavery in European Religious History</i>                                                                                           |     |
| <b>Ulrich Berner</b>                                                                                                                                 | 1   |
| <i>Reimagining Missional Leadership in African Pentecostal Churches</i>                                                                              |     |
| <b>Michael Pamfwiri Mkandawire</b>                                                                                                                   | 27  |
| <i>Neo-Prophetic Akwankyerε and Membership Retention in the Methodist and Anglican Churches in Ghana: A Contextual-Theological Assessment</i>        |     |
| <b>Prince Osei Yeboah</b>                                                                                                                            | 56  |
| <i>A Pastoral Care Approach to Child Sexual Abuse in Ghana: A Theological Reflection Informed by a Relational View of the Trinity</i>                |     |
| <b>Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam</b>                                                                                                                        | 74  |
| <i>Christian Discipleship and Workplace Ethics in Ghana: Bridging the Gap between Faith and Professional Practice</i>                                |     |
| <b>Samuel Nana Yaw Agyei, Marius Nel, Michael Kumaglo</b>                                                                                            | 91  |
| <i>A Pentecostal Theology of Apostolic Leadership: New Testament Foundations and Criteria for Contemporary Discernment</i>                           |     |
| <b>Johnny Lartey Peprah and Patrick Tetteh Kudadjie</b>                                                                                              | 111 |
| <i>Rivalry, Fertility, and Favouritism among Jacob's Wives: An Akan Reading of Genesis 29–30</i>                                                     |     |
| <b>Abraham Nortey</b>                                                                                                                                | 124 |
| <i>African Pentecostalism and Diasporic Mission in Southeast Asia: Reinterpreting Spirituality, Cultural Relativism and Historical Consciousness</i> |     |
| <b>Fred Cudjoe Adadey</b>                                                                                                                            | 144 |

## EDITORIAL

### **African Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity: History, Hermeneutics, Ethics, and Mission**

Justice Anquandah Arthur

This second issue of Volume 6 of the *Pentecost Journal of Theology and Mission* presents a diverse collection of studies centred on African Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity while also engaging wider Christian history and thought. Together, these articles highlight the importance of scholarship that is both theologically rigorous and attuned to the practical challenges the church faces in Africa and around the world.<sup>1</sup> The topics addressed include abolitionism and Christianity, missional leadership, prophetic guidance, child safeguarding, workplace ethics, apostolic ministry, African biblical interpretation, and mission among the diaspora. Despite their diversity, the contributions share a concern for examining and strengthening Christian witness through freedom, integrity, healing, accountability, and faithful participation in God's mission, with particular attention to Pentecostal-Charismatic belief and practice.

This issue further exemplifies the journal's commitment to fostering dialogue on Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity across biblical studies, theology, ethics, history, pastoral practice, and mission, while remaining open to wider Christian scholarship that illuminates its concerns. The authors employ a range of methodologies, including historical analysis, theological interpretation, empirical research, literature review, and ethnography, to address questions relevant to churches, leaders, and scholars. Rather than separating theology from everyday life, the essays situate Christian belief and practice within public engagement, institutional responsibility, cultural interaction, and the ongoing pursuit of the Spirit's guidance.<sup>2</sup> Collectively, they invite readers to consider how African Pentecostal-Charismatic communities, in conversation with broader Christian traditions, embody and test their beliefs in practice.

The issue's engagement with wider Christian scholarship begins with Ulrich Berner's critical re-examination of abolitionism within European religious history, which challenges the assumption that Christianity invariably serves as a force for liberation. By

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<sup>1</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); Nimi Wariboko, *The Pentecostal Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

analysing the intersections of Stoic philosophy, Christian theology, biblical interpretation, colonial experience, and African perspectives, the author distinguishes between moral or theological critiques of slavery and activist movements seeking its legal abolition. The article traces developments from the Roman era to the modern colonial period, showing how Scripture was employed both to justify oppression and to inspire resistance, while figures such as Equiano underscore African agency in the abolition narrative. Its attention to John Philip and John William Colenso broadens the discussion to forced labour, racial hierarchies, and colonial systems that perpetuated domination in new forms. As a historical overview, the article maps a field of inquiry rather than pursuing a narrowly defined research question. It thereby identifies themes that warrant further investigation and invites future scholarship on the forms of unfreedom that may persist after the legal abolition of slavery.

From this broader historical perspective, the issue turns more directly to African Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. Michael Pamfwiri Mkandawire's article, "Reimagining Missional Leadership in African Pentecostal Churches," addresses leadership challenges arising from the rapid expansion and growing public influence of African Pentecostal churches. Drawing on church structures, Pentecostal theology, the fivefold ministry in Ephesians 4:11–13, African Pentecostal scholarship, and contemporary leadership theory, the author argues that numerical growth and good organisation alone do not confer credibility or missional effectiveness. He proposes a Spirit-led leadership model grounded in five areas: spiritual foundation, congregational participation, ethical responsibility, leadership development, and contextual awareness. By linking spiritual gifts with the equipping of the whole church, mentoring, clear authority structures, cultural sensitivity, and public engagement, the article responds to centralised leadership, intergenerational tensions, and related dilemmas in African Pentecostal churches. It calls these churches to embody their missional vocation more faithfully.

Prince Osei Yeboah's article examines the growing significance of neo-prophetic *akwankyere*, spiritual guidance through prophecy, prayer, healing, deliverance, counselling, and discernment in Ghanaian Christianity. This phenomenon may help explain why some Methodist and Anglican members seek ministry outside their denominations. Through a review of existing literature and contextual-theological analysis, the author argues that some Historic Mission Churches may not adequately address spiritual and personal concerns related to illness, unemployment, family challenges, witchcraft, curses, and spiritual insecurity. The article advocates biblically grounded, contextually relevant ministries of healing and spiritual direction that remain

accountable to established Christian practices and beliefs. Such ministries should be marked by sound theology, robust safeguarding, financial integrity, and effective church oversight. They should equip believers to discern the Spirit rather than depend exclusively on prophetic leaders. Although the study does not establish a direct causal link between the absence of *akwankyere* and declining membership, it identifies the issue as a significant pastoral challenge. It recommends pilot programmes, leadership training, youth and urban outreach, and further research on pastoral care and church commitment.

The need for accountable ministry becomes especially urgent in Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam's article, which addresses the critical and often overlooked issue of child sexual abuse in Ghanaian society and churches, developing a pastoral response grounded in a relational understanding of the Trinity. Using Holland and Henriot's pastoral circle, the article brings lived experience into dialogue with Scripture, theological anthropology, and Trinitarian teaching. It argues that children and adults alike reflect the Trinity and possess equal dignity, thereby challenging abuses of power. The article presents the church as a healing community shaped by mutual respect, equality, connection, and supportive relationships. This vision is translated into practical measures for churches in Ghana, including child-centred theology, safeguarding policies, leadership training, advocacy, children's participation in protection efforts, survivor support, and collaboration with governmental and professional organisations. The article thus shows how relational Trinitarian theology can contribute to prevention, accountability, healing, and the transformation of church communities.

A related concern with the public consequences of Christian formation appears in the article by Samuel Nana Yaw Agyei, Marius Nel, and Michael Kumaglo, who examine the persistent disconnect between Ghana's strong Christian identity and unethical workplace behaviours such as bribery, favouritism, dishonest reporting, and abuse of power. Drawing on surveys and interviews with 50 Christians in Accra, the authors find that Christian faith can inspire honesty, diligence, courage, and accountability, yet peer pressure, economic hardship, job insecurity, and the normalisation of misconduct often undermine these commitments. The study argues that this "discipleship gap" cannot be reduced to individual hypocrisy; it also reflects the interaction of personal formation, church support, and workplace systems. The authors therefore propose a Pentecostal workplace ethic that integrates Spirit-led character, mentoring, communal accountability, and public witness, while calling churches and organisations to support and protect professionals who resist unethical practices. The article ultimately asks not only whether Christians affirm the right values, but also whether churches and workplaces enable ethical decision-making when integrity carries high personal or professional costs.

Questions of integrity and accountability also shape Johnny Lartey Peprah and Patrick Tetteh Kudadjie's contribution to Pentecostal ecclesiology by exploring contemporary apostolic leadership through a nuanced interpretation of the New Testament. Through theological exegesis and engagement with Pentecostal and broader biblical scholarship, the authors distinguish Christ's unique apostleship, the foundational witness of the Twelve, Paul's distinct commission to the Gentiles, and the broader missionary role of other New Testament apostles. This framework maintains the singular revelatory authority of the foundational apostles while allowing contemporary apostolic ministry to be understood functionally. The authors propose criteria for discerning authentic apostolic leadership, including divine calling, spiritual gifts, missionary effectiveness, sacrificial service, ecclesial accountability, and fidelity to the gospel. In the Ghanaian Pentecostal-Charismatic context, the article offers a biblically grounded framework for evaluating claims to apostolic titles and authority against the New Testament model of Christ-centred servanthood.

Abraham Nortey's article moves beyond a straightforward explanation of the conflict between Rachel and Leah by showing how an Akan cultural perspective can illuminate the narrative's continuing social and ethical significance. The study relates marital deception, favouritism, infertility stigma, competition for children, unequal marital access, and male passivity to comparable patterns in Akan polygynous households. In doing so, it treats African cultural experience as a substantive interpretive resource rather than a supplementary illustration. The article's significance lies in fostering a dynamic dialogue between text and context: Akan perspectives enrich the reading of the women's actions, while the biblical narrative critiques practices that marginalise wives, instrumentalise fertility, and perpetuate unequal affection. The result is an African-centred hermeneutic that is scholarly, culturally informed, pastorally relevant, and attentive to lived family structures.

The interplay of African identity, Christian faith, and changing social contexts continues in Fred Cudjoe Adade's article, which examines how African Pentecostal spirituality, cultural identity, and historical consciousness shape mission within the African diaspora in Southeast Asia, with particular attention to the Church of Pentecost in Thailand. Drawing on focus-group discussions and observations conducted in 2018 and 2024, he shows how Ghanaian languages, worship practices, music, dance, communal meals, family values, moral guidance, and leadership sustain migrants' faith and cultural heritage. The study nevertheless identifies limited engagement with Thai culture, revealing a tension between cultural preservation and adaptation to a new environment. By placing African diasporic mission in conversation with the work of Afe Adogame,

James Spickard, and Kwame Bediako, the article enriches Pentecostal mission studies and advocates a cross-cultural approach that preserves spiritual identity while fostering deeper, transformative relationships with local communities.

Taken together, the collection shows that Pentecostal theology and mission are most effective when anchored in thorough research, thoughtful self-examination, and proactive engagement with the real-world challenges facing both church and society. Across history, leadership, prophecy, safeguarding, ethics, biblical interpretation, apostolic ministry, and cross-cultural engagement, these articles encourage Christian communities to unite spiritual fervour with reflective theology, ethical accountability, and public responsibility. We hope this issue stimulates further research and constructive dialogue among scholars, church leaders, ministers, and students, while promoting practices that bear authentic witness to the gospel in Africa and beyond. We present these essays with the conviction that profound theological reflection can renew the church and sustain its faithful participation in God's mission.

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## Discourses on Slavery in European Religious History

Ulrich Berner

### Abstract

This article argues that abolitionism in European religious history did not emerge directly or inevitably from Christianity, but through a long, contested process in which Stoic philosophy, Christian theology, biblical interpretation, colonial critique, and African agency interacted. It first examines slavery discourse in the Roman Empire, comparing Stoic critiques by Seneca and Epictetus with early Christian responses by Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, and Eustathius. While several authors affirmed human unity and questioned domination, most did not demand legal abolition or organised reform. The article therefore distinguishes between moral or theological abolitionism, which undermined justifications for slavery, and activist abolitionism, which challenged the institution in law and practice. It then traces how this distinction was reshaped in the colonial-modern period, when biblical texts were used both to defend and oppose slavery. Through Las Casas, Quakers, Wesley, Clarkson, Newton, Equiano, and other African voices, abolitionism appears as a conflict over Scripture, natural justice, human nature, testimony, and empire. The article concludes with John Philip and John William Colenso in South Africa, showing how abolitionist reasoning expanded beyond slavery to expose colonial dependency, coerced labour, and racialised subordination as hidden forms of domination.

**Keywords:** Slavery, abolitionism, European religious history, Stoicism, Early Christianity, Biblical Hermeneutics

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### Introduction: Abolitionists and Abolitionist Movements

Determining the identity of the first abolitionist and tracing the origins of abolitionist movements within European religious history is a complex task. One might initially think of the "Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade," established in London in May 1787.<sup>3</sup> However, one of its members, Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846 C.E.), acknowledged some earlier influences on this movement. Notably, he referenced the Society of Friends, commonly known as the Quakers, who had denounced slavery as far back as the 17th century. Additionally, he highlighted the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-

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<sup>3</sup> Steve Turner, *Amazing Grace: John Newton, Slavery and the World's Most Enduring Song* (Oxford: Lion, 2005), 131.

1566 C.E.) as an individual precursor who spoke out against the enslavement of Indigenous people in the newly established Spanish colonies.<sup>4</sup> Clarkson was convinced that Christianity, being in its essence incompatible with slavery, had significantly contributed to the suppression of slavery in medieval European culture, before the revival of slavery with the beginning of European colonialism. The question remains whether the history of abolitionist movements can be traced back beyond this time, at least to the Christianisation of the Roman Empire in the fourth century C.E. – it would be surprising if the idea of abolition would not have been touched upon in the Christianised Empire. Indeed, in recent scholarship, Gregory of Nyssa (335-394 C.E.) has been called “the first great abolitionist Christian theologian.”<sup>5</sup> So, two different phases in the history of abolitionist movements will be covered in this paper: first, slavery discourses in the Roman Empire (1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries), including pagan philosophical traditions that may have influenced early Christian Theology, and may have lived on within, alongside or in opposition to Christianity in European religious history;<sup>6</sup> second, the development of the slavery/abolition discourse in the European colonies (16<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries).

The first part will be subdivided into two sections: before and after the Christianisation of the Roman Empire. The first section will focus on Stoic philosophers Seneca (1-65 C.E.) and Epictetus (50-135 C.E.), known for their critical view of slavery, in comparison with Christian theologians Clement of Alexandria (150-225 C.E.) and Cyprian (200-258 C.E.). The second section will focus on Gregory of Nyssa, in comparison with John Chrysostom (344-407 C.E.), and will ask whether Christian criticism of slavery went beyond the Stoic position. The second part will provide an overview of the use of the Bible in pro- and anti-slavery literature in the European colonies, focusing on 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century America. This overview will also raise the question of African agency within Western European slavery discourses. The summary and outlook will present two examples of critical reflections in 19<sup>th</sup>-century South Africa: a critique of the colonial system and the development of a new historical Bible criticism.

### **Discourses on Slavery in the Roman Empire before Christianisation**

Aristotle (384-322 C.E.), the philosopher known for his reflections on “natural slavery,” already had to argue against “Others,” who “think that it is contrary to nature to be a master, because the fact that one man is a slave and another free is by convention, whereas in nature they do not differ at all, which is why it is not just either; for it is the

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (London, 1786), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher J. Kellerman, *All Oppression Shall Cease: A History of Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Catholic Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 2022), 22.

<sup>6</sup> See Ulrich Berner, “Greek Mythology in European Religious History,” in *Studying Religion, Past and Present*, ed. Nickolas P. Roubekas, Dimitris Xygalatas, Luther H. Martin, and Donald Wiebe (London: Bloomsbury, 2024), 53–61.

result of force.”<sup>7</sup> This critical attitude which might have become the basis for an abolitionist movement, was carried on by Stoic philosophers, resurfacing in Seneca’s “letters to Lucilius”, pertaining to moral questions. In one of these letters, Seneca articulates his views on how the master-slave relationship ought to be appropriately defined: “I am glad to hear, ..., that you live on friendly terms with your slaves. It is just what one expects of an enlightened, cultivated person like yourself.”<sup>8</sup>

This opening sentence clearly indicates Seneca's intention to temper the hierarchical structure of Roman society, which typically excludes slaves from any personal or friendly relationships with free citizens. A fictitious dialogue unfolds, introducing an opponent who embodies the typical free citizen and slaveholder. This opponent persistently emphasises, “They’re slaves,” while Seneca counters with alternative terms: “No. They’re human beings,” and “No, they’re friends, humble friends.” Ultimately, Seneca responds to the slaveholder by stating, “Strictly speaking, they’re our fellow-slaves, if you once reflect that fortune has much power over us as over them.”<sup>9</sup>

Referring to fortune, which implies that the master-slave relationship could be reversed at any time, already indicates Seneca’s conviction that there are no essential differences in human nature that would legitimise the distinction between free citizens and slaves. Focusing on commensality as one aspect of the proposed “friendly” relationship between master and slave, Seneca declares that he laughs “at those people who think it degrading for a man to eat with his slaves”. He evokes an imaginary situation, certainly drawn from social reality: the master is dining all night, surrounded by a crowd of slaves who are “forbidden to move their lips to speak, let alone to eat”. This is, in Seneca’s view, “the most arrogant of conventions,” which he assumes did not exist in ancient republican Rome. Passing over “other instances of our harsh and inhuman behaviour” towards slaves, “the way we abuse them as if they were beasts of burden instead of human beings,” Seneca goes on to describe and criticise the luxurious lifestyle of the slaveholding elite.

After citing examples of social relationships that had been reversed by fortune, he challenges his opponent by asking:

How about reflecting that the person you call your slave traces his origin back to the same stock as yourself, has the same good sky above him, breathes as you do, lives as you do, dies as you do?

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Politics: Books I and II*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 20-23.

<sup>8</sup> L. Annaeus Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic: Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, selected and trans. Robin Campbell (London: Penguin Books, 1975), ep. 47.

<sup>9</sup> Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, ep. 47.

Having clearly expressed his views on the unity of humankind, Seneca briefly revisits the topic of “the treatment of slaves, towards whom we Romans tend to be especially arrogant, harsh, and insulting.” Not wanting to delve into what he calls “this endless topic of debate,” he advises, “treat your inferiors in the way you would like to be treated by your own superiors.” Challenging the defender of Rome’s hierarchical society, Seneca reflects on the very concept of a slave: “Show me a man who isn’t a slave; ... all are slaves to hope or fear.” This renewed argument for human unity leads him to suggest to slave owners: “Have them respect you rather than fear you.” As he concludes his letter, Seneca raises the crucial question of abolition: “... someone will tell us that I’m now inviting slaves to proclaim their freedom....” However, Seneca then steps back, hesitant to give a clear answer. He compares this to religion, saying, “... what is enough for a god, in the shape of worship, cannot be too little for a master. To be really respected is to be loved; and love and fear will not mix.”

Seneca has highlighted the unity of humankind and advocated for a respectful relationship between masters and slaves, even going so far as to recommend sharing meals together. Given this emphasis, it is reasonable to conclude that he might support abolition and the liberation of slaves. However, his reluctance to take this step raises important questions about the true intent behind his views on slavery. The memory of slave rebellions was still alive within the Roman Empire, suggesting that his counsel to treat slaves with kindness could be interpreted as a strategic approach to prevent future uprisings. This interpretation is particularly plausible considering Seneca’s position as a member of the slaveholding, ruling elite, which relied on the institution of slavery.<sup>10</sup>

However, it is important to remember that Seneca’s critique of cruelty was approaching a statement that resembles a declaration of universal human rights: when citing a well-known example of severe cruelty, he did not hesitate to state:

... though the laws allow a slave to be ill-treated to any extent, there are nevertheless some things which the common laws of life forbid us to do to a human being.<sup>11</sup>

So, it is more likely that Seneca’s refusal to demand abolition stemmed from pragmatic considerations, recognising that slavery was an integral part of the empire’s economy. The argument that slavery is just “necessary” for economic reasons would also be used by Christian theologians in the modern world.

The limits of Seneca’s critique become clearer when the discussion turns to Epictetus, whose social position and philosophical outlook frame the question of slavery from a

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<sup>10</sup> See Keith Bradley, “Seneca and Slavery,” *Classica et Mediaevalia* 37 (1986): 167.

<sup>11</sup> L. Annaeus Seneca, *Minor Dialogs Together with the Dialog on Clemency*, trans. Andrew Steward (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), xviii.

markedly different perspective. The Stoic philosopher Epictetus presents a distinct case, as he was not part of the ruling elite, having been a slave himself and having experienced harsh treatment firsthand. Nevertheless, he was permitted to study philosophy, and after gaining his freedom, he established his own philosophical school. Therefore, he was undoubtedly not in a position to openly address the issue of abolition. In any event, akin to Seneca, he did not hesitate to underscore the unity of humankind, perhaps even more explicitly. According to his student Arrian, when he was asked, “how is it possible to eat acceptably to the gods,” he, like Seneca, evoked the imaginary situation of the master waiting for his negligent slave to serve him. Starting from this, he developed his perspective on the proper, self-restrained behaviour of the master toward his slave, countering the slaveholder’s view by responding:

... will you not bear with your own brother, who has Zeus as his progenitor and is, as it were, a son born of the same seed as yourself and of the same sowing from above...? ... Do you not remember what you are and over whom you rule – that they are kinsmen, brothers by nature, that they are the offspring of Zeus?<sup>12</sup>

When the fictitious dialogue partner opposes him again, pointing to the fact that there is a class of human beings that can be bought and sold – “But I have a deed of sale for them, and they have none for me” – Epictetus now makes a decisive distinction between different kinds of law: he accuses the slaveholder of looking only at the “wretched laws of ours, the laws of the dead, ... not to the laws of the gods.” Thus, he rejects the idea that the laws regulating social reality are based on or derived from a higher order, natural or divine laws that give them legitimacy. Like Seneca, Epictetus emphasises the unity of humankind, perhaps even more clearly, by adding that master and slave are “brothers by nature” and by distinguishing between human and divine laws.

It should be noted that not all Stoic philosophers followed Seneca and Epictetus or shared their critical view of slavery. Musonius Rufus (25-95 C.E.), known as Epictetus’ teacher, for instance, would follow their criticism only as far as luxury and gluttony are concerned; he would not, however, question the institution of slavery as such.<sup>13</sup> It is widely recognised that Stoic philosophy and Early Christian theology overlap considerably in the realm of ethics. The question must now be raised whether this overlap includes a critical attitude towards the institution of slavery. It is also well known that the New Testament contains no explicit condemnation of slavery. On the contrary, slaves are admonished to obey their masters: “... with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart,

<sup>12</sup> Epictetus, *The Discourses as Reported by Arrian, the Manual, and Fragments*, trans. W. A. Oldfather, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1979). Diss. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Musonius Rufus, “Letter 18B,” in *Musonius Rufus: Lectures and Sayings*, trans. Cynthia King, ed. William B. Irvine (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), Part B.

as to Christ...” (Ephesians 6:5).<sup>14</sup> This obedience is demanded of slaves towards any kind of master: “...not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to the harsh” (1 Peter 2:18 NKJV; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:20-24; Colossians 3:22-24; Titus 2:9; 1 Timothy 6:1ff). Masters, too, are advised not to be overly harsh to their slaves and to recognise that God does not look at persons differently (Ephesians 6:9). This double admonishment, however, does not in any way call into question the social institution of slavery in the Roman Empire. In the Old Testament, slaveholding was clearly part of the social reality in ancient Israel, regulated in some respects (Leviticus 25), but never questioned or condemned as such. Therefore, the Sacred Scriptures of Early Christian Theology do not offer an unambiguous basis for developing abolitionist ideas.

Now, looking at Clement of Alexandria, it appears that this Christian theologian is very close to Musonius Rufus, but not to Seneca or Epictetus. He shares the Stoic criticism of a luxurious lifestyle, with a special emphasis on gluttony.<sup>15</sup> Slavery, in Clement’s view, is just a part of luxury: too many slaves, in his view, are as unnecessary as too great a number of cups and vessels for the dining table.<sup>16</sup> Obviously, he does not question the view that slaves are part of the master’s property like the vessels needed for dinner. His critique pertains only to any kind of exaggeration in luxury – he disapproves only of too great a number of slaves in one household.

On the appropriate attitude toward slaves, Clement advises that masters and mistresses should keep their distance from their slaves, especially in situations where they would be close together.<sup>17</sup> He even quotes the philosopher who was known for his reflections on “natural slavery,” as Aristotle said, he would not even laugh with slaves – obviously a warning against every kind of personal or even friendly relationship between master and slave.<sup>18</sup> Clement’s strategy, it seems, was to avoid interfering with Alexandria’s hierarchical social structure, where he lived and tried to win converts to Christianity. It is obvious that he was not willing to make Christians total outsiders in Roman society, for instance, by insisting on food taboos – so he allowed Christians to accept invitations to a banquet with “unbelievers” and eat whatever would be offered.<sup>19</sup>

As the institution of slavery was omnipresent in Roman society, it is not surprising that Christian theologians would often refer to it, comparing the master-slave relationship in

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<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all scriptural references are taken from the Revised Standard Version (RSV).

<sup>15</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Educator*, 2.1.1, in *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. Simon P. Wood (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1954).

<sup>16</sup> Clement, *Educator* 3, 4, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Clement, *Educator* 2, 5, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Clement, *Educator* 3, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Clement. *Educator* 2, I. (10). For more details on Clement’s theology, see Ulrich Berner, “Eating and Morality in (Late) Stoic Philosophy and (Early) Christian Theology,” in *Faith and Food*, ed. Afe Adogame, forthcoming.

social reality to the relationship between God and humanity. This is what, for instance, Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, was doing in his letter to Demetrianus, the Proconsul of Africa. The Roman Empire was suffering from quite a few misfortunes – wars, famine, and pestilence – and the pagan Proconsul attributed these misfortunes to the Christians, as happened quite often in the third century. The bishop, of course, would oppose him, giving back the allegation: these misfortunes have come “not because your gods are not worshipped by us, but because God is not worshipped by you.”<sup>20</sup> Then he takes up the theme of slavery as a starting point for a comparison to the religious realm: “From your slave you yourself require service, and though a man, you compel your fellowman to submit and to be obedient to you...”

Speaking of slaves as “fellowmen” may remind the reader of the Stoic emphasis on the unity of humankind. This association will be confirmed by following Cyprian’s argument through the following sentences:

... and although you have the same lot in respect of being born, the same condition in respect of dying, and although you have like bodily substance and a common order of souls, and although you come into this world of ours and depart from it after a time with equal rights, and by the same law...

These statements, indeed, carry on the critical view of slavery, as propagated by Seneca and Epictetus, in the following sentences, even taking up Seneca’s allusions to the cruel treatment of slaves by their Roman masters:

... yet, unless you are served by him according to your pleasure, unless you are obeyed by him in conformity to your will, you..., flog and scourge him: you afflict and torture him..., and even frequently with the sword and imprisonment.

After this description of Demetrianus’s attitude towards his slave – his demand for obedience and his reaction, the severe punishment of disobedient slaves – Cyprian comes to the point he has been driving at, that is, interpreting the misfortunes ravaging the province as God’s punishment for the disobedience of Demetrianus, who keeps worshipping the pagan gods: “And, wretch that you are, you do not acknowledge the Lord your God while you yourself are thus exercising lordship?”

This argument is based on a comparison: “exercising lordship” is transferred from the earthly to the religious realm, thus describing God as the ruler of the universe who has

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<sup>20</sup> Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum* 2.5, in *Treatises*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, *The Fathers of the Church* 36 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 5.

the right to demand obedience and to punish disobedience – in contrast to the proconsul who usurps this right of exercising lordship. Cyprian does not explicitly say that he would disapprove of the cruel punishment Demetrianus used to apply. However, his closeness to Seneca and Epictetus in denying essential differences between master and slave suggests that Cyprian, as a Christian theologian, would not hesitate to employ the Stoics' critical view of slavery.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that this continuity remains a hidden one might be explained by considering the historical context and the precarious situation of Christians before the change in politics brought about by Emperor Constantine. Of course, it could also be argued that Cyprian drew his arguments from the biblical creation myth, which does not distinguish between free and unfree people. The closeness to Stoic arguments, however, is unmistakable; indeed, Stoic and Christian views could concur in such a critical view of slavery, as will become clear when looking at Gregory's 4<sup>th</sup> homily on Ecclesiastes.

### **Christian Discourses on Slavery in the Christianised Roman Empire**

John Chrysostom, a prolific writer and for some years bishop of the Capital, Constantinople, used to speak very often about slavery – the appropriate behaviour of slaves and the proper treatment of them.<sup>22</sup> In his view, enslaved persons were required to obey their masters, even when those masters were unbelievers, as he states in Homily IV on Titus 2:9-10, one of his homilies on Paul's Letter to Titus. Chrysostom goes further, arguing that the master contributes more to the welfare of the enslaved person than the enslaved person contributes to the master; on this basis, he maintains that enslaved persons ought to respond with gratitude.<sup>23</sup> It will not come as a surprise that this argument will resurface in the modern pro-slavery discourse. The point he is making to his congregation is this comparison: we should imitate slaves by being obedient and grateful to God. He adds the reflection that slaves are free according to their nature, their unfree situation being caused by fortune only – and yet they will honour their master out of fear.<sup>24</sup> Here Chrysostom is, in part, in line with Seneca and Epictetus, denying that the distinction between free and unfree people is based on natural laws. He would not, however, follow Seneca by propagating love instead of fear as the right motivation for obedience. In any case, his view of the unity of human nature does not lead to demanding

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<sup>21</sup> Ramelli has offered a different interpretation, assuming that Cyprian would approve of Demetrianus' harsh treatment of slaves.

<sup>22</sup> See Chris L. de Wet, *Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily IV on Titus, on Titus 2:9-10*, in *NPNF 1.13*.

<sup>24</sup> Chrysostom, *Homily IV on Titus*.

a change in the relationship between slaves and master – replacing fear with respect and love.

There is, however, one point at which Chrysostom's argument might be read as opening onto a more critical reflection on slavery. In Homily 40 on 1 Corinthians, he moves beyond the conventional critique of luxury, arguing that two slaves should suffice, and invokes Paul as an exemplary figure who worked for his own livelihood and did not rely on enslaved labour. Presenting Apostle Paul as a model for a Christian way of life could give an impetus to create a movement for abolition, unless it is meant only for propagating humility and industry as Christian virtues.<sup>25</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa is really a different case, compared to Chrysostom. Two sources are worth considering: one of his homilies on Ecclesiastes and one of his Easter sermons. Commenting on King Solomon's statement, "I got me slaves and slave-girls and homebred slaves were born for me...", Gregory says in a very critical tone: "Do you notice the enormity of the boast? This kind of language is raised up as a challenge to God." Thinking that he is "the owner of men and women," Gregory asks, "What is he doing but overstepping his own nature through pride, regarding himself as something different from his subordinates?" Alluding to the biblical creation myth (Genesis 1:26), Gregory goes on to state that the authority of human beings is limited; their rule "is confined to control over things without reason...Irrational beasts are the only slaves of mankind." But by putting slaves, cattle and sheep on one and the same level, as property, the human species is divided into two species – "enslaved to itself", which is against the Biblical account that humans are created equally free as the "owner of the earth": "Whenever a human being is for sale, therefore, nothing less than the owner of the earth is led into the sale-room."<sup>26</sup>

Having condemned the idea of slavery by demonstrating its incompatibility with the Christian view, as set out in the Bible, Gregory embarks on another line of argument that will remind the reader of the Stoic position of Epictetus and Seneca:

Your origin is from the same ancestors, your life is of the same kind,...Is there any difference in these things between the slave and his owner? Do they not draw in the same air as they breathe? Do they not see the sun in the same way? Do they not alike sustain their being by consuming food?... Are not the two one dust after death?

<sup>25</sup> John Chrysostom, "Homily 40 on First Corinthians," in *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, vol. 12, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Talbot W. Chambers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 243-49.

<sup>26</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "Homily 4 on Ecclesiastes (Eccl. 2:7)," in *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on Ecclesiastes: An English Version with Supporting Studies*, ed. Stuart George Hall, trans. S. G. Hall and Rachel Moriarty (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 72-84.

The last sentence of this section goes back to a special Christian view: “Is there not one judgment for them? – a common Kingdom and a common Gehenna?” It appears that Gregory’s “condemnation of,”<sup>27</sup> or “opposition to” slavery,<sup>28</sup> whether or not designated as “abolition,” is based on two lines of argument, a biblical and a philosophical one, coming together as mutually enforcing each other. Gregory has not, however, made it explicit that he draws the second step from a different tradition: a philosophical one.<sup>29</sup> Those authors who celebrate Gregory of Nyssa as “(the first) Christian abolitionist theologian”<sup>30</sup> have correctly stated that he has abolished all arguments that would give legitimacy to the institution of slavery. So, one could say, following Wickham: “... Gregory’s arguments are, in the end, arguments for the abolition of slavery.” However, Wickham has to add the assumption: “What he has to say is consistent with the toleration of the system...” For, as he admits: “... the congregation is not being invited, ... to campaign for a change in the law.”<sup>31</sup>

The same assumption has to be applied to one of Gregory’s Easter sermons, where he speaks about various kinds of liberation as an appropriate response to the day of Christ’s resurrection: “Now is the prisoner freed, the debtor forgiven, the slave is liberated by the good and kindly proclamation of the church, ...”<sup>32</sup> Liberating slaves (“manumission”) according to their merits and as an act of benevolence of the master, had been an old tradition in the Roman Empire, and Constantine, the first Christian emperor, had granted this right to the church - this is the legally valid ritual Gregory is here alluding to. It is, however, hardly possible, to infer that Gregory “urges ... all the heads of households in his audience to manumit all slaves.”<sup>33</sup> For Gregory goes on to say:

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<sup>27</sup> David Bentley Hart, “‘The Whole Humanity’: Gregory of Nyssa’s Critique of Slavery in Light of His Eschatology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001): 51; Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery: The Role of Philosophical Asceticism from Ancient Judaism to Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 178.

<sup>28</sup> Hans Boersma, “‘This Is the Day Which the Lord Has Made’: Scripture, Manumission, and the Heavenly Future in Saint Gregory of Nyssa,” *Modern Theology* 28, no. 4 (2012): 658.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Rachel Moriarty, “Human Owners, Human Slaves: Gregory of Nyssa, Hom. Eccl. 4,” in *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on Ecclesiastes: An English Version with Supporting Studies*, ed. Stuart George Hall (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 61–71.; Daniel J. Pratt Morris-Chapman, “John Wesley and Methodist Responses to Slavery in America,” *Holiness: The Journal of Wesley House Cambridge* 5 (2019): 37–58.

<sup>30</sup> See Daniel F. Stramara Jr., “Gregory of Nyssa: An Ardent Abolitionist?,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 41 (1997): 37–60.

<sup>31</sup> Lionel R. Wickham, “The Date of Gregory of Nyssa’s Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” in *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on Ecclesiastes: An English Version with Supporting Studies*, ed. Stuart George Hall (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 179.; Cf. Mary E. Sommar, *The Slaves of the Churches: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 66: “It was not at all a call for the abolition of slavery as an economic practice ...”; Boersma, “This Is the Day Which the Lord Has Made,” 659: “... we have no evidence of Gregory lobbying for a change in the empire’s legal system ...”

<sup>32</sup> Ramelli, *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery*, 174.

<sup>33</sup> Ramelli, *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery*, 174.

Even the one who still remains in servitude benefits. Though his offences be many and serious and surpassing mitigation and pardon, the master is moved by the peacefulness of the day and accepts with kindness the one rejected and regarded as in disgrace, as Pharaoh did the cupbearer from the prison.<sup>34</sup>

Obviously, Gregory does not expect, let alone demand, that all slaves would or should be liberated. So, it appears, the sermon is more an appeal to the individual conscience of slaveholding Christians, to think of such an act of benevolence in a special case, in continuity of the old Roman tradition of “manumission.” Attacking the institution as such, however, by proclaiming the right of slaves to be disobedient and leave their masters, was not tolerated: Eustathius, bishop of Sebaste, who had done just this, was immediately excommunicated at the council of Gangra, in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup>

This bishop would have been the first Christian abolitionist in a strict sense: not only abolishing pro-slavery arguments but also taking action towards challenging the legislation. However, there was no chance to start an abolitionist movement within the church. All Christian emperors, beginning with Constantine, maintained that the distinction between free-born citizens and slaves remained valid.<sup>36</sup> So, there is no other way but to split the definition of abolitionist: Gregory, like his Stoic precursors,<sup>37</sup> and, possibly, Cyprian,<sup>38</sup> was an abolitionist in the wide sense: abolishing all pro-slavery arguments, not, however, becoming an activist for changing the legal system, but leaving it to the reader to draw personal consequences.

In any case, his dogmatic position, though not going beyond the Stoic tradition, is rightly emphasized as being exceptional, especially when compared to the position of Augustine, who developed a dogmatic theory – referring to Adam’s fall and hereditary sin – that gave legitimacy to the institution of slavery. According to Augustine, slavery would exist – and slaves would be under the obligation to obey – as long as this material world will exist. After the Last Judgement, however, the situation would be different, as it had been in paradise.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, “Discourse on the Holy Pascha,” 8-9.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Kellerman, *All Oppression Shall Cease*, 21ff; Sommar, *The Slaves of the Churches*, 74.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, the edict by Constantine: Thomas Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 29.

<sup>37</sup> Concerning the relationship to the Stoic tradition, cf. Moriarty, “Human Owners, Human Slaves,” 65ff.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Moriarty, “Human Owners, Human Slaves,” 67ff, for a different interpretation of Cyprian.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 208-219.

## Abolitionists and Abolitionist Movements in the Epoch of European Colonialism

Clarkson pointed to Las Casas, the “pious bishop of Chiapa,” as the first among the “well-disposed individuals..., who have humanely exerted themselves to suppress the abject personal slavery...” reintroduced with the beginning of this epoch. He presented Las Casas as an “amiable man” who opposed the enslavement of the Indians in the new Spanish colonies.<sup>40</sup>

A totally different, even contrasting image was given by David Walker, in the third article of his “Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World”: he presents Las Casas as that “very very notoriously avaricious Catholic priest,” that “wretch,” who was responsible for the beginning of the transatlantic Slave Trade.<sup>41</sup> Both these images are one-sided, each giving half of the truth: Clarkson was not aware of or did not mention, that, indeed, Las Casas had proposed to replace the Indians with Africans – an idea which he later regretted.<sup>42</sup> Walker, on the other hand, was not aware of or did not mention the fact that Las Casas, indeed, was moved by compassion for the Indians who were suffering in the Spanish system of enslavement.<sup>43</sup>

In any case, it should be noted that Las Casas liberated all the Indians who had been given to him as a reward for his participation in the conquest, before he began his lifelong fight for the rights of the colonised people – a move towards abolitionism, although limited to the indigenous population of the Caribbean. Las Casas can indeed be regarded as an abolitionist in the full, strict sense, as he not only abolished the arguments which would give legitimacy to enslaving the Indians, such as the argument that they do not behave like rational human beings,<sup>44</sup> he was also publicly attacking the institution of slavery in the presence of the Emperor Charles V, demanding a change in the legislation.<sup>45</sup>

Clarkson was also right to credit the Quaker community with keeping the idea of abolitionism alive in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The “Germantown Declaration,” signed by four members of the “Friends” in 1688, should be mentioned, even if it did not have a lasting impact: “We are against the traffik of men-body.”<sup>46</sup> And at last, in 1757 and 1761, in Philadelphia and London respectively, the decision was taken to commit “Quakers

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<sup>40</sup> Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, ed. Peter P. Hinks (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 37ff.

<sup>42</sup> Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda on the Religious and Intellectual Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974).

<sup>43</sup> Hanke, *All Mankind Is One*, 1974.

<sup>44</sup> See Hanke, *All Mankind Is One*, 1974.

<sup>45</sup> See Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Boston: Little Brown, 1965).

<sup>46</sup> See Brycchan Carey, *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery, 1657–1761* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 72–76.

everywhere to a future of antislavery campaigning."<sup>47</sup> Clarkson himself relied on their support during his travels in England.<sup>48</sup>

As slavery was part of social reality in ancient Israel, and as it is not explicitly condemned in the New Testament, it is not surprising that the defenders of slavery in 18th- and 19th-century America quoted from the Bible. They would, for instance, refer to Ephesians 6, 1 Corinthians 7, and 1 Peter 2:18 to argue that slavery was compatible with Christianity.

In 1739, George Whitefield, a renowned revival preacher representing the Calvinist wing of Methodism, travelled through the Southern slaveholding states of North America. At first, he was shocked to see the cruel treatment of the slaves, abused as if they were beasts.<sup>49</sup> Though disapproving severely of such a treatment, Whitefield goes on to say that "Enslaving or misusing their Bodies would, comparatively speaking, be an inconsiderable Evil, was proper Care taken of their Souls."<sup>50</sup> It is clear what he was aiming at: the slaveholders should allow that their slaves would be instructed in Christianity, which they were not inclined to do because they feared that "teaching them Christianity would make them proud, and consequently, unwilling to submit to Slavery." To counter this argument, Whitefield refers to the New Testament:

Do you find any one Command in the Gospel, that has the least Tendency to make People forget their relative Duties? Do you not read that Servants, and as many as are under the Yoke of Bondage, are required to be subject, in all lawfull Things, to their Masters, and that not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward?<sup>51</sup>

In the following sentences, Whitefield does not emphasise the obligation of the master to treat his slaves gently. He discovers even something good in harsh treatment: in his view, framed by his Calvinistic theology, he comes to the conclusion that,

Your present and past bad Usage of them, however ill-designed, may thus far do them good, as to break their Wills and increase the Sense of their natural Misery, and consequently better dispose their Minds to accept the Redemption wrought for them by the Death and Obedience of Jesus Christ.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Carey, *From Peace to Freedom*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> See Justice Anquandah Arthur, "Confronting the Ills of Society: Thomas Clarkson and the Slave Trade," *PJTM* 5, no. 1 (2024): 97–110.

<sup>49</sup> George Whitefield, *Three Letters from the Reverend Mr. G. Whitefield: Viz. Letter I. To a Friend in London, Concerning Archbishop Tillotson; Letter II. To the Same, on the Same Subject; Letter III. To the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South-Carolina, Concerning Their Negroes* (Philadelphia, 1740), 13.

<sup>50</sup> Whitefield, *Three Letters from the Reverend Mr. G. Whitefield*, 14.

<sup>51</sup> Whitefield, *Three Letters from the Reverend Mr. G. Whitefield*, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Whitefield, *Three Letters from the Reverend Mr. G. Whitefield*, 15.

Being fully convinced of the compatibility of Christianity and slavery, as proved by the commands in the New Testament, Whitefield became a slaveholder himself. Selena Hastings (Lady Huntingdon), who financed many Methodist chapels across England and a theological college, “followed Whitefield’s lead on the issue of slavery...She inherited Whitefield’s large plantation and orphanage at Bethesda, and expanded slave-holding there....”<sup>53</sup> It is important to note that this is only one strand in the Methodist movement, the Calvinist one, heavily opposed by the rival faction of the Arminian movement within Methodism.<sup>54</sup>

William Graham (1745-1799), a minister of the Presbyterian Church, based his conviction that Christianity “was never designed to alter the political or civil Status of men, but only to bring them to the Love of God.”<sup>55</sup> His conviction is anchored in a broad range of scriptural testimonies, confined to the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 7, Ephesians 6, Titus, and 1 Timothy.<sup>56</sup> Having given such a broad scriptural basis for constructing an appropriate attitude towards slaves, he felt justified to conclude that Christianity “does not point out any mode of their Emancipation ...”<sup>57</sup>

As late as 1841, Thornton Stringfellow (1788-1869), a Baptist minister, published a pamphlet to counter the “bitter fruits,” and “false doctrines” of abolitionism.<sup>58</sup> His contribution to the slave controversy is based on a broad overview of biblical texts, including the Old Testament. Of particular interest is his exegesis of Genesis 16, the story of Sarah and Hagar: he points out that the angel sent by God does not criticise Abraham and Sarah for their behaviour, but instead addresses Hagar as Sarah’s slave – this, in Stringfellow’s view, clearly indicates that the master-slave relationship is not in any way questioned or criticised, with Abraham’s God on the side of the slave-owner.<sup>59</sup> Later, he published “Scriptural and Statistical Views in Favor of Slavery” in 1856, already in its fourth edition, providing an extremely broad overview of the biblical testimonies from the Old and New Testaments.

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<sup>53</sup> Ryan Hanley, “Calvinism, Proslavery and James Albert Gronniosaw,” *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 36 (2015): 373.

<sup>54</sup> See Hanley, “Calvinism, Proslavery and James Albert Gronniosaw,” 374.

<sup>55</sup> William Graham, “Lecture 30th: An Important Question Answered,” in *Proslavery and Sectional Thought in the Early South, 1740–1829: An Anthology*, ed. Jeffrey Robert Young (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 169.

<sup>56</sup> Graham, “Lecture 30th,” 169-170.

<sup>57</sup> Graham, “Lecture 30th,” 170.

<sup>58</sup> Thornton Stringfellow, “A Brief Examination of Scripture Testimony of the Institution of Slavery,” in *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860*, ed. Drew Gilpin Faust (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 137.

<sup>59</sup> Thornton Stringfellow, *Scriptural and Statistical Views in Favor of Slavery*, 4th ed., with additions (Richmond, VA, 1856).

Regarding these few examples of the proslavery literature produced by ordained ministers of various denominations, it is easy to imagine that it would be a difficult task for the abolitionists to argue on the basis of biblical texts that slavery is incompatible with Christianity. John Wesley (1703-1791), representing the Arminian strand within the Methodist movement, may have recognised this problem. When he published his polemical “Thoughts upon Slavery” in 1774, he did not touch upon biblical statements on slavery. Instead, he made great efforts to reject the various negative prejudices concerning Africa and Africans by presenting a thoroughly positive image of the respective African countries and their inhabitants. He then informed the readership about how African slaves were procured, transported to America, and treated, summarising his description of the cruel living conditions with a rhetorical question: “Did the Creator intend that the noblest creatures in the visible world should live such a life?”<sup>60</sup> He then asked whether these things “can be reconciled (setting the Bible out of the question) with any degree of either justice or mercy,” leading to the clear conclusion that they are inconsistent with natural justice or mercy.

One important argument raised by defenders of slavery was that it was necessary to cultivate the land in the hot climate and to secure the nation's wealth and glory. Wesley rejected this pragmatic argument on the basis of his own experience in the respective colonies and, with the ethical argument that wealth must not be gained by neglecting virtue. At last, Wesley addresses those groups of people who are directly involved in the institution of slavery: the captains, the merchants and the plantation owners, appealing to their sentiments of compassion and sympathy, not, however, to their religious identity as Christians. Wesley had written this condemnation of slavery after visiting the colonies and seeing with his own eyes the living conditions of African slaves.

A different case is Thomas Clarkson, arguably the most interesting member of the “Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade,” founded in London in 1787. Not based on travel experiences but on historical study, Clarkson developed, as a young man, a commitment to the abolitionist movement that would change his life.<sup>61</sup> Like Wesley, he was deeply convinced that Christianity, in its essence, is incompatible with any form of slavery, and he shared Wesley's vision of the historical development of European culture – slavery declining under the influence of Christianity until it was revived in the 16th century.<sup>62</sup> In Clarkson's view: “A melancholy instance of the depravity of human

<sup>60</sup> John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery* (London: R. Hawes, 1774), 68.

<sup>61</sup> See Arthur, “Confronting the Ills of Society,” 97–110.

<sup>62</sup> Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, 21–23.

nature... that there are always men, of every age, country, and persuasion, who are ready to sacrifice their dearest principles at the shrine of gain."<sup>63</sup>

Clarkson's treatise is subdivided into three parts, the first one giving an overview of the history of slavery, drawing upon sources from Antiquity. Clarkson cites only one reference to the Bible: the story of Joseph and his brothers, used as an example to show that the "commerce of the human species was of a very early date."<sup>64</sup> Clarkson concludes this overview by recounting a contemporary instance of the enslavement of peoples: the Dutch colonists at the Cape hunting down the "Boshies-man nation." Clarkson comments: "With what horror do these passages seem to strike us!" What indignation do they seem to raise in our breasts, when we reflect, that a part of the human species are considered as *game*... "<sup>65</sup> The second part is devoted to "The African Commerce or Slave Trade," leading to the conclusion that "it is contrary to the principles of *law* and *government*, the dictates of *reason*, the common maxims of *equity*, the laws of *nature*, the admonitions of *conscience*, and, in short, the whole doctrine of *natural religion*."<sup>66</sup> The third part is devoted to "The Slavery of the Africans in the European Colonies." Clarkson begins by evoking an imaginary scene: a long column of African slaves in chains, driven to the slave ships for transport to America; an African observer comments by asking, "What is Christianity but a system of murder and oppression?"<sup>67</sup> Clarkson responds with a contention about "the generous Englishman at home", who... would be enraged at the conduct of his countrymen, and resist their tyranny."<sup>68</sup>

Obviously, it is his strategy to appeal to the compassion and sympathy of the English readers by giving a realistic account of the cruel conditions of the African slaves in the colonies. To counter one of the arguments European colonists used about the capacities of African slaves, Clarkson quotes from the poetical work of Phyllis Wheatley and comments: "If other examples of African genius should be required, suffice it to say, that they can be produced in abundance..."<sup>69</sup>

In the concluding chapters, it becomes clear that Clarkson's position – "that slavery is incompatible with the Christian system" – is deduced from certain general Christian doctrines: "brotherly love," "universal benevolence," and the fundamental doctrine that all human beings will exist in a future state and will have to give an account of their actions at the Last Judgement. In Clarkson's view, this would not apply to slaves as

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<sup>63</sup> Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, 23.

<sup>64</sup> Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, 19ff.

<sup>65</sup> Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, 26.

<sup>66</sup> Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, 46.

<sup>67</sup> Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, 49.

<sup>68</sup> Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, 50.

<sup>69</sup> Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, 66.

unfree beings. In the very last sentence of the treatise, Clarkson goes beyond condemning the African Slave Trade as contrary to natural religion, adding that it is also contrary to “the revealed voice of God.”<sup>70</sup>

At the same time, John Newton joined the abolitionist movement in London by publishing his “Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade.” His arguments are based on very specific, personal experiences related to his professional activities before his ordination as a minister of the Anglican Church. Newton is also celebrated as the author of a well-known hymn:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see...

This hymn refers to his conversion from a blasphemer to a believer, which he experienced after surviving a shipwreck. After this conversion, however, he continued in his profession as captain of a slave ship, involved in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Even after changing his profession – for reasons of his health – and after being ordained as an Anglican priest, preaching and composing hymns at Olney, he did not reflect on his former profession as sinful. This perspective reveals the Calvinistic framework of his conversion, particularly the doctrine of predestination: “What I did I did ignorantly; considering it as the line of life which Divine Providence had allotted me...” The following sentence, it seems, mirrors the biblical precepts given to the Christian master concerning the appropriate treatment of his slaves: “and having no concern, in point of conscience, but to treat the slaves, while under my care, with as much humanity as a regard to my own safety would admit.”<sup>71</sup>

However, coming into contact with the recently formed group of abolitionists, he changed his mind, almost a second conversion: “I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders.”<sup>72</sup> Like Wesley and Clarkson, he did not argue as a theologian – and perhaps rightly so – believing that his firsthand experience as a slave-ship captain was the strongest support for the abolitionist cause. The list of arguments he provided was pragmatic and, in essence, political: it listed the detrimental effects of the slave trade

<sup>70</sup> Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, 91.

<sup>71</sup> John Newton, *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade* (London, 1788), in *The Journal of a Slave Trader (John Newton), 1750–1754, with Newton’s Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*, ed. Bernard Martin and Mark Spurrell (London: Epworth Press, 1962), 99.

<sup>72</sup> Newton, *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*, 98.

in several respects: first, on the English people, for instance, the loss of many seamen; and second, of course, on the slaves purchased on the African coast.

Again, like Wesley and Clarkson, he appeals to the readers' sympathy and compassion by giving vivid examples of the cruel conditions on board to which the slaves are exposed.<sup>73</sup> At this point, he does not miss the opportunity to counter a standard argument of the proslavery authors: he states, based on his own experience, that "the state of slavery" in Africa "is much milder than in our colonies", that it "may be deemed a state of ease and liberty compared with their situation on board our ships."<sup>74</sup> He also aligns with Wesley in insisting on the ethical principle that wealth must not be gained by unjust means. He adds an allusion to the New Testament, referring to Matthew 27:6 with regard to the wealth flowing from the African Trade; he should think himself "bound to say to Government, to Parliament and to the nation, 'it is not lawful to put it into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.'"<sup>75</sup>

This overview would be incomplete if the question of African agency were neglected – African voices within the Western-European Slavery discourse. It is not surprising that a few African authors joined the abolitionist movements, using their autobiographies to reinforce anti-slavery arguments: Olaudah Equiano should be mentioned first, as arguably the most important figure. After gaining his freedom, he became an active member of the British public sphere, writing articles for newspapers and travelling across England, successfully offering his autobiography for subscription.<sup>76</sup> Ottobah Cugoano might be named alongside Equiano. It would be rewarding, certainly, to further investigate the collaboration of these African ex-slaves and the group of English abolitionists, and the impact of these African voices on the critical discourse leading to the abolition of the African Slave Trade; Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass and David Walker have to be named, with regard to the American context.<sup>77</sup>

It may come as a surprise that African ex-slaves joined the other side, thereby confirming the pro-slavery arguments of the Calvinistic faction within the Methodist movement: J.A.W. Gronniosaw wrote in favour of the Whitefield faction, expressing gratitude for being freed from African superstitions and led to Christianity. In one of her poems,

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<sup>73</sup> Newton, *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*, 103-105.

<sup>74</sup> Newton, *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*, 107, 111.

<sup>75</sup> Newton, *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*, 100.

<sup>76</sup> Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), 1-3.

<sup>77</sup> See Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (London: J. Phillips, 1787); Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Boston: Author, 1861); Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845); David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (Boston: 1830).

Phyllis Wheatley celebrated Whitefield, the slaveholding missionary.<sup>78</sup> Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein must be mentioned as a precursor, already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: having been freed in Amsterdam, he wrote a treatise defending the institution of slavery as fully compatible with Christianity.<sup>79</sup> Interpreting these divergent attitudes among African ex-slaves would certainly require thorough studies of the situations they were exposed to, for instance, financial dependencies, and, of course, the theological orientation of their owners – in these three cases, the Calvinistic version of Reformed Christianity. In any case, the African voices within the Western-European slavery discourse must not be ignored.

### Summary and Outlook

The abolitionist movement, consisting of seven members and beginning its work in London in 1787, certainly obtained considerable additional support when Newton and Equiano joined the group. Their contributions mutually reinforced each other, confirming the antislavery polemics through eyewitness testimony from both sides: British slave traders and African slaves. The first aim – the prohibition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade – was achieved in 1807, and the final aim – the prohibition of slavery in the British Empire – in 1834. However, the question must be asked whether hidden forms of slavery may arise in a colonial context – other means of legal oppression, designed to keep the colonised people in a state of permanent bondage by denying them equal rights with the colonisers. It is the merit of John Philip, a Scottish missionary in South Africa, that he drew attention to this question very early – a question that could also be asked today.

As a superintendent of the London Missionary Society, Philip began travelling to South Africa in 1819. At first, he had a high opinion of the liberal progress the new British administration would bring compared with the Dutch administration, which had been known as an oppressive system.<sup>80</sup> To his disappointment, however, he had to realise that conditions for the colonised people, then designated “Hottentots”, had not improved, or had even worsened. Philip did not blame individual representatives of the new administration, but the colonial “system” as such.<sup>81</sup> After reviewing the “Colonial Proclamation of 1809”, promulgated after the final takeover as a British colony and

<sup>78</sup> James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, “A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself” (Bath: 1772), in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 32-58.

<sup>79</sup> See Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein’s *The Agony of Asar: A Thesis on Slavery by the Former Slave, Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, 1717–1747* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers).

<sup>80</sup> John Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, vols. 1 (London: James Duncan, 1828), 116.

<sup>81</sup> Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, vol. 1, 35, 61, 130, 150, 154.

praised as the “Magna Charta of the Hottentots”, he concluded that it did not remove the unjust claims of the farmers on the indigenous population: “The very reverse is the case: it legalizes these claims and it consigns the Hottentots and their posterity to universal and hopeless slavery.”<sup>82</sup>

According to Philip, the prohibition of the slave trade in 1807 caused a scarcity of imported slaves in the colony. So, colonists pressured the indigenous population to work for them. This development led to conflicts between missionaries and colonists, who disliked the missionary stations where “the Hottentots are treated like rational beings.” Philip adds an interesting comparison:

The proprietors in our sugar islands are not more alarmed by any plan for the abolition of slavery, than the inhabitants of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope are by any exertions to improve the character of the Hottentots.<sup>83</sup>

This is the most important point, and it remains Philip’s merit, to have realised that the colonial legislation, pertaining to nominally free people, actually operated as a hidden form of slavery. In response, he developed a clear vision of the missionary’s task and the function of missionary stations: to protect oppressed people and offer places of refuge.<sup>84</sup> In his view, Christianization should be an ecumenical work, beyond denominational boundaries.<sup>85</sup> His theological conviction, which did not allow for any racism, was derived from two sources: the idea of “certain rights which human beings possess and of which they cannot be deprived but by manifest injustice,” and from the biblical account of God creating humankind as a unity.<sup>86</sup> Since he did not avoid running into conflict with the colonisers and criticising governmental measures, he might be designated an abolitionist, though in a new, slightly altered sense, as he was fighting a hidden form of slavery.

The pro-slavery theologians would have remained in their conviction as long as it was the basic belief that each sentence of the Bible is the Word of God, to be taken in its literal meaning, so that, for instance, the biblical precepts concerning slavery were still valid and had to be applied. A new, critical hermeneutical approach to biblical studies was needed, it appears, to create space for a critical discourse on exegetical ground. John William Colenso (1814-1883), the first Anglican Bishop of Natal, South Africa, developed this new hermeneutic. His Bible criticism, contending that Moses was not the author of

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<sup>82</sup> Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, vol. 1, 148.

<sup>83</sup> Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, vol. 1, 141.

<sup>84</sup> Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, vol. 1, 30.

<sup>85</sup> Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, vol. 1, 30.

<sup>86</sup> Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, vol. 1, 26, 32.

the Pentateuch, met with strong opposition in the Anglican Church, leading to a trial for heresy and to his excommunication.<sup>87</sup>

Although Colenso drew on the most recent Western European Bible criticism, then emerging in Germany, it has rightly been emphasised that his theology derived from his encounter with African culture.<sup>88</sup> The most interesting point, however, is that he developed this critical view in response to questions from his Zulu assistant, William Ngidi, with whom he was collaborating on translating the Old Testament. In the preface to the first volume of his “critical examination” of the Pentateuch, Colenso told his readers, referring to Exodus 21:4:

I shall never forget the revulsion of feeling, with which a very intelligent Christian native, with whose help I was translating these words into the Zulu tongue, first heard them ... His whole soul revolted against the notion, that the Great and Blessed God, the Merciful Father of all mankind, would speak of a servant or maid as mere ‘money’ ...<sup>89</sup>

Colenso’s contention that the whole narrative of the Pentateuch is unhistorical was not meant to destroy faith in the “Living Word of God” contained in the Bible, which is not identical with it; that is, we are not under the obligation to regard every sentence as divinely inspired. Just a few years before his “examination” of the Pentateuch, Thornton Stringfellow, one of the pro-slavery theologians, commented on the same text, Exodus 21, which made William Ngidi revolt against this law, which defined slaves as the owner’s “money”, as sanctioned by God.

In Stringfellow’s view, this law is “the common-sense principle, which has been adopted substantially in civilised countries where involuntary slavery has been instituted from that day until this.” So, he was sure that modern Christian slaveholders are entitled to punish disobedient slaves, in order to force them into submission, even if this would lead to their death within three days: “And he who believes the Bible to be of divine authority, believes these laws were given by the Holy Ghost to Moses.”<sup>90</sup>

Such an application of biblical precepts on slavery is exactly what Colenso sought to prevent through his critical hermeneutical approach. At the end of the first volume of his “examination” of the Pentateuch, he reveals what he was aiming at: referring to Numbers 31, the war on Midjan, he says: “But how thankful we must be, that we are no longer

<sup>87</sup> See John William Colenso, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined* (London: Roberts & Green, 1862).

<sup>88</sup> John William Colenso, *St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: Newly Translated, and Explained from a Missionary Point of View*, ed. Jonathan A. Draper (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003).

<sup>89</sup> Colenso, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined*, 9.

<sup>90</sup> Stringfellow, *Scriptural and Statistical Views in Favor of Slavery*, 31.

obliged to believe, as a matter of fact, and with vital consequence to our eternal hope, the story related in N. XXXI..."<sup>91</sup>

Thus, Colenso's new hermeneutical approach created space to refute biblical pro-slavery arguments on exegetical grounds. Laws or stories such as those in Exodus 21 or Numbers 31, which report the treatment of slaves or defeated enemies, can no longer be cited as legitimising slavery once the unhistorical character of the whole Pentateuch is acknowledged. Those laws and stories that conflict with general Christian and philosophical principles raise questions about God's righteousness, and Colenso follows this in his commentary on Romans, written "from a missionary point of view." In his view, God has given this righteousness to all members of humankind, without privileging any chosen people. As Paul tells the Jews that they do not have any kind of superiority over the Pagans, so the European Christian colonisers cannot claim superiority over the indigenous Zulu population, Colenso infers "by extension."<sup>92</sup> His version of Christianity is universalistic, based on an appreciation of other religions, with the consequence that conversion to Christianity need not be a total break with the past. The ongoing task of missionising, in his view, would be to tell people who may not yet have realised it that God loves all humankind. Since he kept fighting for the rights of the Zulu, even lobbying at the British Parliament, he could also be described as an abolitionist, though again in a slightly altered sense, as he was confronting a hidden form of slavery.

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<sup>91</sup> Colenso, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined*, 143.

<sup>92</sup> Jonathan A. Draper, ed., *The Eye of the Storm: Bishop John William Colenso and the Crisis of Biblical Inspiration*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 386 (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2003).

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# Reimagining Missional Leadership in African Pentecostal Churches

Michael Pamfwiri Mkandawire

## Abstract

The rapid growth and expanding public presence of Pentecostal Christianity in Africa have intensified questions concerning the theological coherence, ethical credibility, and missional adequacy of contemporary leadership practices. This study examines missional leadership in contemporary African Pentecostal contexts, particularly ecclesial settings shaped by charismatic spirituality, rapid institutional growth, and increasing social engagement. Employing a constructive theological method of critical synthesis, it brings ecclesiological models, Pentecostal pneumatology, African Pentecostal scholarship, and selected contemporary leadership theories into interdisciplinary conversation. It argues that missional leadership should be understood as a Spirit-empowered praxis through which leaders and ecclesial communities participate in the *missio Dei* by integrating proclamation, communal formation, ethical accountability, contextual discernment, and transformative public engagement. Its specific contribution is a constructive Spirit-empowered missional leadership framework that critically appropriates ecclesiological and leadership resources through a Pentecostal lens, rather than treating theological and organisational perspectives as parallel discourses. The study concludes that the future credibility and missional vitality of African Pentecostalism depend not merely on numerical expansion or institutional effectiveness, but on forming leaders who are pneumatologically grounded, theologically discerning, ethically accountable, relationally participatory, and contextually responsive to contemporary African life.

**Keywords:** Missional Leadership; African Pentecostalism; Pneumatology; Ecclesiology; *Missio Dei*

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## Introduction

Missional leadership<sup>93</sup> has emerged as a critical theological and practical concern in contemporary African Pentecostalism amid ecclesial growth, socio-cultural transformation, and the Church's expanding public presence. The expansion and

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<sup>93</sup> See the use of "Spirit-empowered leadership" and "missional leadership" in this study as conceptually convergent. While the latter emphasises participation in the *missio Dei*, the former highlights the pneumatological grounding of such participation. In Pentecostal theology, mission is inseparable from the Holy Spirit's empowering and directing work; therefore, the two terms are used interchangeably to reflect both theological orientation and practical expression.

growing public visibility of Pentecostal Christianity across many African settings have intensified questions about forming leadership capable of sustaining theologically coherent, ethically accountable, and contextually responsive participation in God's mission. Yet numerical growth and institutional expansion do not necessarily produce leadership that is theologically formed, ethically accountable, communally participatory, or adequately equipped to discern the Church's participation in the *missio Dei*. The central problem concerns a potential disjunction between the vitality of African Pentecostal Christianity and the formation of missional leadership capable of integrating Spirit empowerment, theological discernment, ecclesial accountability, and contextually responsive participation in God's mission. This concern is sharpened by documented challenges surrounding leadership development, succession planning, and intergenerational continuity in African Pentecostalism.<sup>94</sup> These pressures are neither uniform across African Pentecostalism nor equally evident in every church or national context, but they warrant sustained constructive theological reflection.

Against this background, the central question is how missional leadership might be constructively reimagined for contemporary African Pentecostal contexts in a manner that integrates Pentecostal pneumatology, ecclesial formation, ethical accountability, contextual discernment, and participation in the *missio Dei*. It addresses this question through a constructive theological method of critical synthesis, bringing ecclesiological models, Pentecostal pneumatology, African Pentecostal scholarship, and selected leadership theories into interdisciplinary conversation. Critical synthesis entails evaluating these resources in relation to one another, identifying points of convergence and tension, and constructively integrating selected insights under the governing theological claims of the *missio Dei* and the Spirit's agency in the Church's life and mission. Avery Dulles' ecclesiological models provide an important heuristic resource for examining the Church's identity and mission. They are critically reinterpreted through a Pentecostal emphasis on the active agency of the Holy Spirit. This is not an empirical study of a single denomination or national setting; rather, it engages broader patterns and recurring leadership pressures across diverse African Pentecostal contexts without treating African Pentecostalism as a uniform ecclesial phenomenon.

The fundamental argument is that missional leadership should be understood as a Spirit-empowered praxis through which leaders and ecclesial communities participate in the *missio Dei* by integrating proclamation, communal formation, ethical accountability, contextual discernment, and transformative public engagement. Drawing critically on Dulles' ecclesiological models, Pentecostal understandings of the Holy Spirit, the

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<sup>94</sup> Kimion Tagwirei, "Battling with the Baton: (Dis)connecting Today and Tomorrow's Leaders in African Pentecostalism," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023): 1–3, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.9179>.

Fivefold Ministry of Ephesians 4:11–13, African Pentecostal scholarship, and selected leadership theories, it develops a constructive Spirit-empowered missional leadership framework in which theological and organisational perspectives are critically integrated rather than treated as parallel discourses. On this basis, the future credibility and missional vitality of African Pentecostalism depend not simply on numerical expansion or institutional effectiveness, but on forming leaders who are pneumatologically grounded, theologically discerning, ethically accountable, relationally participatory, and contextually responsive.

### **Ecclesiological Foundations for Missional Leadership**

The theological base of missions is being tested from all angles. In attempting to align with contemporary cultural expectations, some theological positions have weakened the urgency of mission, particularly regarding the lostness of those outside Christ.<sup>95</sup> This moment calls for a renewed emphasis on missions and the adoption of contextually relevant models of missional leadership. Avery Dulles proposes five models of the Church: institutional, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, and servant, which together provide a multidimensional framework for understanding ecclesial identity and mission.<sup>96</sup> Although rooted in a Roman Catholic perspective, these models retain significant analytical value. From a Pentecostal standpoint, they are engaged critically and reinterpreted in light of pneumatological emphasis.

From this perspective, Dulles' work serves as a heuristic framework through which African Pentecostal theology can reflect more deeply on its own ecclesial identity. By bringing these models into conversation with Pentecostal pneumatology, particularly the emphasis on the active work of the Holy Spirit, this analysis appropriates what is helpful while remaining faithful to Pentecostal theological convictions.

Across African Pentecostal contexts, ecclesiology is inseparable from lived experience, communal identity, and socio-cultural realities that shape how ecclesial life embodies and participates in God's mission. Historically, Christianity across the continent has functioned as both a religious system and a formative influence on social and communal structures. In his paper reflecting upon the role of the Christian Church as a natural factor in the holistic development of society, Ioan Stinghe states:

Church's role in society is "to ready for the Lord a people well prepared for Him" (Luke 1:17) for His second coming. To accomplish this work, the

<sup>95</sup> John York, *Missions from the Two Thirds Word. A Study Guide* (Springfield: Global University, 2005), 18.

<sup>96</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 22–24.

Church is involved in society in existential areas such as social, health, education and spiritual.<sup>97</sup>

Such an insight challenges reductionist views of mission by affirming the Church's holistic calling. In these communities, where life is deeply embedded in social and economic realities, this perspective emphasises the inseparability of proclamation and social engagement.

To "prepare a people for the Lord" must be understood not just as individual salvation, but as the formation of communities that embody the transformative reign of God in every sphere of life. Holistic engagement is inseparable from the work of the Holy Spirit, who empowers the believers for proclamation and for tangible expressions of justice, healing, and restoration. Thus, missional leadership must resist any tendency toward spiritual reductionism and instead embrace a Spirit-empowered vision of mission that engages the full spectrum of human existence.

At the same time, such holistic engagement inevitably raises the question of how the Church maintains its distinct identity while remaining fully present within society. This tension becomes clearer in the experience of the early Christian community.

Thus, the early Christians had a sense of extra-territorial (Phil. 3:20) outside the existing social order, they were "travelers" or "foreigners", but they remained in the society (in the world) fulfilling all the daily duties responsibly, putting divine authority over the human one, being spiritually detached.<sup>98</sup>

Stinghe's observation reflects the enduring tension of being 'in the world' yet not 'of the world,' calling for a Spirit-led engagement that avoids both withdrawal and uncritical assimilation. For African Pentecostalism, this necessitates a form of missional leadership that is both spiritually grounded and socially present.

For Pentecostal communities, this dual identity must be navigated through a Spirit-led discernment that neither withdraws from societal engagement nor uncritically assimilates into prevailing cultural patterns. The early Christian posture of responsible participation without spiritual compromise provides a compelling model for contemporary missional leadership. It suggests that faithful witness is not expressed through isolation, but through transformative presence within society.

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<sup>97</sup> Ioan Stinghe, "The Holistic Development of Society: The Contributions of the Christian Church," in *Proceedings of the Harvard Square Symposium: The Holistic Society – Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, vol. 3 (Princeton: NJ: Research Association for Interdisciplinary Studies, 2017), 90, <https://zenodo.org/record/1435117/files/006.pdf>.

<sup>98</sup> Ioan Stinghe, *The Holistic Development of Society*, 92.

In many African societies, where communal life is deeply valued, this insight carries even greater weight. Missional leadership nurtures believers who are spiritually grounded yet socially engaged, individuals who express the values of the Kingdom of God within everyday structures of life. Such an approach affirms that the Church's witness is most effective not at the margins of society, but at its very centre, where faith is lived out in visible, responsible, and Spirit-empowered ways. Consequently, this dynamic informs contemporary ecclesiological reflection and provides a framework for engaging models such as those proposed by Dulles.

The institutional model understands the Church as a structured community with defined roles, governance, and doctrinal coherence.<sup>99</sup> While this provides necessary order, Pentecostal theology resists rigid institutionalism that may suppress the dynamic leading of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, "in the institutionalist ecclesiology, the powers and functions of the Church are generally divided into three: teaching, sanctifying, and governing."<sup>100</sup> Accordingly, the church's role is double-edged: that of ministering and governing. In a sense, there are the governing and the governed; the minister and the ministered. In response to the notion above, Dulles contends that the church is a society of unequals.<sup>101</sup> This description raises an important question concerning the relationship between differentiated ecclesial authority and the equal standing of believers in Christ, particularly in light of Galatians 3:28.

Galatians 3:28 does not eliminate differentiated ministries or responsibilities, but its affirmation of unity in Christ challenges leadership arrangements in which social or gender distinctions become grounds for exclusion or unequal ecclesial worth. This question carries particular significance for African Pentecostal leadership, where claims concerning spiritual gifting and the agency of the Holy Spirit may coexist with inherited assumptions about gender and authority. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu's account of African Independent Churches is instructive in this regard, since he identifies the creation of space for women's leadership on the basis of charismatic experience as one of their notable contributions to African Christianity.<sup>102</sup> Allan Anderson similarly observes that "in African churches, the leadership patterns that sometimes follow African patterns are often also biblical patterns, when the leader is a man or woman upon whom the Spirit

<sup>99</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 22-24.

<sup>100</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 24.

<sup>101</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 25-26.

<sup>102</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Spirit and Empowerment," in *African Initiated Christianity and the Decolonisation of Development: Sustainable Development in Pentecostal and Independent Churches*, ed. Philipp Öhlmann, Wilhelm Gräb, and Marie-Luise Frost (London: Routledge, 2020), 36, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367823825>

has come.”<sup>103</sup> Missional leadership should therefore attend seriously to Spirit-enabled vocation and gifting while critically examining social hierarchies that restrict responsible participation in the Church’s mission.

Such a model can help the Church remain effective while preserving ecclesial coherence. Pentecostal openness to the Spirit does not eliminate the need for agreed doctrine, responsible governance, and shared institutional purpose; rather, these structures should remain sufficiently flexible to support discernment of the Spirit’s leading.<sup>104</sup> Comparisons between Church and state institutions must nevertheless be handled cautiously, because close identification with political authority can render the Church spiritually irrelevant and institutionally fragmented. By contrast, the Church’s participation in the reign of God announced in Luke 4:18 entails personal and social transformation and liberation from slavery and oppression.<sup>105</sup>

Yet the institutional dimension of the Church must remain subordinate to the dynamic leading of the Holy Spirit. While structure provides necessary order, Pentecostal ecclesiology resists any form of rigid institutionalism that quenches spiritual vitality (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:19).<sup>106</sup> Leadership structures are therefore understood not as ends in themselves, but as Spirit-enabled frameworks that facilitate participation in the mission of God. In African Pentecostal contexts, this balance is particularly crucial, as excessive institutional control may hinder the spontaneous and charismatic expressions that often characterise vibrant church life.

### **Pentecostal Reinterpretation of Ecclesiological Models**

The following discussion re-examines these ecclesiological models through a Pentecostal theological lens, with particular attention to the Holy Spirit’s role in shaping the life and mission of the Church. While the institutional model emphasises structure and order, it does not fully capture the relational and experiential dimensions of ecclesial life. This limitation opens the way for a complementary perspective, namely, the Church as mystical communion.

According to Roman Catholic ecclesiology, Arnold Rademacher maintains that the Church is, at its inner core, a community (*Gemeinschaft*) and, at its outer level, a society (*Gesellschaft*).<sup>107</sup> Thus, the visible structure of the Church serves the realisation of its deeper communal reality, which corresponds to the Kingdom of God and the communion

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<sup>103</sup> Allan Anderson, “African Initiated Churches of the Spirit and Pneumatology,” *Word & World* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 180, <https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/issue/the-holy-spirit/>.

<sup>104</sup> Doug Bandow, *Beyond Intentions: A Biblical View of Politics* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 15.

<sup>105</sup> Bandow, *Beyond Intentions: A Biblical View of Politics*, 95.

<sup>106</sup> Scripture references are used in a general theological sense and are not tied to a specific translation.

<sup>107</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 33.

of saints. This model finds strong biblical grounding in Paul's depiction of the Church as the Body of Christ (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12), emphasising mutual dependence and unity among believers. Pentecostal theology deepens this model by spotlighting that such communion is not merely relational but also pneumatological. The unity of believers is understood as being constituted and sustained by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, who binds the community together in living fellowship. This Spirit-formed *koinonia* transcends social, ethnic, and economic divisions, an especially significant reality across Pentecostal communities in Africa marked by diversity and, at times, fragmentation. Consequently, missional leadership must nurture communities that are socially connected and spiritually animated by the presence and activity of the Spirit.

Although the model of mystical communion emphasises relational belonging, it does not fully account for how the Church visibly embodies divine grace. This limitation opens the way for understanding the Church as a sacrament. Dulles describes the Church as a sign and instrument of grace, holding together both visible structure and spiritual reality.<sup>108</sup> From a Pentecostal perspective, this sacramental dimension is reinterpreted through lived experience rather than formal ritualism. While affirming practices such as water baptism and the Lord's Supper, Pentecostal theology emphasises the immediacy of divine encounter through the Holy Spirit. As a living community, the Church thus becomes a living sign of God's presence, manifested in symbolic acts but also in ongoing experiences of transformation, healing, and empowerment.

Among African Pentecostal communities, this experiential dimension is particularly significant because they expect to encounter God's presence tangibly in the community's life. Missional leadership must therefore hold visibility and vitality together, ensuring that the Church remains both a recognisable sign of grace and a dynamic expression of the Spirit's work. At the same time, attention to visible forms must not displace the inward spiritual reality to which those forms bear witness.

While the sacramental model highlights the Church as a visible sign of grace, it must be complemented by a clear emphasis on proclamation. In the herald model, the Church is fundamentally called to proclaim the gospel entrusted to it.<sup>109</sup> In Pentecostal theology, proclamation is inseparable from Spirit-empowered witness. Spirit-empowered leadership encourages proclamation that is both faithful to Scripture and open to the dynamic activity of the Holy Spirit, recognising that the credibility of the message is reinforced through lived encounter. Accordingly, missional leadership plays a crucial role in ministry. The Church's mission centres on the proclamation of the Word of God

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<sup>108</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*.

<sup>109</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 56.

to the whole world.<sup>110</sup> Pentecostal theology intensifies this heralding function by insisting that proclamation is inseparable from Spirit-empowered witness, where the gospel is confirmed through the demonstration of the Spirit's power (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:4), a reality frequently expressed through healing, deliverance, and prophetic ministry. This calls for a leadership that supports a form of proclamation that is both faithful to Scripture and open to the dynamic activity of the Holy Spirit, recognising that the credibility of the message is often reinforced through lived encounter.

Yet proclamation alone does not exhaust the mission of the Church; it must be expressed in concrete acts of love and service. This brings into focus the model of the Church as servant, grounded in Jesus' mission as articulated in Luke 4:18–19. Here, Jesus presents a Spirit-anointed ministry marked by proclamation, liberation, healing, and restoration.

This passage reveals that the Kingdom of God is not merely announced but enacted, engaging the social, physical, and spiritual dimensions of human life.<sup>111</sup> From a Pentecostal perspective, such integration is inseparable from the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, who enables both proclamation and its visible outworking. As Christopher J.H. Wright observes, Jesus' ministry reflects continuity with the Servant motif in Isaiah, where the authenticity of mission is demonstrated through observable acts of transformation.<sup>112</sup> The inseparability of word and deed is therefore vital to understanding the nature of God's mission.

Across Pentecostal communities in Africa, this is expressed through holistic ministries that address spiritual, social, and material needs, reflecting the ongoing mission of Christ in both word and deed. Missional leadership should demonstrate a Spirit-empowered *diakonia* that moves beyond charity toward transformation, ensuring that acts of service are both compassionate and redemptive.

Flowing from this premise, the missional identity of the Church may be expressed through the interrelated dimensions of *koinonia*, *kerygma*, *diakonia*, and *martyria*. *Koinonia* reflects the communal life of the Church, grounded in fellowship with Christ and one another, and serves as a catalyst for mission.<sup>113</sup> *Kerygma* centers on the proclamation of the gospel, affirming the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and His Lordship (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). *Diakonia* expresses the Church's commitment to service, addressing

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<sup>110</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 56.

<sup>111</sup> Stephen Barry, "The Year of Jubilee: A Hermeneutic for Social and Moral Transformation in South Africa," *In die Skriflig* 45, no. 4 (2011): 869–870.

<sup>112</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 145.

<sup>113</sup> Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House), 91.

the needs of others as an essential dimension of its identity. *Martyria*, empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), embodies the Church's witness through both word and deed.

Together, these dimensions provide a holistic framework for understanding the Church's mission, integrating community, proclamation, service, and witness. A more adequate approach requires engagement that promotes a balanced expression of these elements, ensuring that the Church remains both theologically grounded and actively involved in God's mission within the world. Having explored the ecclesiological foundations of the Church's identity and mission, it becomes necessary to consider how these theological insights are made visible in leadership practices within contemporary Pentecostal contexts.

### Contemporary Perspectives on Missional Leadership and the *Missio Dei*

Missional leadership is exercised within the Church but extends beyond it through the Church's participation in God's mission. Since mission originates in God, ecclesial life must be understood as derivative of and accountable to God's redemptive initiative. Correspondingly, Nelus Niemandt claims, "the church is mission and organises all of its activities around the process of participating in God's mission, the source and base of authority and power in the church."<sup>114</sup> Missional leadership is about gifted leadership using that authority and power in the church. This is not about authority and power in a negative sense, but in providing a conducive direction. According to Lal Thla Muana, missional leadership is, in principle, none other than biblical leadership, but it is, significantly, lifestyle discipleship.<sup>115</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk observe that "Missional leadership understands how to nurture and release an innovative spiritual gift of leadership that has 'missional imagination' amongst the people of God."<sup>116</sup> Niemandt further argues,

When the understanding of leadership is based on the church's life in the Trinity, and the calling of the community of faithful disciples who follow Jesus in the transformation of people and all creation, and when power and authority are understood as empowerment to serve and

<sup>114</sup> Nelus Niemandt, "Missional Leadership," *HTS Religion & Society Series 7* (Cape Town: AOSIS, 2019), 68, <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2019.BK108.05>.

<sup>115</sup> Lal Thla Muana, *Missional Leadership: A Case Study of the Representative Congregations of Methodist, Presbyterian, and Other Churches in Tahan-Kalaymyo, Sagaing Region* (PhD diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2017), 7.

<sup>116</sup> Kirk James Franklin, *A Paradigm for Global Mission Leadership: The Journey of the Wycliffe Global Alliance* (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2016), 57, [https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/53075/Franklin\\_Paradigm\\_2016](https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/53075/Franklin_Paradigm_2016) (accessed 17 February 2026).

participate in God's mission, the understanding of leadership follows a different route.<sup>117</sup>

This illuminates key elements of influence, participation, direction, and enablement. There is a realisation that leadership is a God-given task. Building on this understanding, missional leadership involves forming leaders and communities capable of participating in God's mission through Spirit-led transformation. In this case, missional leadership is "the transformation of people and institutions to participate, through meaningful relations and in the power of the Spirit, in God's mission."<sup>118</sup> The centrality of the Holy Spirit redefines the nature and practice of missional leadership, empowering, directing, and sustaining change within both leaders and communities.<sup>119</sup> As such, missional leadership reshapes ecclesial identity and practice, operating across both personal and corporate dimensions.

Spirit-empowered leadership is both transformative and relational. This can be derived from the model of the church as mystical communion. Church as community is relational in nature. Missional leaders strive to bring about positive relational networks within the complex relationships in any given setup.<sup>120</sup> Leaders who are missional value individuals and allow them to express their God-given giftings and talents for the benefit of the kingdom of God. A missional church, led by missional leaders, recognises that simply running church programs is not the end of mission. Rather, it is primarily meant to involve people in order to grasp the saving purpose of God through involvement in the *missio Dei*. In the early church, the apostolic ministry was characterised by being empowered to engage people (Acts 1:8).

The pneumatological character of missional leadership also requires attention to the differentiated ways in which Spirit-enabled ministry contributes to the formation and mobilisation of the ecclesial community. This concern brings the discussion into direct engagement with Ephesians 4:11–13 and its significance for Pentecostal understandings of gifted leadership.

### **Fivefold Ministry, Leadership Formation, and African Pentecostal Mission**

Ephesians 4:11–13 provides a significant framework for understanding missional leadership through the interrelated ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The theological significance of the passage lies not simply in the identification of distinct ministries but in their orientation toward the equipping of the saints, the building up of the body of Christ, and the attainment of ecclesial maturity.

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<sup>117</sup> Niemandt, "Missional Leadership," 70.

<sup>118</sup> Niemandt, *Missional Leadership*, 73.

<sup>119</sup> Niemandt, *Missional Leadership*, 74.

<sup>120</sup> Niemandt, *Missional Leadership*, 82.

Read within a Pentecostal framework, this equipping dynamic suggests that Spirit-enabled leadership is fundamentally participatory and formative. Its purpose is not to monopolise ministry but to cultivate the capacity of the wider body to serve. The plurality of ministries named in the text further challenges models of leadership that locate ecclesial agency exclusively in a single dominant office or personality. Accordingly, the Fivefold Ministry may be approached as a theological framework in which differentiated gifting serves communal formation, shared participation, and the Church's missionary vocation. Its missional significance therefore rests not simply on the recognition of gifted leaders, but on whether leadership equips the whole community to participate faithfully in God's mission.

This framework acquires particular significance when brought into conversation with Peter White's missiological study of Classical Ghanaian Pentecostal churches. Drawing specifically on the Christ Apostolic Church International, The Apostolic Church-Ghana, and The Church of Pentecost, White demonstrates that leadership within these churches is substantially understood through the Fivefold Ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.<sup>121</sup> His analysis moves the discussion beyond an abstract appeal to Ephesians 4 by locating Fivefold Ministry within identifiable African Pentecostal ecclesial structures and practices. Missiologically, White associates apostolic ministry with missionary expansion, church planting, and leadership formation; prophetic ministry with discerning divine purposes and direction for the Church's mission; evangelistic ministry with gospel propagation; and pastoral and teaching ministries with nurture and discipleship.<sup>122</sup> Ghanaian Pentecostal practice thus illustrates how charismatic gifting, ecclesial structure, leadership formation, and missionary vocation may intersect within African Pentecostalism. Significantly, White's argument does not terminate with the identification of spiritual gifts or ministerial callings; he maintains that such gifts must be nurtured and developed through mentoring and appropriate theological education so that their ultimate orientation is participation in the *missio Dei*.

White's analysis also creates space for further constructive reflection on the relationship between charismatic gifting, ecclesial office, and missional participation. His study shows that Classical Ghanaian Pentecostal churches distinguish between leadership gifts and supportive gifts and, for purposes of ecclesial and administrative order, locate Fivefold Ministry within identifiable structures of authority and responsibility.<sup>123</sup> Yet the

<sup>121</sup> Peter White, "A Missional Study of Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches' Leadership and Leadership Formation," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 1-2, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.2865>.

<sup>122</sup> White, "Missional Study," 5-6.

<sup>123</sup> White, "Missional Study," 2-5.

equipping logic of Ephesians 4:12–13 raises a further theological question that extends beyond White's immediate analysis: do such structures consistently mobilise the whole people of God for ministry, or can the institutionalisation of charismatic office inadvertently concentrate ecclesial agency in recognised leaders? The existence of Fivefold Ministry structures does not, by itself, guarantee missional leadership. A Spirit-empowered missional reading must therefore evaluate these ministries according to whether they equip the saints, cultivate communal discernment, nurture mature discipleship, and release the wider body of Christ into meaningful participation in God's mission. The decisive criterion is not simply whether apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are formally recognised, but whether their ministries generate mature, participating, discerning, and missionally engaged communities.

For African Pentecostal contexts, the constructive value of the Fivefold Ministry consequently lies in its capacity to hold together charismatic diversity, communal equipping, leadership formation, and missionary participation. This interpretation resonates with White's insistence that the discovery of a spiritual gift or calling is insufficient unless that gift is intentionally nurtured through mentoring and theological education toward participation in the *missio Dei*.<sup>124</sup> An equipping orientation centred on the formation of the whole body provides a theological basis for relational formation, mentorship, and intergenerational leadership development, since gifted leadership fulfils its missional purpose by identifying, equipping, accompanying, and releasing others in ministry. Where this equipping and formative function is neglected, churches may become vulnerable to leadership dependency, succession fragility, doctrinal immaturity, and the concentration of ecclesial agency in a limited number of charismatic personalities. Properly construed, therefore, the Fivefold Ministry is not merely a catalogue of ministerial offices but a Spirit-enabled architecture for forming a mature, participatory, and missionary Church.

This understanding of the Fivefold Ministry ultimately depends upon a deeper Pentecostal conviction concerning the agency of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's work is not simply doctrinal but experiential and formative, grounding the Church's mission, leadership, and ecclesial identity. The maturation of the Church and its participation in the *missio Dei* therefore cannot be separated from the Spirit who empowers, equips, directs, and sustains the believing community. In this sense, Spirit-enabled ministry is not an ancillary dimension of missional leadership but its pneumatological foundation.

Yet this theological claim must be considered against changing emphases evident in segments of contemporary Pentecostal Christianity. The historic emphasis on Spirit

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<sup>124</sup> White, "Missional Study," 6–8.

baptism and empowerment for witness increasingly exists alongside, and at times is overshadowed by, preaching that foregrounds material prosperity and financial blessing. Such developments raise important theological and missiological concerns where the formative and missionary significance of Spirit baptism recedes from the centre of Pentecostal identity and practice. More specifically, Denzil R. Miller highlights a related concern in his analysis of Assemblies of God churches in Africa, noting the significant number of adherents who have not experienced Spirit baptism.<sup>125</sup> The resulting tension is not purely statistical but theological: a Pentecostal tradition that confesses Spirit empowerment while marginalising its experiential and missional significance risks creating a disjunction between its doctrinal identity and ecclesial practice.

Luke-Acts closely relates Spirit empowerment to witness and participation in God's mission. Acts 1:4–5 presents Jesus instructing the disciples to await the Father's promise, while Acts 1:8 links the coming of the Spirit with power for witness. Acts 2 then narrates the communal reception of the Spirit in a multilingual setting that anticipates the transnational horizon of the Church's mission. Robert P. Menzies accordingly emphasises the proclamatory significance of the Pentecost event, arguing that its outcome should not be reduced to praise directed toward God but understood, above all, in relation to proclamation.<sup>126</sup> Classical Pentecostal interpretation has also understood this Lukan pattern to support a distinction between conversion and Spirit baptism, with the latter construed as a subsequent empowering experience oriented particularly toward witness and mission. Although this interpretation remains contested across wider New Testament scholarship, the present discussion adopts the Pentecostal reading that Luke portrays Spirit baptism as distinguishable from conversion and functionally directed toward empowerment for missionary witness.<sup>127</sup> Spirit baptism, on this reading, is not an inward experience detached from ecclesial vocation; it empowers a community whose identity is expressed through witness.

Luke's narrative subsequently portrays this empowerment-for-witness dynamic across expanding geographical and cultural frontiers. The Samaritan mission demonstrates that

<sup>125</sup> Denzil R. Miller, *Teaching in the Spirit* (Springfield, MO: AIA Publications, 2009).

<sup>126</sup> Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 177

<sup>127</sup> See James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1970); Max Turner, *Power from on High* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). In contrast, see Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984); Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Howard M. Ervin, *Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984); Denzil R. Miller, *Empowered for Global Mission* (Springfield, MO: Life Publishers International, 2005) and Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), who emphasises the ongoing and missional work of the Spirit in the life of the Church. These perspectives collectively support the view that Spirit baptism is both theologically and functionally distinct from conversion, particularly within Pentecostal missional theology.

the gospel crosses inherited social and religious boundaries, while the emergence of the Antioch community shows how missionary advance develops amid displacement and persecution. Miller's observation that "Samaria was to become a new base for the advance of the gospel into unreached areas"<sup>128</sup> captures the centrifugal movement of Luke's narrative. The Spirit's mission therefore cannot be confined to individual experience or congregational preservation. It propels the believing community beyond established centres, forms new missionary communities, and advances witness across boundaries. Prayer, discernment, and attentiveness to the Spirit remain integral to this movement as the Church seeks to recognise and participate in God's missionary initiative.

Against this narrative backdrop, Acts 1:8 functions programmatically by linking the reception of the Holy Spirit with empowerment for witness across expanding geographical and cultural frontiers. Miller treats this empowerment-for-witness motif as a significant interpretive lens for tracing the missionary advance narrated throughout Acts.<sup>129</sup> Read from a Pentecostal perspective, the verse does more than anticipate geographical movement from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth; it establishes a pneumatological logic in which the Church's participation in God's mission depends upon divine empowerment. The subsequent narrative develops this logic through the crossing of social, religious, and ethnic boundaries and the formation of witnessing communities in new contexts. Within the present argument, Spirit baptism is therefore understood as empowerment that forms and propels a missionary people rather than as a privatised spiritual experience.

This pneumatological account also carries implications for missional leadership. If the Spirit empowers the whole witnessing community, leadership cannot be reduced to positional authority, institutional management, or the visibility of exceptional charismatic personalities. Missional leaders are called to cultivate prayerful discernment, ethical accountability, communal participation, and attentiveness to the Spirit's missionary initiative. The account of Ananias and Sapphira further indicates that the Spirit's presence is related not only to power and expansion but also to truthfulness, integrity, and accountability in the believing community. Spirit-empowered leadership must therefore hold together charismatic vitality and ethical formation, missionary expansion and communal integrity, spiritual gifting and accountable participation.

The Spirit's missionary agency is always expressed through particular cultural and social settings. A religious movement cannot be adequately understood apart from the cultural and political environment in which it exists, and Pentecostal mission is no exception. Theological reflection on Spirit empowerment must therefore attend to the settings in

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<sup>128</sup> Denzil R. Miller, *Empowered for Global Mission* (Springfield, MO: Life Publishers International, 2005), 150.

<sup>129</sup> Miller, *Empowered for Global Mission*, 77-83.

which witness occurs and to the ways ecclesial practices both shape and are shaped by surrounding societies. Mission defines the Church's vocation, while the Spirit enables believers to participate in that vocation across cultural boundaries. The commission of Matthew 28:18–20 and the empowerment motif of Acts should thus be held together: the Church is sent to make disciples among the nations and remains dependent upon divine empowerment for faithful witness. This relationship between Spirit, mission, and context provides the basis for considering how Pentecostal communities engage the cultures through which Christian faith is embodied and communicated. Ogbu Kalu's account of African Pentecostalism strengthens this contextual emphasis by giving serious attention to the role of African believers in shaping the movement within differing historical and cultural settings. His analysis challenges explanations that place disproportionate weight on external influences and instead directs attention to African Christian agency in the development of Pentecostal life and practice.<sup>130</sup>

Many cultures grapple with maintaining worship that is both biblically grounded and culturally relevant. The tension lies in identifying the biblical values that should guide worship across diverse cultural contexts. Within every culture, forms of worship are present, shaped by local meanings and expressions. As Bruce L. Bauer aptly points out, "when people worship, it is through their local culture that they express their faith in God and praise their Lord and Saviour through words and images shaped by cultural meanings, feelings, and values."<sup>131</sup> Christianity is therefore always expressed and communicated through cultural forms. In a similar vein, Resane emphasises that "theology has always been enculturated, rooted in a given culture utilising its language, symbols, and modes of thought."<sup>132</sup>

### **Contemporary Leadership Theories and the *Missio Dei***

Contemporary leadership theories can contribute to missional leadership only when they are critically appropriated within the theological conviction that mission originates in God and that the Church participates in this mission through the empowering and directing work of the Holy Spirit. Leadership theory therefore serves as a dialogical resource rather than the controlling framework for ecclesial practice. Franklin's call to reinterpret servant, shepherd, transformational, and missional leadership within glocal contexts is instructive in this regard, since it resists separating theoretical reflection from

<sup>130</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17, 22.

<sup>131</sup> Bruce L. Bauer, "Christian Worship and Cultural Diversity: A Missiological Perspective," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 5, no. 2 (2009): 2, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/>.

<sup>132</sup> Kelebogile T. Resane, "Theology and Culture in Dialogue Towards Harmonious Multi-Religious and Multi-Cultural South Africa," *In die Skriflig* 55, no. 1 (2021): 5, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v55i1.2764>.

concrete missionary practice.<sup>133</sup> For African Pentecostal contexts, the critical question is not simply which leadership model is most effective, but how particular theories may illuminate practices of leadership that remain accountable to the *missio Dei*, responsive to context, and open to the Spirit's agency.

The development of leadership theory has generated a wide range of approaches. Benmira and Agboola trace a movement from trait and behavioural theories through situational approaches to later transactional and transformational paradigms, while Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber identify an expanded field that includes authentic, transformational, ethical, transactional, shared, cross-cultural, and other forms of leadership.<sup>134</sup> Given the scope of the present discussion, these theories are not treated as an exhaustive taxonomy. Rather, authentic, transformational, transactional, ethical, and servant leadership are selectively engaged according to their capacity to illuminate dimensions of Spirit-empowered missional praxis. This selective approach also requires theological discernment, since organisational effectiveness cannot itself determine what constitutes faithful leadership in the Church.

Authentic leadership contributes to this discussion through its emphasis on transparent and ethical conduct, openness in decision-making, and attentiveness to followers' contributions.<sup>135</sup> These features resonate with the earlier ecclesiological emphasis on communal participation and with the equipping purpose of the Fivefold Ministry. Read through a Pentecostal missional lens, authenticity cannot be reduced to individual self-expression or managerial transparency; it must involve integrity before God and the community, accountable exercise of charismatic authority, and willingness to recognise the Spirit's gifting of others. Authentic leadership therefore becomes missiologically significant where it strengthens trust, shared responsibility, and the participation of the wider body in God's mission.

Transformational and transactional leadership likewise require critical theological appropriation. Avolio and his colleagues describe transformational leadership as involving behaviours that inspire followers beyond self-interest toward a larger organisational good, while transactional leadership operates through exchanges in which rewards are related to performance.<sup>136</sup> Although these approaches are often contrasted,

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<sup>133</sup> Kirk James Franklin, *A Paradigm for Global Mission Leadership: The Journey of the Wycliffe Global Alliance* (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2016), 18,

[https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/53075/Franklin\\_Paradigm\\_2016](https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/53075/Franklin_Paradigm_2016)

<sup>134</sup> See Sihame Benmira and Moyosolu Agboola, "Evolution of Leadership Theory," *BMJ Leader* 5 (2021): 3–5, <https://doi.org/10.1136/leader-2020-000296>; Bruce J. Avolio, Fred O. Walumbwa, and Todd J. Weber, "Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions," *Annual Review of Psychology* 60, no. 1 (2009): 421–449, DOI: 10.1146/ANNUREV.PSYCH.60.110707.163621.

<sup>135</sup> Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, *Leadership*, 423.

<sup>136</sup> Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, *Leadership*, 427.

Tucker notes that they may function in complementary ways within organisational settings.<sup>137</sup> For missional leadership, transformational insights are valuable where leadership forms people, nurtures vocation, and mobilises communities toward participation in God's mission. Transactional mechanisms may contribute to clarity, responsibility, and accountability, but they become inadequate when ecclesial participation is reduced to performance, compliance, or reward. In Pentecostal contexts, where charismatic authority can exercise substantial influence, the theological criterion must remain whether leadership equips and releases the community for Spirit-enabled participation rather than consolidating dependence upon the leader.

Ethical leadership sharpens this criterion by locating character and accountable conduct at the centre of leadership practice. Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber associate ethical leadership with normatively appropriate conduct expressed through personal action, interpersonal relationships, and the encouragement of such conduct among followers.<sup>138</sup> This emphasis corresponds with the pneumatological argument developed earlier, where the Spirit's presence is related not only to charismatic power and missionary expansion but also to truthfulness, integrity, and communal accountability. Ethical leadership is therefore not an external managerial addition to Pentecostal spirituality. It is integral to credible participation in the *missio Dei*, particularly where claims to spiritual authority must be tested by the character, accountability, and communal consequences of leadership practice.

Servant leadership provides a further point of convergence between leadership theory and Christian participation in God's mission. Although no universally accepted theory of servant leadership exists<sup>139</sup>, Greenleaf's influential formulation begins with the disposition to serve before aspiring to lead.<sup>140</sup> This orientation resonates with Osei-Mensah's argument that biblical leadership is fundamentally appointment to service.<sup>141</sup> Yet a missional appropriation of servant leadership must move beyond the language of personal humility alone. In light of the Church's participation in the *missio Dei*, service entails using authority to equip others, nurture mature discipleship, cultivate shared responsibility, and resist forms of domination that weaken the agency of the believing

<sup>137</sup> R. Tucker, "Using Business Leadership Models to Analyse Leadership Stances in a Developmental Organisation in the Cape Flats," *Acta Theologica* 41, no. 1 (2021): 141–175, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.v41i1.9>.

<sup>138</sup> Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, *Leadership*, 424.

<sup>139</sup> Adam Focht and Michael Ponton, "Identifying Primary Characteristics of Servant Leadership: Delphi Study," *International Journal of Leadership Studies* 9, no. 1 (2015), 45, <https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/ijls/new/vol9iss1/1-IJLS.pdf>.

<sup>140</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 13.

<sup>141</sup> Gottfried Osei-Mensah, *Wanted: Servant Leader* (Achimota, Ghana: African Christian Press, 1990), 9.

community. Servant leadership thus converges with the earlier Fivefold Ministry discussion: leadership fulfils its ecclesial and missionary purpose not by concentrating ministry in exceptional personalities but by forming and releasing others for participation in God's mission.

This critical appropriation of contemporary leadership theories reinforces rather than displaces the pneumatological argument developed above. Authentic leadership contributes transparency and accountable participation; transformational leadership highlights formation and mobilisation; transactional leadership offers limited resources for responsibility and organisational clarity; ethical leadership foregrounds integrity; and servant leadership directs authority toward service and the flourishing of others. None of these theories is sufficient as a self-standing model for African Pentecostal missional leadership. Their value lies in their selective integration within a Spirit-empowered ecclesiology in which leadership is judged by its capacity to equip the community, sustain ethical accountability, discern context, and facilitate faithful participation in the *missio Dei*. This theological integration provides the basis for examining how such commitments are embodied within the organisational praxis of African Pentecostal churches.

### **Missional Leadership and Organisational Praxis in African Pentecostal Contexts**

The critical appropriation of contemporary leadership theories developed above requires concrete expression in the organisational life of African Pentecostal churches. Organisational praxis is not external to the Church's participation in the *missio Dei*, since patterns of decision-making, accountability, leadership formation, resource stewardship, and communal participation can either enable or constrain faithful witness. Yet organisational effectiveness cannot serve as the ultimate criterion of missional leadership. From a Pentecostal perspective, structures and strategies remain accountable to the Spirit's agency and to the ecclesial vocation of forming a mature, discerning, and witnessing community. The central question is therefore not simply whether a church possesses effective organisational systems, but whether its practices enable leaders and communities to discern and participate faithfully in God's mission.

Strategic leadership has a legitimate but subordinate place within this theological framework. Churches require clarity of purpose, responsible planning, and the capacity to respond to changing social and cultural environments. Hughes' emphasis on strategic action as part of an ongoing learning process is useful here, particularly where leadership must assess direction, act, and evaluate progress.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, Collins and Porras emphasise the importance of organisational alignment in sustaining core commitments

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<sup>142</sup> Richard L. Hughes and Katherine Colarelli Beatty, *Becoming a Strategic Leader: Your Role in Your Organization's Enduring Success* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 83.

while pursuing an envisioned future.<sup>143</sup> For African Pentecostal churches, however, strategic alignment should not be reduced to institutional expansion, numerical growth, financial performance, or the preservation of a leader's personal vision. Missional alignment concerns the continuing relationship between ecclesial identity, Spirit-led discernment, communal participation, and the Church's vocation in the *missio Dei*. Strategy becomes theologically significant when it serves mission rather than allowing institutional survival or expansion to define mission.

Vision and mission must consequently be subjected to the same theological discernment. Organisational literature rightly recognises that shared purpose can strengthen commitment and coordinate action, and Yukl's discussion of task commitment highlights the relationship between commitment and performance.<sup>144</sup> Warren similarly stresses the orienting function of a clear purpose.<sup>145</sup> Yet Pentecostal missional leadership cannot equate vision with the ambitions of a charismatic founder or assume that organisational commitment is identical with faithfulness to God's mission. Vision requires communal discernment because the Spirit's agency is not confined to the senior leader. The earlier discussion of the Fivefold Ministry is pertinent at this point because differentiated gifts contribute to the equipping of the whole body, so missional direction should emerge through practices that recognise multiple forms of Spirit-enabled insight, theological wisdom, and contextual knowledge.

Organisational culture is equally significant because leadership values become embodied in repeated practices, relationships, and expectations. Kouzes and Posner's emphasis on the formative influence of values helps explain why declared commitments alone cannot sustain institutional identity.<sup>146</sup> In Pentecostal settings, the decisive issue is whether organisational culture embodies the theological claims the Church makes about the Spirit, community, and mission. A church may confess the gifting of the whole body while maintaining practices that concentrate decision-making in a single personality; it may proclaim servant leadership while normalising unaccountable authority; or it may celebrate spiritual vitality while neglecting structures for leadership development and succession. Organisational culture should therefore be evaluated according to whether it nurtures integrity, participation, accountability, and the formation of others for ministry.

This emphasis on participation also reframes the place of people in organisational praxis. Kreitner's account of differentiated organisational roles and the systems perspective

<sup>143</sup> James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 221.

<sup>144</sup> Gary Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2013), 409.

<sup>145</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 115.

<sup>146</sup> James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco, CA: Wiley & Sons, 2012), 49.

associated with Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson draw attention to interdependence within organisational life.<sup>147</sup> Mullers likewise emphasises the importance of understanding organisational culture in the management of people.<sup>148</sup> These insights are useful but require ecclesiological reinterpretation. Members of a Pentecostal church are not simply human resources to be deployed efficiently; they are participants in the body of Christ whose gifts, vocations, and capacities contribute to the Church's witness. The organisational task of leadership therefore includes identifying, equipping, mentoring, and releasing others rather than treating them primarily as instruments for achieving institutional objectives. At this point, organisational praxis converges directly with the equipping logic of Ephesians 4:11–13 and the Fivefold Ministry discussed earlier.

The relationship between mission and leadership preparation also finds a broader African Pentecostal resonance in Kalu's account of the movement. His treatment relates Pentecostal expansion to changing forms of evangelistic practice and the preparation of leaders for developing ministry contexts.<sup>149</sup> This perspective reinforces the need to view leadership formation not simply as an internal organisational requirement but as part of the Church's capacity for sustained missionary participation.

The participatory and formative dimensions of organisational praxis are especially significant for leadership continuity and intergenerational formation. Tagwirei's analysis of African Pentecostalism identifies serious challenges surrounding leadership development, succession planning, and the connection between present and future generations of leaders.<sup>150</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu identifies comparable vulnerabilities in his discussion of African Independent Churches, relating their decline in part to inadequate preparation for leadership succession, weak intergenerational continuity, and failures of accountability.<sup>151</sup> These concerns expose the limitations of organisational systems that depend excessively upon founding personalities or fail to cultivate credible pathways for emerging leadership. Mentorship should therefore be understood as more than a technique for institutional continuity. It is a form of missional formation through which theological convictions, ethical practices, ministerial wisdom, and responsibility for participation in God's mission are cultivated across generations. Transformational leadership contributes to this process where it encourages growth, initiative, and shared

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<sup>147</sup> See Robert Kreitner, *Management* (Boston, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2009), 283; Paul Hersey, Kenneth H. Blanchard and Dewey E. Johnson, *Management of Organization Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources* (Upper Saddle, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc.1996), 13.

<sup>148</sup> Laurie J. Mullers, *Management and Organizational Behavior* (Edinburgh Gate: UK. Pearson Education Ltd, 2013), 135.

<sup>149</sup> Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 123–136.

<sup>150</sup> Tagwirei, *Battling with the Baton*, 1–3.

<sup>151</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Spirit and Empowerment," 36.

responsibility, but its missional value depends upon whether followers are formed as mature participants rather than permanent dependants of charismatic leaders.

Accountability provides a further bridge between organisational praxis and Pentecostal pneumatology. The earlier discussion of Ananias and Sapphira demonstrated that the Spirit's presence in Acts is associated not only with power for witness but also with truthfulness and communal integrity. Organisational structures of accountability should therefore not be viewed as signs of diminished spirituality or as secular constraints upon charismatic authority. Properly constituted, they can serve the Church's theological commitments by encouraging responsible stewardship, transparent decision-making, and answerability within the believing community. Ethical and transactional insights may assist in clarifying responsibilities and expectations, but accountability must remain relational, communal, and directed toward faithful participation in the *missio Dei* rather than institutional control alone.

Servant leadership draws these organisational and theological concerns toward a distinctly Christian understanding of authority. Missional leaders are called to exercise authority through service, humility, and the formation of others. Yanofchick's argument that servant leadership can cultivate a culture in which people become partners rather than resources at the disposal of managers is especially relevant to ecclesial contexts.<sup>152</sup> Read alongside the Fivefold Ministry and Pentecostal pneumatology, servant leadership resists both managerial instrumentalisation and the concentration of ministry around exceptional personalities. Its purpose is not simply to produce a more harmonious organisation but to cultivate a community in which people are dignified, equipped, entrusted with responsibility, and released for participation in God's mission.

Organisational praxis in African Pentecostal churches should therefore be understood as the embodied expression of Spirit-empowered missional leadership. Strategic discernment, vision, organisational culture, accountability, mentorship, and servant leadership retain practical value, but none should operate independently of ecclesiology and pneumatology. Their missional legitimacy depends upon whether they strengthen communal participation, ethical integrity, intergenerational formation, contextual responsiveness, and faithful witness. This integrated approach moves beyond a parallel use of theology and management theory by locating organisational practice within the Spirit's work of forming and sending the Church. The theological, ecclesial, ethical, formative, and contextual insights developed across the preceding discussion now

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<sup>152</sup> Brian Yanofchick, "Mission and Leadership – Servant Leadership: Bring It Home," *Health Progress* (September–October 2007): 6, <https://www.chausa.org/publications/health-progress/article>.

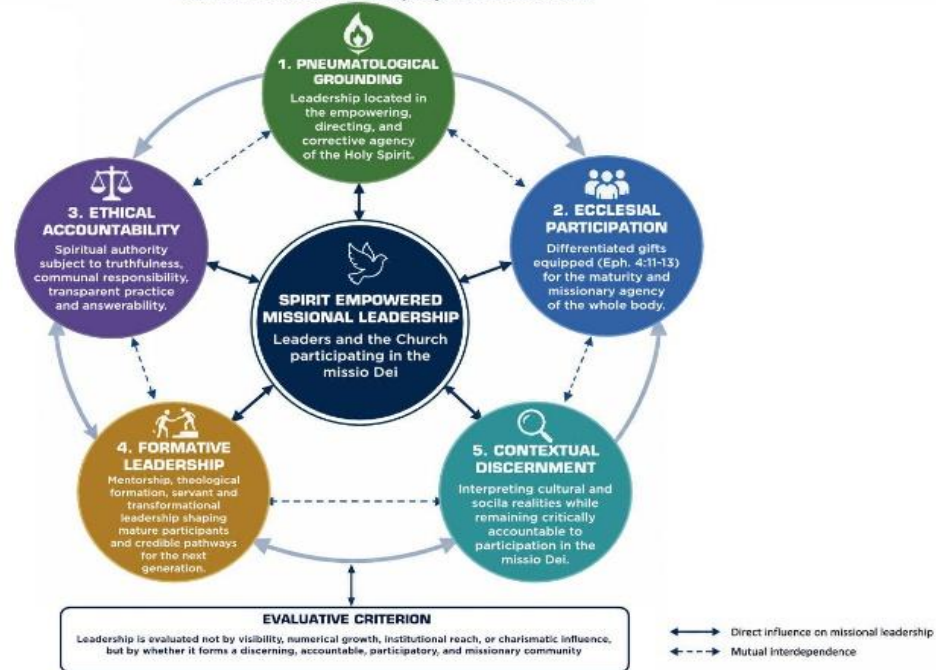
provide the basis for articulating a constructive Spirit-empowered missional leadership framework.

### **A Constructive Spirit-Empowered Missional Leadership Framework**

The preceding analysis yields a constructive Spirit-empowered missional leadership framework for African Pentecostal contexts. Rather than adding another leadership theory to existing organisational models, the framework integrates five interrelated dimensions developed across the argument: pneumatological grounding, ecclesial participation, ethical accountability, formative leadership, and contextual discernment. Pneumatological grounding locates leadership within the empowering, directing, and corrective agency of the Holy Spirit rather than in charismatic personality or managerial competence alone. Ecclesial participation draws on the equipping logic of Ephesians 4:11–13 by directing differentiated gifts toward the maturity and missionary agency of the whole body. Ethical accountability subjects spiritual authority to truthfulness, communal responsibility, transparent practice, and answerability. Formative leadership joins mentorship, theological formation, servant leadership, and transformational insights in order to cultivate mature participants and credible intergenerational pathways. Contextual discernment requires leaders to interpret changing cultural and social realities while remaining critically accountable to the Church's participation in the *missio Dei*.

Figure 1 presents these five dimensions as mutually dependent elements of a Spirit-empowered missional leadership framework. The visual arrangement places participation in the *missio Dei* at the centre while showing that pneumatological grounding, ecclesial participation, ethical accountability, formative leadership, and contextual discernment operate relationally rather than sequentially.

**A CONSTRUCTIVE SPIRIT-EMPOWERED MISSIONAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK**  
*Five Interrelated and Mutually Dependent Dimensions*



**Figure 1. A Constructive Spirit-Empowered Missional Leadership Framework**

*Source: Developed by the author from the analysis presented in this study.*

The framework gains its coherence from the interaction among these five dimensions. Spirit empowerment without accountability may legitimise concentrated or authoritarian authority; ecclesial participation without formation may leave emerging leaders insufficiently prepared for responsibility; mentorship without intentional succession pathways may reproduce dependence upon founding personalities; organisational competence without pneumatological and theological discernment may reduce mission to institutional expansion; and contextual responsiveness without critical judgement may become accommodation to prevailing social or religious expectations. The framework therefore evaluates leadership not primarily by visibility, numerical growth, institutional reach, or charismatic influence, but by whether it forms a discerning, accountable, participatory, and missionary community.

Applied to recurring leadership vulnerabilities identified in the preceding discussion, the framework offers a constructive response without suggesting that such problems characterise all African Pentecostal churches uniformly. Concentrated authority is challenged by communal discernment, differentiated gifting, and the equipping of the wider body; succession fragility is addressed through mentorship, theological formation, intergenerational accompaniment, and the intentional release of emerging leaders; failures of integrity are confronted through ethical accountability and transparent communal practices; and excessive dependence on institutional expansion is corrected

by locating strategy within Spirit-led participation in God's mission. The framework's distinctive contribution therefore lies in holding together dimensions that are often separated: Spirit empowerment and accountability, charismatic gifting and communal participation, leadership formation and succession, organisational competence and theological discernment, contextual responsiveness and missional faithfulness.

### **Implications for Missional Leadership in African Pentecostal Contexts**

The constructive framework developed above carries several implications for leadership formation, ecclesial participation, public witness, and organisational discernment in African Pentecostal contexts. These implications acquire particular urgency amid the rapid expansion and increasing public presence of Pentecostal Christianity across Africa. Pentecostal growth is neither accidental nor reducible to a single cause but reflects intersecting spiritual, social, economic, and institutional dynamics.<sup>153</sup> Diara and Onah identify a range of factors associated with this expansion, including leadership ambition, aspirations for material prosperity, pastoral care, flexibility in liturgical and cultural expression, and emphasis on manifestations of the Holy Spirit such as healing, miracles, and spiritual gifts.<sup>154</sup> Their analysis draws attention to the complex environments in which African Pentecostal leadership operates. Read through the proposed framework, these dynamics require leaders to hold Spirit empowerment together with ethical accountability, contextual discernment, ecclesial participation, and formative responsibility, especially where spiritual aspirations, social pressures, institutional interests, and material expectations intersect.

A first implication concerns the practice of contextual discernment. The framework requires African Pentecostal leaders to interpret changing cultural, social, and ecclesial realities without separating such discernment from the Spirit's missionary agency. Pentecostal freedom in the Spirit has contributed to a notable capacity for adaptation

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<sup>153</sup> See Ogbu U. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); and Afe Adogame, "African Christianities: Features, Promises and Problems," in *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, ed. Elias K. Bongmba (London: Routledge, 2016). Empirical studies further corroborate this multidimensional growth, emphasizing factors such as urbanisation, socio-economic challenges, and the appeal of healing and deliverance ministries; see David Maxwell, "African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostalism and the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35, no. 1 (2005): 1-35; and Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* (London: Hurst, 2015).

<sup>154</sup> Benjamin C. D. Diara and Nkechinyere G. Onah, "The Phenomenal Growth of Pentecostalism in Contemporary Nigerian Society: A Challenge to Mainline Churches," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 6 (2014): 398, Doi:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n6p395.

across differing cultural and social settings.<sup>155</sup> Anderson connects such contextual relevance directly with the Church's wider social vocation, observing that "the more relevant the church in the Third World becomes to its cultural and social context, the more prepared it will be to serve the wider society."<sup>156</sup> Yet adaptability requires theological judgement if contextual responsiveness is to avoid uncritical accommodation to prevailing religious, social, or material expectations. The practical implication is therefore not contextual flexibility alone, but Spirit-attentive and theologically critical discernment.

A second implication concerns the redistribution of ecclesial agency through formation and participation. If the Fivefold Ministry is governed by the equipping logic of Ephesians 4:11–13, leadership development cannot be confined to preparing future office-holders or sustaining prominent personalities. African Pentecostal churches require practices through which diverse gifts are recognised, emerging leaders are mentored, theological and ministerial capacities are cultivated, and responsibility for witness is shared across generations. This has direct significance for the succession vulnerabilities discussed earlier: the Church's missionary continuity is strengthened when leaders intentionally form and release others rather than reproducing dependency upon exceptional individuals.

A third implication concerns the public and relational credibility of Pentecostal mission. The framework's integration of pneumatological grounding, ethical accountability, and ecclesial participation means that participation in the *missio Dei* cannot be measured by evangelistic proclamation or institutional expansion alone. The Church also bears witness through the quality of its communal life and its engagement with human need. The *koinonia* of the early Christian community points towards forms of fellowship that cross social, economic, and ethnic boundaries, while diaconal service gives tangible expression to the reconciling and restorative dimensions of the gospel. In African Pentecostal contexts, this calls for leadership that connects Spirit empowerment with dignity, care, reconciliation, and transformative engagement in society. Missional credibility is therefore tested not only by growth or charismatic vitality but also by the communities, relationships, and forms of public responsibility that leadership helps to cultivate.

A fourth implication concerns the theological governance of organisational strategy. The framework does not reject strategic planning, organisational competence, or leadership theory; it subjects them to the *missio Dei*. Churches should therefore evaluate strategies not only by efficiency, growth, financial sustainability, or institutional reach, but by

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<sup>155</sup> Allan H. Anderson, "The Gospel and Culture in Pentecostal Mission in the Third World," *Missionalia* 27, no. 2 (August 1999): 221.

<sup>156</sup> Allan H. Anderson, "The Gospel and Culture in Pentecostal Mission in the Third World," 227.

whether they strengthen communal participation, ethical accountability, leadership formation, contextual faithfulness, and witness. This requires organisational resources to be used critically within practices of prayer, theological discernment, communal accountability, and attentiveness to the Spirit's missionary initiative.

### **Conclusion: Toward Spirit-Empowered Missional Leadership**

This study has argued that missional leadership in African Pentecostal contexts is best understood as a Spirit-empowered praxis through which leaders and ecclesial communities participate in the *missio Dei*. By bringing ecclesiological models, Pentecostal pneumatology, African Pentecostal scholarship, the equipping logic of Ephesians 4:11–13, and selected contemporary leadership theories into critical synthesis, the discussion has shown that neither charismatic vitality nor organisational effectiveness is sufficient as a basis for faithful missional leadership. Dulles' ecclesiological models remain valuable heuristic resources, but their constructive significance emerges through critical reinterpretation within a Pentecostal account of the Spirit's agency in forming, directing, empowering, and correcting the Church.

The central contribution of the study is the constructive Spirit-empowered missional leadership framework developed around five interrelated dimensions: pneumatological grounding, ecclesial participation, ethical accountability, formative leadership, and contextual discernment. These dimensions are mutually dependent. Spirit empowerment requires ethical accountability; differentiated gifting should equip the wider ecclesial body; leadership formation must cultivate credible pathways for succession and intergenerational continuity; organisational competence remains subordinate to theological and pneumatological discernment; and contextual responsiveness requires critical judgement if it is to sustain missional faithfulness. The framework therefore responds to recurring leadership vulnerabilities, including concentrated authority, succession fragility, failures of integrity, dependence upon exceptional personalities, and the reduction of mission to institutional expansion.

For African Pentecostal churches, the implications are both ecclesial and public. Missional leadership should form communities in which diverse gifts are recognised, emerging leaders are mentored and released, authority is exercised accountably, and organisational practices serve participation in God's mission. Such leadership also requires attentiveness to changing cultural and social realities without surrendering theological discernment. The future credibility and missional vitality of African Pentecostalism therefore depend not simply on continued numerical growth, charismatic influence, or institutional reach, but on the formation of discerning, accountable, participatory, and missionary communities whose life and witness embody the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in both Church and society.

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## Neo-Prophetic *Akwankyerε* and Membership Retention in the Methodist and Anglican Churches in Ghana: A Contextual-Theological Assessment

Prince Osei Yeboah

### Abstract

Neo-prophetic Christianity in Ghana has popularised the practice of *akwankyerε*, or spiritual guidance and direction, and has reshaped the country's religious and ecclesiastical landscape. Although the Methodist and Anglican churches have historically prioritised liturgical, sacramental, doctrinal, and ecclesiastical order, some members seek neo-prophetic ministries that emphasise charismatic spirituality and offer responses to contemporary spiritual and existential concerns. This study examines the relationship between *akwankyerε* and membership retention in the Methodist and Anglican churches in Ghana. It employs a critical literature review and contextual-theological analysis informed by scholarship on neo-prophetic Christianity, African Pentecostalism, and Historic Mission Churches. The study argues that some members seek spiritual direction outside their churches because they perceive Methodist and Anglican ministries as insufficiently responsive to unemployment, spiritual insecurity, family dysfunction, sickness, witchcraft, and curses. It concludes that scripturally grounded healing, spiritual direction, and prophetic ministry, aligned with Methodist and Anglican theological traditions and ecclesiastical oversight, could strengthen pastoral care and help address migration to neo-prophetic churches.

### Keywords

Neo-prophetic Christianity, Spiritual guidance, *Akwankyerε*, Historic Mission Churches, Methodist Church Ghana, Anglican Church Ghana, Membership retention

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### Introduction

The rapid growth of neo-prophetic Christianity has significantly reshaped Ghana's religious landscape. A prominent feature of this development is the increasing demand for *akwankyerε*, an Akan concept of guidance that has been reinterpreted in contemporary Christian practice through prophetic consultation, deliverance, visions, revelations, spiritual diagnosis, and counselling. Historic Mission Churches, including the Methodist Church Ghana and the Anglican Church in Ghana, have traditionally emphasised liturgy,

doctrine, sacramental worship, and pastoral order. The expansion of neo-prophetic ministries therefore raises questions about the continuing pastoral relevance of these churches, particularly among younger and urban Christians seeking immediate spiritual intervention and practical responses to existential concerns.

In his study, Omenyo observes that some members of Ghana's mainline churches sought responses to their spiritual and existential concerns beyond their inherited ecclesiastical traditions, particularly from churches where healing, deliverance, and other charismatic ministries were more readily available. This movement contributed to the growing incorporation of charismatic practices within Historic Mission Churches, including the Methodist Church Ghana.<sup>157</sup> This study highlights spiritual concerns and relevance in Methodism and Anglicanism in Ghana. Asamoah-Gyadu argues that the growth and appeal of Charismatic Christianity in Africa are closely related to its capacity to address contemporary existential and spiritual concerns, particularly through its emphasis on healing, deliverance, divine intervention, and empowerment in situations of adversity.<sup>158</sup>

Many scholars have analysed Neo-prophetic Christianity, African Pentecostalism and charismatic renewal movements in Ghana. Asamoah-Gyadu closely examines the development and growing appeal of African Charismatic Christianity within the context of African spirituality, demonstrating how its emphasis on healing, deliverance, spiritual warfare, prosperity, and divine intervention resonates with an African religious worldview in which the supernatural is closely connected with everyday human experience.<sup>159</sup> Omenyo studies charismatic renewal in the Historic Mission Churches. Gifford, on the other hand, examines the religious, social, and economic dimensions of Ghana's emerging Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, paying particular attention to the relationship between prosperity, success, wealth, deliverance, and spiritual causality. He argues that these churches should be understood within Ghana's wider socio-economic environment, since their emphasis on material wellbeing, miracles, and overcoming spiritual forces responds to the economic uncertainties and existential concerns experienced by many believers.<sup>160</sup> On the study of prophetism, Quayesi-Amakye introduces a deeper understanding in the theology of prophecy, evil and Pentecostal spirituality in Ghanaian Christianity. However, the present study's focus on *akwankyere* is closely related to Simon Kouessan Degbe's study of *Sunsum Akwankyere*. Degbe's work is particularly relevant because it examines the meanings and theological

<sup>157</sup> Cephas N. Omenyo, "From the Fringes to the Centre: Pentecostalisation of the Mainline Churches in Ghana," *Exchange* 34, no. 1 (2005): 39–60, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1572543053506338>.

<sup>158</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 93–94.

<sup>159</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 93–94.

<sup>160</sup> Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 44–60, 83–103.

dimensions associated with *akwankyerε*, including the mediation and appropriation of spiritual power, while also highlighting some of the theological and practical implications and concerns surrounding its practice within particular strands of Ghanaian Christianity.<sup>161</sup>

Yet little scholarship has examined the relationship between neo-prophetic *akwankyerε* and membership retention in the Methodist and Anglican churches in Ghana. The central question is not whether Historic Mission Churches should reproduce neo-prophetic practices, but how they can draw on their own theological and pastoral resources to address members' spiritual needs while preserving ecclesiastical identity and avoiding dependence on prophetic specialists. Accordingly, this study interrogates the intersection of ecclesiastical tradition, charismatic spirituality, and pastoral care in Ghanaian Methodism and Anglicanism.

This study examines available literature to illustrate the association between the term *akwankyerε* and shifts in membership from the Methodist and Anglican Churches to Neo-prophetic Ministries, and to question how it could serve as a contextual pastoral response. Because the study does not include primary empirical data or denominational retention data, the proposed relationship between the sense of spiritual vacancy and membership shift is treated more as a contextual theological hypothesis than as a causal relationship. The study seeks to advance the discourses on African Christianity and contextual theology, on the renewal of the Church, and the future relevance of the Historic Mission Churches within the contemporary Ghanaian context of religious practice. The study advocates including contextual prophetic healing ministries to strengthen the pastoral and missionary work of the Historic Mission Churches.

### **Methodological Approach**

This study uses contextual-theological analysis rather than field-based qualitative research. Sources include books, journal articles, and other scholarly publications on Neo-prophetic Christianity, African Pentecostalism, and all Historic Mission Churches, including African theology. It focuses on Ghanaian and African scholarship on prophetic ministry, African spirituality, and ecclesiastical transformation.

This study is inherently interpretative and analytical. It uses the literature available to assess the theological, sociological, and pastoral implications of Neo-Prophetic *akwankyerε* for member retention in both the Methodist and Anglican churches in

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<sup>161</sup> Simon Kouessan Degbe, "Sumsum Akwankyerε: Emerging Modes of Mediation and Appropriation of Spiritual Power in Sections of Ghanaian Christianity," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 24, no. 2 (2015): 270–289, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02402011>.

Ghana. This analysis does not report experiences of church members because no interviews, focus groups, or surveys were conducted.

The predominant analytical method employed is contextual theology. This approach enables the study to investigate how the Methodist and Anglican churches may engage the African context, African spiritual experiences, and Christian concerns while maintaining commitments to Scripture, doctrine, and ecclesiastical order. The literature review provides the basis for the argument. The analysis is limited to the Ghanaian context and focuses on two representative Historic Mission Churches: the Methodist Church Ghana and the Anglican Church in Ghana. Because the study draws on a relatively small body of literature and does not use primary empirical data, its findings should be interpreted cautiously and regarded as context-specific rather than broadly generalisable.

## **Historical Background of the Methodist and Anglican Churches in Ghana and their Theological Practices**

### ***The Methodist Church Ghana***

The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society's work in the Gold Coast formed the basis of the Methodist Church Ghana. The Mission was formally recognised as the Rev. Joseph Rhodes Dunwell's work in Cape Coast in 1835. The Methodists were unable to develop into a rapidly growing Mission, and, like the Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman before them, some influential leaders carried out the evangelistic and educational work of Methodism in the Gold Coast.<sup>162</sup>

In Ghana, Methodism acquired popularity for its work in evangelism, education, discipline, holiness and social transformation. The church has contributed substantially to Ghana's socio-religious development by establishing schools, hospitals, and training colleges, and by undertaking other social work.<sup>163</sup> Theologically, from the Wesleyan tradition, the Methodist Church adopted John Wesley's ideas on the theology of salvation, sanctification, and holiness, and embraced the spirit of institutionalised Christianity. Within mainstream Methodism, liturgical worship has focused on scripture, the sacraments, and the liturgy of the church, along with catechism and a ministry of pastoral care.

Some Methodist churches in Ghana formalised and became liturgical. As a result, some congregations began to place less emphasis on the spiritual experience and the work of the Holy Spirit, as Wesley preached. Omenyo and Asamoah-Gyadu note that this has

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<sup>162</sup> Francis Lodowic Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 112.

<sup>163</sup> Hans W. Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967), 85.

created a divide between inherited mainline church forms and a growing need for Ghanaian spirituality.<sup>164</sup> As a result, some church members began participating in charismatic and neo-prophetic ministries. These ministries focus on spiritual healing, prophecy, miracles, and deliverance.

### *The Anglican Church in Ghana*

The origin of the Anglican Church in Ghana goes back to the colonial days when the activities of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) and other Anglican missionary organizations were carried out. By the late 1800s the number of missionaries in the Gold Coast had grown enough to be more visible, especially on the coast, in Cape Coast, Accra and neighbour towns.<sup>165</sup> The Anglican Church went on to be involved in the Anglican Communion, and slowly had influence in educational institutions, hospitals, and parish missions.

Theologically, the Anglican Church attributes the three aspects of Christian faith to be the scriptures, tradition and reason.<sup>166</sup> Anglican worship is rich in structure and sacrament, focusing on the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, prayers, creeds and organisation. Historically the Book of Common Prayer has influenced the Anglican worship and spirituality in Ghana. The church also has an established episcopal chain of command with the presence of bishops and diocesan structures.

George Ossom-Batsa and Kwesi Dickson note the importance of addressing Ghanaians' immediate spiritual and existential concerns.<sup>167</sup> As neo-prophetic churches emphasise prophecy, healing, and spiritual warfare, some Anglican members have been drawn to these ministries in the hope of experiencing healing and spiritual deliverance.

### **Theological Practices of the Methodist and Anglican Churches in Ghana**

Historically, both the Methodist and Anglican churches had their own Christian traditions rooted in those of European missionaries. Typical elements of their theology involve liturgy, sacrament ministry, scripture reading, teaching on the word, pastoral counseling, catechesis, choir and hymn singing, and social outreach ministries. The role played by these churches in the Christianization, education, health care and moral upbringing of the Ghanaian society was quite significant.<sup>168</sup> Their theological emphases, however, tended more to doctrinal stability and order in the church than to prophetic

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<sup>164</sup> Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 43; Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 154.

<sup>165</sup> Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, 104.

<sup>166</sup> Joshua Narteh Kudadjie, *Moral Renewal in Ghana: Ideals, Realities, and Possibilities* (Accra: Asempa Publishers/Christian Council of Ghana, 1995), 67.

<sup>167</sup> George Ossom-Batsa, *African Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2018), 93; Kwesi Abotsia Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 121.

<sup>168</sup> Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, 214-215.

spirituality and spiritual warfare, which are greatly appreciated in the African cosmological context.

However, it is evident in practice that, African Christians are not entirely detached from the indigenous beliefs, worldviews, and practices that have historically shaped African religious consciousness. Consequently, some continue to interpret experiences of illness, misfortune, suffering, and other life crises within a worldview that recognises the possible influence of evil forces and malevolent spiritual powers on human wellbeing.

According to Asamoah-Gyadu, Africa's Christians view life with a strong spiritual perspective, such that sickness, failure, barrenness and poverty could be linked to the presence of a supernatural cause.<sup>169</sup> Therefore, churches that are not able to offer practical spiritual solutions to such concerns may look inadequate to many believers.

In this study, "neo-prophetic ministries" refers to Ghanaian Christian ministries in which a recognised prophetic figure exercises a central role in diagnosing the spiritual causes of personal or communal problems and prescribing responses through prophecy, prayer, healing, deliverance, dream interpretation, spiritual counselling, and related practices. The term denotes a distinctive stream within the broader Pentecostal and Charismatic environment rather than every church that affirms prophecy or the gifts of the Spirit. These ministries appeal to believers by offering personalised spiritual mediation and practical responses to existential concerns within an African religious worldview.<sup>170</sup>

### **Conceptualising *Akwankyerε* in Ghanaian Christianity**

In Akan, *akwankyerε* means 'showing the way' and can connote guiding someone through problems related to struggles in life, marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, protection, business, health, and destiny. In Neo-prophetic Christianity, *akwankyerε* has largely been reframed to mean prophecies, discernment, visions, deliverance, dream interpretations, and spiritual counselling. In his seminal article 'Sumsum Akwankyerε', Degbe focuses on this aspect and argues that, in some circles of Christianity in Ghana, spiritual direction and divine instruction are the meanings associated with this term, and he looks at *akwankyerε* as a channel through which spiritual powers are channelled and appropriated in Ghanaian Christianity.<sup>171</sup> His article also discourages an overly optimistic approach to the term: 'sumsum akwankyerε' is problematic for Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity because it raises doctrinal issues, ritual mediation, ministerial authority, and the appropriation of spiritual power.

<sup>169</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 58.

<sup>170</sup> Quayesi-Amakye, *Christology and Evil in Ghana*, 74.

<sup>171</sup> Degbe, "Sumsum Akwankyerε," 270-289.

According to Johnson K. Asamoah-Gyadu, discussing African Christianity (which he defines as Christianity within the African Primal Worldview) cannot be complete without addressing the African Primal Worldview, as spiritual causes and supernatural agents affect the human condition.<sup>172</sup> African Christianity looks for a type of religion that will be a remedy for witchcraft, curses, demonic activities, sickness, and poverty. As such, neo-prophetic churches become attractive because they offer immediate spiritual answers and solutions to these issues.

Omenyo believes that how well Christianity fits into Africa can be seen in how it addresses existential and spiritual anxieties.<sup>173</sup> Neo-prophetic ministries root their influence in the lack of response by mission-founded liturgical traditions to spiritual anxieties and fears that worshippers perceive.

In this study, *akwankyere* is not synonymous with prophetic speech. Prophetic speech is a particular utterance understood to communicate divine insight, warning, or encouragement, whereas *akwankyere* is a broader pastoral process of spiritual guidance that may include prophecy but can also involve prayer, counselling, discernment, dream interpretation, healing, deliverance, and practical direction. For many Christians in Ghana, it functions as an existential framework intended to provide direction, hope, and spiritual empowerment. Degbe nevertheless cautions against treating *sunsum akwankyere* as an uncomplicated Christian resource, because its layered practices raise doctrinal and ethical questions about ritual mediation, ministerial authority, and the appropriation of spiritual power. This distinction is central to the present argument: Methodist and Anglican engagement with *akwankyere* must combine pastoral responsiveness with critical theological discernment rather than uncritically adopting neo-prophetic forms.<sup>174</sup>

### **Pneumatological Tension: Prophetic Guidance and the Spirit's Guidance of Believers**

Any attempt to incorporate *akwankyere* into Methodist or Anglican ministry must address significant pneumatological questions. Both traditions affirm that the Spirit is given to the Church and is active in the life of every believer; divine guidance cannot therefore be treated as the exclusive possession of a prophetic specialist. Within Methodism, the Spirit strengthens and forms believers through prayer, worship, and the means of grace. Within Anglicanism, believers pray for the Spirit to grant right judgement in all things. A minister may exercise recognised gifts of prophecy, counsel, or discernment, but such ministry must serve the Spirit's work in the body of Christ rather than replace believers' prayerful discernment or become their only route to God. This balance is evident in the

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<sup>172</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 93–94.

<sup>173</sup> Cephas N. Omenyo, "New Wine in an Old Wine Bottle?: Charismatic Healing in the Mainline Churches in Ghana," in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, ed. Candy Gunther Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 201), 233–236.

<sup>174</sup> Degbe, "Sumsum Akwankyere," 270–289.

New Testament: gifts are distributed by the one Spirit among members of the body (1 Cor. 12:4–11), prophetic speech is weighed by others (1 Cor. 14:29), and believers are instructed to test what they hear (1 Thess. 5:19–21). A Methodist or Anglican form of *akwankyerε* can therefore be defended only as accountable pastoral discernment exercised within the Church.

### **The Need for the Adoption of *Akwankyerε* in the Methodist and Anglican Churches**

Migration of members from the Methodist and Anglican Church to the Neo-prophetic ministries shows the need for contextual pastoral adaptation in Historic Mission Churches in Ghana. Such migration should not be understood merely as denominational preference but also as an indication that some Christians seek forms of worship and pastoral ministry that respond more directly to their spiritual and existential concerns. Sarbah, Niemandt, and White identify significant “push” and “pull” factors in the movement of Ghanaian Christians from HMCs to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and argue that the phenomenon requires HMCs to reconsider aspects of their missional and pastoral practice. According to research on the Methodist Church in Ghana, unfulfilled spiritual and social needs, liturgical difficulties, and leadership issues are some of the reasons why young people are gravitating toward Pentecostal and charismatic churches. The study concludes that greater adaptability is required for the church to remain relevant over time. In this context, pastoral adaptation calls for a critical retrieval of biblical charismatic resources such as prophecy, healing, discernment, prayer, and properly regulated *akwankyerε* within established structures of theological discernment and ecclesiastical accountability rather than requiring HMCs to give up their theological, liturgical, or ecclesiastical identities.

To be applicable and effect transformational change in the HMCs, these churches on the continent must engage with other spheres of African reality as witness among the Pentecostal/Charismatic ministries. Similarly, Omenyo argues that Historic Mission Churches must meet Africans’ spiritual aspirations while prioritising theology.<sup>175</sup> The inability to confront the challenges of witchcraft fears, spiritual attacks and curses, and to provide spiritual security, carries people to Neo-prophetic churches.

The adoption of *akwankyerε* within the Methodist and Anglican churches does not necessarily imply the imitation of all Neo-prophetic practices. On the contrary, it is the contextual application of: Prophetic counselling, Healing ministries, Prayer and deliverance and Spiritual discernment. To ensure that such ministries are not

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<sup>175</sup> Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 141.

manipulated, commercialized, or misused in doctrinal aspects, they must be supervised by an ecclesiastical authority and disciplined by biblical principles.<sup>176</sup>

Biblical and Methodist precedents deserve more nuance than associating them with contemporary *akwankyerε*. 1 Samuel 9:6-10 describes Saul going to Samuel for answers concerning the lost donkeys. 2 Kings 5:8-14 shows Elisha addressing Naaman and giving him instructions about his sickness. In Acts 11:27-30 and 21:10-14, we see Agabus express prophetic messages that influenced the entire community. These examples show sequences and episodes in the Holy Scriptures in which prophetic figures describe certain actions and give instructions and warnings to communities, or deliver prophetic messages. These examples, however, do not establish that a permanent Christian prophetic class exists to which Christians should routinely submit their decisions and actions. John Wesley's work also suggests the importance of actively experiencing the Holy Spirit and the gifts of grace and defining Christian experience in terms of assurance<sup>177</sup> and discernment; however, no concrete evidence suggests that he was involved in contemporary Neo-prophetic *akwankyerε*. Therefore, given the preceding comments, what should interest us more is the right of Spirit-guided discernment in Christian communities, rather than relying on a prophetic specialist.

In summary, the theory suggests that the Methodist and Anglican Churches in Ghana have justifiable reasons to initiate contextual ministries that are responsive to the existential and spiritual needs of their members. Such a responsive approach could enhance member commitment; however, this literature-based study does not confirm that the absence of *akwankyerε* or similar ministries leads members to migrate to Neo-prophetic ministries or to an overall decline in church membership.

### **Resistance to Charismatic and Prophetic Practices within the Methodist and Anglican Churches**

In spite of the increasing trend of the Neo-prophetic spirituality in Ghana, the introduction of the charismatic worship practices and *akwankyerε* into the Methodist and Anglican churches has not been free of opposition. Although some clergy within these Historic Mission Churches have attempted to introduce charismatic styles of worship, healing services, deliverance sessions, prophetic prayer meetings, and contemporary praise forms into their ministries, such innovations often encounter opposition from sections of the church hierarchy, senior clergy, and some lay members.

Omenyo observes that charismatic renewal groups in Historic Mission Churches in Ghana have historically caused division between renewalists and more conservative

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<sup>176</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 172.

<sup>177</sup> Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1989), 392.

church leaders.<sup>178</sup> Some lose liturgy, doctrinal sturdiness, and church order to a charismatic tendency. For these reasons, some members of Historic Mission Churches criticise prophetic and charismatic clergy for “Pentecostalising” the church.

Asamoah-Gyadu has also noted resistance to calls for experiential and prophetic ministry in Historic Mission Churches.<sup>179</sup> Some Bishops, Ministers, and Church Councils are more apprehensive about the doctrinal implications of prophecy, spiritual guidance, deliverance, anointing, and praying in tongues.

Some parts of Ghana’s Anglican Church experience friction between proponents of charismatic renewal and those who prefer established liturgical and sacramental forms. Some renewal-engaged clergy and congregations have begun healing ministries, added revival services, and adopted worship practices informed by Pentecostal traditions.<sup>180</sup> In contrast, some clergy and laity have adopted and defended more traditional Anglican liturgical and sacramental practices. Charismatic clergy will face resistance from those concerned that such activities will endanger church order and identity.

The Methodist Church of Ghana has faced the same problems. According to Omenyo, the introduction of healing services, deliverance, and revival-oriented worship by some Methodist ministers sparked backlash from church-based conservatives, who associated these with Neo-prophetic excesses.<sup>181</sup> However, these practices draw youth and church members seeking solutions to spiritual and existential crises. Gifford adds that the Historic Mission Churches of Africa have faced a similar problem: balancing institutional custom with members’ contemporary spiritual needs.<sup>182</sup> Church leadership maintains theological orthodoxy and order, while church members grow spiritually hungry and long for a Christianity that brings immediate spiritual change and offers solutions to everyday challenges.

The literature links disputes over Methodist and Anglican charismatic renewal to members leaving for Neo-prophetic ministries. Some suggest members who do not find their needs met in traditional church environments will opt to join churches that focus on charismatic practices, such as prophecy, healing and deliverance. While this makes membership migrations a valid pastoral concern for HMCs, it does not provide evidence that opposition to charismatic practices leads to denominational decline, or that embracing charismatic practices would stop migratory tendencies. Some argue that charismatic and prophetic practices should be practised within controlled theological frameworks and church order. In espousing contextual African Christianity and

<sup>178</sup> Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 97.

<sup>179</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 154.

<sup>180</sup> Ossom-Batsa, *African Christianity in Ghana*, 104.

<sup>181</sup> Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 122.

<sup>182</sup> Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 143.

maintaining church doctrine. Quayesi-Amakye and Tsekpoe demonstrate that the recognition of prophetic ministry need not result in unregulated prophetism; rather, prophetic gifts can be exercised within biblical principles, spiritual discernment, ministerial integrity, and the administrative oversight of the Church.<sup>183</sup>

There is clearly a disconnection in the positions taken on charismatic renewal resistance in Methodist and Anglican churches in Ghana, and the acceptance of Neo-prophetic ministries. This shows that renewal initiatives must be tailored to this environment. For these churches, the question is not whether they will embrace African spirituality responsibly and accountably, but how.

### **The Rise of Neo-Prophetic Influence in Ghana**

From the late 1980s, Neo-prophetic Christianity gained prominence in Ghana, especially in the 1990s, when charismatic preachers and ministries began to emphasise prophecy, healing, deliverance, miracles, and prosperity. Asamoah-Gyadu<sup>184</sup>, Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi<sup>185</sup> and Paul Gifford<sup>186</sup> analyse different aspects of the broader Pentecostal and Charismatic expansion and its influence on Ghanaian Christianity. Like other ministries, many Neo-prophetic ministries have used the media, public crusades, prayer centres, and personal spiritual counselling to expand.

Neo-prophetic ministers claim the right to speak about the hidden causes of suffering and to give spiritual direction toward healing, protection, and amelioration of suffering. Quayesi-Amakye analyses the role of evil and the presence of spiritual causality and intercession in Ghanaian Pentecostalism.<sup>187</sup> This has caused anguish in Historic Mission Churches, as some members have begun to seek prophetic ministry outside their inherited worship.

The growing significance of the prophet as a religious expert who asserts the spiritual ability to identify the underlying causes of human issues is a defining characteristic of this evolution. Therefore, Neo-Prophetic Christianity tackles ordinary worries like illness, infertility, unemployment, marriage, business failure, death, and spiritual attack in addition to traditional Christian concerns about salvation. Quayesi-Amakye similarly demonstrates how the reality of evil and the pursuit of divine intervention continue to be

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<sup>183</sup> Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, "The Concept of the Prophet in Ghana's Church of Pentecost," *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 43, no. 1 (2011): 9-12; Christian Tsekpoe, "The Dynamics of African Pentecostalism: The Christianisation of Indigenous Religious Practices and the Indigenisation of the Christian Faith" (PhD diss., Middlesex University, 2020), 127.

<sup>184</sup> Kwabena J. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 23.

<sup>185</sup> Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: Blessed Publications, 2001), 56

<sup>186</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 89.

<sup>187</sup> Quayesi-Amakye, *Christology and Evil in Ghana*, 91.

central to Ghanaian Pentecostal spirituality<sup>188</sup>, while Omenyo and Atiemo note that Ghanaian Neo-Propheticism functions within the broader Pentecostal environment while displaying distinctive prophetic emphases.<sup>189</sup>

The evolution of religious communication has also contributed to the growth of Neo-Prophetic influence. While modern digital platforms have made prophecy, deliverance, testimonies, and spiritual guidance accessible to far larger audiences, radio and television originally allowed prophets to expand their ministries beyond their congregations. According to recent Ghanaian research, social media has emerged as a significant channel for the dissemination and integration of Neo-Prophetic teachings, especially those related to prosperity, spiritual warfare, and prophetic revelation, into believers' religious decision-making.<sup>190</sup> As a result, prophetic influence increasingly transcends geographic and denominational barriers.

This development has important implications for Historic Mission Churches, particularly the Anglican and Methodist Churches in Ghana. These churches must recover, acknowledge, and appropriately use the prophetic gift as a biblical charism within the life and ministry of the Church rather than permitting prophecy and other charismatic gifts to become almost entirely connected with Neo-Prophetic ministries. Paul lists prophecy as one of the Holy Spirit's gifts for the Christian community's edification (1 Cor. 12:10; 14:1–5), but he also calls for its careful evaluation (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19–21). Anglican and Methodist churches are challenged to provide credible spaces where these spiritual needs can be met within sound doctrine, sacramental life, pastoral accountability, and ecclesiastical oversight because some members of Historic Mission Churches are drawn to Neo-Prophetic ministries for prophecy, healing, deliverance, and spiritual direction. Omenyo illustrates how charismatic renewal has impacted the older mission churches themselves,<sup>191</sup> while Asamoah-Gyadu highlights the significance of experience spirituality within modern Ghanaian Christianity.<sup>192</sup> Therefore, rather than merely copying the methods of autonomous Neo-Prophetic churches, strengthening biblically grounded prophetic ministry inside Anglican and Methodist churches may help them respond more effectively to members who seek prophetic experiences elsewhere.

<sup>188</sup> Quayesi-Amakye, "Prophetism in Ghana's New Prophetic Churches," 162–173

<sup>189</sup> Cephas N. Omenyo and Abamfo O. Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Space: The Case of Neo-Propheticism in Ghana," *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 1, no. 1 (2006): 55–68

<sup>190</sup> Grace Sintim Adasi, Sanatu Fusheini, and Frank Amuzu, "Digital Dissemination of Neo-Prophetic Theologies in Ghana: Societal Impact and Challenges in the Age of Social Media," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 11, no. 6 (2025): 279–292.

<sup>191</sup> Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 141.

<sup>192</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 23.

## **Membership Retention Challenges in the Methodist and Anglican Churches**

<sup>193</sup>The literature identifies reports of some young Christians leaving Historic Mission Churches for charismatic and neo-prophetic ministries. Asamoah-Gyadu notes that Historic Mission Churches are sometimes perceived as formal and insufficiently responsive to contemporary spiritual and existential concerns. These observations indicate a pastoral challenge, but the available literature does not establish the scale of migration from Methodist and Anglican churches or demonstrate that perceived liturgical formality is its principal cause.

Because of this, members of the Methodist and Anglican Churches attend prophetic conventions, deliverance services, and prayer camps run by Neo-prophetic ministries. George Ossom-Batsa adds that many African Christians want authentic connections with the Holy Spirit beyond the formality of Sacraments.<sup>194</sup> Members of these churches believe that if their churches do not offer divine healing and spiritual presence, among other things, they should attend religious venues that do. The challenge for Methodist and Anglican churches remains bridging the gap between their formalism and their members' real-life experiences. The subsequent section discusses the need for Historic Mission Churches (HMCs) to recognise, accommodate, and responsibly integrate prophetic ministry, particularly the practice of *akwankyerε*, within their ecclesiastical structures and pastoral oversight.

## **The Need to Inculcate *Akwankyerε* in Historic Mission Churches**

Some contemporary scholars argue that HMCs in Africa should be involved in contextual ministry that addresses different Africans' existential realities and circumstances without compromising biblical orthodoxy. This section focuses on three dimensions that are necessary for the inculcation:

### ***Contextual Theology and African Spiritual Needs***

According to Kwame Bediako, Christianity must interact meaningfully with African religious consciousness.<sup>195</sup> Bediako believes that African Christians can retain their reasoning when they become Christian and Christianize it.<sup>196</sup> Churches that fail to consider the spiritual dimensions of Africans are at risk of pastoral disaffiliation. Therefore, there is a need for ministries in both the Methodist Church and the Anglican Church to address spiritual insecurity, fear of witchcraft, family curses, demonic

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<sup>193</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 76.

<sup>194</sup> Ossom-Batsa, *African Christianity in Ghana*, 93.

<sup>195</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 260.

<sup>196</sup> Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 260.

oppression, unemployment, sickness, and marital problems. To meet this need, ministries based on Bible prophecy, counselling, and healing are likely to be fit for churches.

### ***Preventing Membership Migration***

The literature reviewed describes how some members of Historic Mission Churches look for *akwankyere* outside their churches, which is attributed to members believing their churches lack spiritual provision and/or effective ministries for spiritual deliverance. When discussing this trend, Asamoah-Gyadu suggests that some Neo-prophetic churches address this need and offer spiritual care by having a prophet attend to the needs, dreams, and spiritual instructions for a particular individual or group.<sup>197</sup> Some worshippers believe that liturgical, routinised worship is less closely related to their existential problems. These observations can help formulate a hypothesis of contextual theology: carefully supervised, structured prophetic counselling, prayer, and healing ministries can address challenges and enhance pastoral care. These observations do not prove that such an approach can reduce member outflow; to evaluate that, surveys, interviews, and data on denominational retention would be helpful.

### ***Biblical and Historical Precedents***

Biblical and historical precedents provide a strong basis for the exercise of prophecy, spiritual discernment, and pastoral guidance within the Christian tradition. Scripture itself offers prophecy along with other gifts of the Spirit for the edification and well-being of the believing community, and it has significant precedents for prophetic service. Even though there are dishonest prophets in the modern prophetic environment in Ghana whose actions go against biblical values and create grave ethical and theological issues, such misdeeds shouldn't cause prophetic service to be completely rejected. Additionally, there are prophetic ministers whose ministries exhibit the gifts of knowledge, wisdom, healing, spirit discernment, and release from demonic tyranny. The challenge, therefore, is not simply whether prophetic ministry should be permitted, but how authentic prophetic gifts can be recognised, discerned, regulated, and exercised responsibly within the theological and ecclesiastical structures of the Church.

In 1 Samuel 9:6-10, we see a seeker come to a recognised prophet to receive knowledge not available to him. In 2 Kings 5:8-14, we see prophetic power and authority paired with a very specific act. In the New Testament, we see Agabus' prophetic warnings in Acts 11:27-30 and 21:10-14 where the receiving communities must divine and respond appropriately. More so, we see the gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed to believers in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, and we can also note that in 1 Corinthians 14:29, prophetic speech must be evaluated by others. Thus, as with the biblical examples of prophetic ministry,

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<sup>197</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 154.

the church supports not an unquestionable, singularly gifted prophetic specialist, but a ministry of prophetic gifts discerned by a community of faith. Likewise, while Wesley's and Anglican's focus on experiential faith and prayer, and the presence of the Holy Spirit also support the practice of Christian Discernment, they do not, on their own, support Neo-prophetic *akwankyerε* as it is seen in their current state. These biblical precedents should inspire Historic Mission Churches (HMCs) to recognise and strengthen prophetic ministry within their ecclesiastical structures, enabling them to respond more effectively to the spiritual needs of members who might otherwise seek prophetic guidance and assistance outside their churches.

### *Risks and Theological Cautions*

Although *akwankyerε* has pastoral value, scholars find its unrestrained use problematic. Gifford opposes some Neo-prophetic Christianity.<sup>198</sup> These tendencies include the promotion of Christian spirituality, and with them fear and the commercialisation of the spirit. Omenyo shares similar concerns about spiritual phenomena that promote reliance on charismatic leaders and spiritual 'specialists' at the expense of committed Christian discipleship.<sup>199</sup> This leads to prophetic ministry and direction remaining Christ-centred, under scriptural control, practising responsible pastoral care, with no cost associated with it, and under proper ecclesiastical oversight.

### **Conclusion**

Neo-prophetic *akwankyerε* has made itself known in modern Ghanaian Christianity. This indicates the place of prophecy, healing, deliverance, and spiritual direction, as well as existential security, in the contemporary Christian experience. The literature reviewed indicates that the appeal of some Methodist and Anglican members' to Neo-prophetic ministries is not solely a preference for another denomination; it is more likely a response to spiritual and pastoral needs which these members have determined their churches do not meet.

Ghanaian Christian responses to sickness, misfortune, unemployment, and problems in their marriages and other worries include the possibility of a spiritual cause. Neo-prophetic ministries meet these concerns through prophetic prayers, healing, and deliverance, as well as spiritual direction. This literature-based study cannot quantify member movement caused by these practices, however, it does articulate why *akwankyerε* matters for the Historic Mission Churches as a pastoral and theological concern.

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<sup>198</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 172.

<sup>199</sup> Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 141.

The literature describes movements in the Methodist and Anglican Churches that incorporate healing and prophetic prayer with liturgical worship, alongside prophetic and revival prayer ministry, while remaining concerned with the Church's order, doctrine, and liturgy. The best approach is neither rejection nor imitation of these movements, but prayerful theological discernment of the spirit that guides the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the pastoral care of the Churches, and corporate responsibility within each of these individual Churches.

Methodist and Anglican churches in Ghana should develop contextual forms of spiritual guidance that are biblically and theologically defensible. This does not require abandoning their traditions or imitating Neo-prophetic practice. Rather, such ministries must remain faithful to Scripture, ecclesiastical discipline, and each church's theological heritage while responding directly to the spiritual concerns of their congregations.

Such engagement must also preserve the theological agency of ordinary believers. In Methodist and Anglican contexts, the Holy Spirit's guidance is not confined to a prophetic office; the Spirit is active throughout the Church through Scripture, prayer, worship, conscience, communal discernment, and the gifts distributed among the body of Christ. A contextual ministry of spiritual direction is therefore appropriate only when it equips believers to discern faithfully rather than making them dependent on a minister presumed to possess exclusive access to the will of God.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations may be implemented through a phased programme of pastoral ministry, theological formation, and engagement with younger and urban Christians. First, each church should appoint a diocesan or connexional oversight team to develop written protocols for prayer, spiritual counselling, healing, discernment, referral, safeguarding, financial integrity, theological review, and ministerial accountability. Second, selected clergy and lay leaders should receive training in African spirituality, Pentecostal and contextual theology, pastoral counselling, and the responsible exercise of charismatic gifts. Third, the churches should pilot supervised ministries of prayer, healing, counselling, and discernment in selected congregations, alongside strengthened youth, campus, urban, and pastoral-care networks. The pilot should prohibit sensationalism, commercialisation, coercion, and manipulation, and should include clear procedures for complaints and referrals. Finally, the oversight team should evaluate the programme at agreed intervals using participant feedback, safeguarding reports, ministry records, and available membership data before recommending wider implementation. Future empirical research should assess whether these initiatives improve pastoral care, member commitment, and retention.

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## Study limitations

Readers should interpret the study's findings with caution, as they result from analysis of a small sample of literature. The findings may be applicable in a limited context.

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## A Pastoral Care Approach to Child Sexual Abuse in Ghana: A Theological Reflection Informed by a Relational View of the Trinity

Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam

### Abstract

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is both a moral transgression and a criminal offence, with consequences that reverberate throughout the child's life and across the family, the community, and the nation. In Ghana, CSA is documented as pervasive across social institutions, including faith communities, yet it has received comparatively little sustained theological attention. This article develops a theological-pastoral response to CSA in the Ghanaian context, drawing on a relational understanding of the Trinity. Using Holland and Henriot's pastoral circle as an integrative method, the study situates practical theology in conversation with trinitarian doctrine to transform ecclesial praxis and Christian spirituality in relation to CSA. It argues that a relational doctrine of the Trinity provides a robust theological foundation for both a pastoral anthropology of children and an ecclesiology grounded in mutuality, equality, and interconnectedness — one capable of flattening entrenched power gradients and redirecting power towards life-giving ends among persons of equal worth.

**Keywords:** Child sexual abuse, Child theology, Faith community, Pastoral care, Relational Trinity

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### Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) constitutes a global public health crisis whose effects are pervasive, cumulative, and frequently lifelong for survivors, families, and the wider society.<sup>200,201</sup> Scripture itself situates such violation within the register of sin, affecting "both spirit and body" (1 Cor. 6:18), a position broadly mirrored in Ghanaian civil law, where CSA is classified as a criminal offence. The scholarly literature on CSA, however, has developed unevenly. Sociological, economic, and anthropological analyses have

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<sup>200</sup> Prakash B. Behere and Anweshak Mulmule, "Sexual Abuse in Children," *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 10, no. 2 (2014): 96–119.

<sup>201</sup> John Wihbey, "Global prevalence of child sexual abuse," *Journalist's Resource*, 15, no. 4 (2011): 25–30.

proliferated chiefly within Western contexts,<sup>202,203</sup> and even where pastoral-theological engagement with CSA exists, it remains overwhelmingly shaped by Western frameworks and case material.<sup>204,205</sup> Within Ghana specifically, existing scholarship has interrogated the phenomenon through socio-cultural, psychological, and political lenses, leaving its theological dimensions comparatively unexamined.<sup>206,207</sup>

This lacuna is significant, since African theological anthropology offers a distinctive vantage point from which to interpret the abuse of children. Mtata situates child abuse within “the social position children have occupied in the hierarchy of the construction of personhood in African thought,”<sup>208</sup> a formulation consonant with Reynaert's broader observation that child abuse is fundamentally an abuse of power.<sup>209</sup> On this reading, the hierarchical ordering of personhood that has historically structured African ecclesial and theological reflection is not incidental to the problem of CSA but constitutive of it: as Mtata contends, “a faulty anthropology produces a faulty theology, and a faulty theology produces a skewed anthropology.”<sup>210</sup> Mtata further observes that the marginalisation of children within African communitarian ethics is “sometimes rationalized by using the language of ‘care’ and ‘protection’ while the real value of childhood is not recognised.”<sup>211</sup> An insight that helps explain why perpetrators of CSA are so often precisely those figures like parents, teachers, and church volunteers entrusted with a child's care.

Mtata extends this analysis to argue that a hierarchical construction of personhood marginalises not only children but “all those considered as not being fully human, such as the physically or mentally disabled or those considered different,”<sup>212</sup> concluding that African theology can only adequately serve children and other vulnerable persons once it has confronted this hierarchical inheritance.<sup>213</sup> Because CSA is, by definition, a violation

<sup>202</sup> Behere and Mulmule, “Sexual Abuse in Children,” 96–119.

<sup>203</sup> Wihbey, “Child Sexual Abuse.”

<sup>204</sup> Lisa Rudolffsson, “Abused, Ashamed, and Alone: Experiences of Shame Among Victims of Sexual Abuse” (PhD diss., Örebro University, 2015).

<sup>205</sup> Lisa Rudolffsson and Inga Tidefors, “Shame and Sexual Abuse: A Pastoral Care Perspective,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 67, no. 4 (2013).

<sup>206</sup> Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Josephine Beoku-Betts, Wairimu Ngaruiya Njambi, and Mary Osirim, “Women's and Gender Studies in English-Speaking Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Gender & Society* 18, no. 6 (2007).

<sup>207</sup> Kevin Lalor, “Child Sexual Abuse in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Literature Review,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 28, no. 4 (2004): 439–460, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2003.07.005>. (PubMed)

<sup>208</sup> Kenneth Mtata, “Child Theology and the African Context,” in *Building from the Rubbles: Theological Reflections on the Global Financial Crisis and Other Essays* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2009).

<sup>209</sup> Didier Reynaert, “Power and Children's Rights: An Analysis,” in *Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies*, ed. Wouter Vandenhoe, Ellen Desmet, Didier Reynaert, and Sara Lembrechts (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>210</sup> Mtata, “Child Theology and the African Context.”

<sup>211</sup> Mtata, “Child Theology and the African Context.”

<sup>212</sup> Mtata, “Child Theology and the African Context.”

<sup>213</sup> Mtata, “Child Theology and the African Context.”

enacted within relationship, a theological response is best grounded in a doctrine that takes relationality as its starting point: the relational Trinity. This article accordingly develops a theological pastoral response to CSA in Ghana through a relational reading of trinitarian doctrine. It proceeds by outlining the relational view of the Trinity that undergirds the analysis, surveying the empirical landscape of CSA in Ghana, describing the study's methodology, and presenting findings organised around a trinitarian pastoral anthropology of children and an account of the church as a healing community, before concluding with implications for pastoral practice.

### **A Relational View of the Trinity**

Relationality names the web of interdependence within which human existence unfolds. Ackermann argues that human beings are “shaped and nurtured” by the quality of their relationships with others, so that community-mindedness itself becomes generative of growth and development.<sup>214</sup> Desmond Tutu makes a cognate theological claim, observing that persons are “made for complementarity,” endowed by God with distinct gifts precisely so that they might depend on one another within a network of relationships to express their humanity fully.<sup>215</sup> Building on this relational anthropology, a relational view of the Trinity holds that the communion obtaining between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is not merely a speculative datum of doctrine but a pattern that should characterise the life and ministry of the Christian community. Following LaCugna,<sup>216</sup> Tanner,<sup>217</sup> and Venter,<sup>218</sup> this article conceives the Trinity as a communion of mutual love, equality, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness. For LaCugna, the doctrine expresses “the primacy of communion among equals, not the primacy of one over another”<sup>219</sup> – a formulation that positions the abuse and hoarding of power in human society as the direct inversion of the relational quality intrinsic to the Godhead. This reconception has shifted trinitarian theology away from an abstract and largely mystical inheritance toward a constitutively practical doctrine, situating everyday Christian existence at the very centre of trinitarian reflection.

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<sup>214</sup> Denise M. Ackermann, “A Voice Was Heard in Ramah: A Feminist Theology of Praxis for Healing in South Africa,” in *Claiming Our Footprints: South African Women Reflect on Context, Identity and Spirituality*, ed. Denise M. Ackermann, Elna Mouton, and Riet Bons-Storm (Stellenbosch: EFSA, 1998).

<sup>215</sup> Lovemore Mbigi and Jenny Maree, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management* (Randburg: Knowledge Resources, 1995), xiii–xv.

<sup>216</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

<sup>217</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>218</sup> Rian Venter, “Trinity and Ethics: An Overview of a Recent Debate,” in *Trinity, Doxology, and Community*, ed. Rian Venter (Bloemfontein: Sun Press, 2012).

<sup>219</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*.

The ecclesial implications of this shift have been developed extensively. Volf, engaging Ratzinger's trinitarian ecclesiology, contends that the entire life of the faith community – its structures no less than the daily texture of Christian spirituality – ought to be rooted in trinitarian communion, such that congregational practice becomes a visible enactment of trinitarian belief.<sup>220</sup> Zizioulas advances a still stronger claim, describing the church as *imago trinitatis*: not merely an organisation but a mode of being that must take on the relational “flesh” of God's own being.<sup>221</sup> Volf, commenting on Zizioulas, insists that ecclesial communion can be adequately understood only through sustained critical engagement with the communal pattern disclosed in the life and teaching of Christ.<sup>222</sup> The deployment of a specifically doctrinal resource in this study reflects a conviction that practical theology and Christian doctrine are inseparable. As Miller-McLemore observes, “practical theology refers to an activity of believers seeking to sustain a life of reflective faith in everyday life”<sup>223</sup> – an activity that properly draws on both the priority of Scripture and the retrieval of doctrinal tradition. This is especially apt in the African context, where the doctrine of the Trinity functions as what Sakupapa terms an “ecumenical discourse,”<sup>224</sup> one whose emphasis on communal life resonates closely with African communitarian ethics.<sup>225</sup> Bitrus sharpens this convergence further, arguing that a relational Trinity stands in direct opposition to the patriarchal forms of dominion that often typify African communal life, such that an authentically African communalism is, properly understood, a trinitarian communalism.<sup>226</sup>

### Child Sexual Abuse in the Ghanaian Context

CSA is not a marginal phenomenon within Ghanaian society. The Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560) defines a child as any person below the age of eighteen, while the statutory age of sexual consent remains sixteen; sexual activity involving a child below this threshold therefore constitutes CSA under Ghanaian law. UNICEF estimates that approximately 90% of Ghanaian children have experienced some form of abuse<sup>227</sup> – physical, emotional,

<sup>220</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>221</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

<sup>222</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*.

<sup>223</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “Practical Theology and Pedagogy: Embodying Theological Know-How,” in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

<sup>224</sup> Teddy C. Sakupapa, “The Trinity in African Christian Theology: An Overview of Contemporary Approaches,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75 no. 1 (2019): a5460, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5460>.

<sup>225</sup> Sakupapa, “The Trinity in African Christian Theology.”

<sup>226</sup> Ibrahim S. Bitrus, “The Trinity and Human Society: An African Perspective,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017).

<sup>227</sup> UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children in Ghana* (Accra: UNICEF Ghana, 2018).

sexual, or neglect, while a related UNICEF costing exercise placed the annual national expenditure attributable to child abuse at between GH¢926 million and GH¢1.442 billion.<sup>228</sup> A comprehensive nationwide study conducted by the Ghana Health Service in partnership with UNICEF identified CSA as a serious public health problem and documented child marriage as a further, closely related form of CSA occurring across all surveyed regions, with girls as young as nine betrothed to and sexually engaged by adult men.<sup>229</sup> Complementary school-based research corroborates the scale of the problem: in a descriptive and exploratory survey spanning four of Ghana's then 110 districts, drawing on responses from 490 pupils, 116 parents, and 49 headteachers, 11.2 per cent of participating children reported having been victims of rape or defilement, with 92% of victims identified as female.<sup>230</sup> A subsequent study examining the period of the COVID-19 lockdown found that 32% of surveyed adolescent girls aged thirteen to nineteen had experienced sexual abuse during that period.<sup>231</sup> Notably, Kpalam and Ahiataku report that CSA is no less pervasive within churches than within Ghanaian society at large,<sup>232</sup> with several studies implicating Christian religious leaders as perpetrators and media reports identifying church leadership as, in some instances, an obstacle to the fight against CSA rather than an ally within it.<sup>233</sup> Taken together, this body of evidence points to a persistent and, in places, worsening crisis that existing governmental and civil-society interventions have not yet been able to contain.

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<sup>228</sup> UNICEF, *Study on the Economic Impact of Violence Against Children in Ghana* (Accra: UNICEF Ghana, 2015).

<sup>229</sup> Ghana Health Service, *National Study on the Health Sector Response to Child Abuse in Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Health Service, with support from UNICEF, 2018).

<sup>230</sup> Anthony Agu, Andrews Brown, Maimuna Adamu-Issah, and Angela Duncan, "Child Sexual Abuse in Ghanaian Public Schools: A Descriptive and Exploratory Study," *African Journal of Social Work Studies*, 122.

<sup>231</sup> E. Owusu-Addo et al., "Prevalence and Determinants of Sexual Abuse among Adolescent Girls during the COVID-19 Lockdown and School Closures in Ghana: A Mixed Method Study," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 135 (2023): 105997.

<sup>232</sup> Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam and Eva Ahiataku, "An Ecclesial Analysis of Child Sexual Abuse in Ghana: Implications for Pastoral Response," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 9, no. 7 (2023): 304-317, <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.2023976>.

<sup>233</sup> Emmanuel Nii-Boye Quarshie et al., "Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse in Ghana: A Media Content Analysis of Survivors, Offenders, and Offence Characteristics," *Journal of Religion and Health* 61, no. 4 (2022): 3028-3054, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01430-3>.

## Methodological Framework: The Pastoral Circle

This study adopts the Pastoral Circle developed by Holland and Henriot,<sup>234</sup> an approach to practical theology emerging from the traditions of contextual and liberation theology and oriented explicitly toward context-sensitive action and change.<sup>235,236</sup> Holland and Henriot conceive of practical theology as an ongoing, integrative process binding together pastoral praxis, hermeneutics, and theological reflection within the life of the church, and they identify four constitutive moments: insertion, social analysis, theological reflection, and pastoral planning.<sup>237</sup> The moment of insertion, or what Cochrane et al. call “beginning in the context,”<sup>238</sup> attends to the lived experiences, feelings, and perceptions of individuals and communities as the primary data from which theological reflection proceeds.<sup>239,240</sup> Applied here, this moment highlights the complexity of CSA in Ghana, as documented across a decade of scholarship calling on all stakeholders, including faith communities, to institute concrete protective measures.<sup>241</sup> The second moment, social analysis, seeks to identify the causes, contributing factors, and consequences of the phenomenon under study, including the specific role and influence of the church within the community.<sup>242</sup> The third moment, theological reflection, undertakes to interpret the analysed context “in the light of living faith, scripture, church social teachings, and the resources of tradition,”<sup>243</sup> in this study, that reflection proceeds specifically through the doctrine of the Trinity, with particular attention to its relational articulation. The fourth and final moment, pastoral planning and praxis, is the point at

<sup>234</sup> Joe Holland and Peter J. Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

<sup>235</sup> Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 2006).

<sup>236</sup> Brian Macallan and H. Jurgens Hendriks, “Practical Theology and Philosophy: Working from a Distinctly Trans/postdisciplinary Approach,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 68, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>237</sup> Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

<sup>238</sup> James R. Cochrane, John de Gruchy, and Robin Petersen, *In Word and Deed: Towards a Practical Theology for Social Transformation* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1991).

<sup>239</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018).

<sup>240</sup> Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski, eds., *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

<sup>241</sup> Anthony Agu, Andrews Brown, Maimuna Adamu-Issah, and Angela Duncan, “Child Sexual Abuse in Ghanaian Public Schools: A Descriptive and Exploratory Study,” *African Journal of Social Work Studies*, 122; Kevin Lalor, “Child Sexual Abuse in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Literature Review,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 28, no. 4 (2004): 439–460, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2003.07.005>. (PubMed) ; Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam, “Applying Integrated Theology to Child Protection in the Church of Pentecost in Winneba Municipality in Ghana” (Master’s Thesis, South African Theological Seminary, 2019).

<sup>242</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. and expanded ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); H. Jurgens Hendriks, *Studying Congregations in Africa* (Wellington: Lux Verbi, 2004); Brian Macallan and H. Jurgens Hendriks, “Practical Theology and Philosophy: Working from a Distinctly Trans/postdisciplinary Approach,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 68, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>243</sup> Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis*.

which the faith community discerns and restates the will of God for its present context,<sup>244</sup> synthesising the preceding three moments into a concrete pastoral response. This final moment, elaborated below, generates the practical pastoral care strategies with which the article concludes.

### **Discussion: Trinitarian Foundations for Pastoral Care**

The discussion that follows corresponds to the pastoral circle's culminating moment of planning and praxis,<sup>245</sup> addressing what a pastoral response to CSA grounded in a relational Trinity might entail. Because a theological anthropology of children directly shapes the church's pastoral praxis toward them (Matt. 5:13–16), the discussion proceeds in two movements: first, toward a trinitarian pastoral anthropology of children; second, toward an account of the church as a healing community capable of responding pastorally to CSA.

#### ***Pastoral Anthropology of Children Informed by the Trinity***

How might a relational paradigm of the Trinity inform the theological status accorded to children? Moltmann offers a productive point of entry through the concept of *imago Trinitatis*: because human beings are created in God's image, and that image is irreducibly trinitarian, they are called to enact that relational image within their earthly communities.<sup>246</sup> Moltmann grounds this claim in Jesus's high-priestly prayer “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21, ESV), reading it as a summons into a fellowship with Christ that believers are called to embody in the shape of their communal life. On this account, believers are not merely instructed to imitate the trinitarian relationship from without; they are constituted within it.<sup>247,248</sup>

This theological claim carries direct implications for the status of children. Ecclesial practice too often implies, whether explicitly or through neglect, that children bear an inferior image relative to adults—an implication that a trinitarian anthropology cannot sustain. Both children and adults are created in the singular image and likeness of the Triune God (Gen. 1:26; 2:7), and Moltmann resists any reduction of the *imago Dei* to a mandate for dominion over creation, insisting instead that it extends to *imago Trinitatis*: the relationality of Father, Son, and Spirit “represented in the fundamental human

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<sup>244</sup> James R. Cochrane, John de Gruchy, and Robin Petersen, *In Word and Deed: Towards a Practical Theology for Social Transformation* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1991).

<sup>245</sup> Cochrane, de Gruchy, and Petersen, *In Word and Deed*.

<sup>246</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1985).

<sup>247</sup> Mark S. Medley, *Imago Trinitatis: Toward a Relational Understanding of Becoming Human* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002).

<sup>248</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation*.

communities and manifested in them through creation and redemption.”<sup>249</sup> It follows that “if the whole human being is designated the image of God, then true human community – the community of the sexes and the community of the generations – has the same designation.”<sup>250</sup> Read against this claim, the residual notion of ‘rule’ within some interpretations of the *imago Dei* helps to explain the persistence of dominative power over those judged inferior, including children, and correspondingly the difficulty of cultivating a relational space for all creation analogous to that within the Trinity itself. The faith community, called by the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit into a fellowship that LaCugna describes as one of “primacy of equals,”<sup>251</sup> is thus properly a community of persons who share, without remainder, in the one image of God – a community whose vocation is to construct relational spaces of safety for all its members, including its most marginalised and vulnerable.<sup>252,253</sup>

Dillen's work on relational anthropology offers a further resource for integrating this trinitarian claim into a workable theology of childhood.<sup>254</sup> Dillen identifies two dominant paradigms in the literature on children – a ‘liberationist’ emphasis on child participation and a ‘care’ emphasis on child protection – and argues that these need not stand in opposition but can be held together within a relational anthropology that places “the dignity of both the child and the parent centrally,” viewing them as “interconnected in a relation of give and take from the beginning.”<sup>255</sup> This interconnected mutuality mirrors the communion internal to the Trinity, and Dillen grounds it theologically in a doctrine of creation as an “interconnected web of relationships” rather than “a fixed hierarchical ordering” in which persons occupy a static ontological rank.<sup>256</sup> The resulting model is one of asymmetry rather than hierarchy: adult and child occupy different positions and differing configurations of power, yet both retain equal dignity within their interconnected relational space. Children thereby enter the pastoral relationship as both vulnerable and agentive – capable of giving as well as receiving. As Dillen concludes, honouring both the asymmetry of the relationship and its capacity to shift in balance over time, together with the underlying mutuality of giving and receiving, is essential to respecting the dignity of both parties in parent-child and pastoral relationships alike – a

<sup>249</sup> Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*.

<sup>250</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation*.

<sup>251</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1991).

<sup>252</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1994).

<sup>253</sup> Dirk J. Smit, “Trinity, History – and Discernment?” *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 53, nos. 3–4 (2012): 337–352, <https://doi.org/10.5952/53-3-4-273>. (NGTT)

<sup>254</sup> Annemie Dillen, “Can Parents and Children Be Friends? A Relational-Theological Exploration of the Asymmetry and Mutuality Between Parents and Children,” *Journal of Empirical Theology* 24 (2011): 199–216.

<sup>255</sup> Dillen, “Can Parents and Children Be Friends?” 199–216.

<sup>256</sup> Dillen, “Can Parents and Children Be Friends?” 199–216.

formulation that closely mirrors the asymmetry-within-mutuality that characterises a relational Trinity.<sup>257</sup>

Moltmann's account of trinitarian personhood reinforces this claim: because the Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and the Spirit within both, "each Person receives the fullness of eternal life from the other."<sup>258</sup> Each divine person, in other words, exists in orientation toward the flourishing of the others – a pattern closely allied to the African relational maxim of *Ubuntu*, "I am because of you." Read alongside Moltmann's subsequent account of "friendship in freedom"<sup>259</sup> as the epitome of humanity's liberating relationship with God, this suggests that children should be understood not merely as objects of adult protection but as full participants in the community of friends constituted by Christ, entitled to experience that friendship in freedom.<sup>260</sup> Bunge, drawing on Psalm 127:3 – "Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him" – extends this claim by insisting that children are simultaneously bearers of the divine image and gifts entrusted to families and societies, a dual status that calls for an environment in which children and adults hold one another in mutual respect and delight.<sup>261</sup>

Altogether, these resources yield a pastoral anthropology in which children are understood as bearers of the same imago Trinitatis borne by adults, entitled to the same dignity and respect accorded to any person created in that image. While adults retain a God-given responsibility to guide and nurture children toward spiritual maturity, this responsibility confers no ontological superiority within the body of Christ; indeed, children are elsewhere presented in Scripture as models of faith from whom adults themselves have something to learn. Such an anthropology supplies a compelling theological rationale for building faith communities in which every member is accorded a dignity rooted in the image of the Triune God – communities within which power is correspondingly more likely to be exercised in life-giving ways among persons of equal worth. Because pastoral care is, at its root, a communal undertaking in which the whole community cares for its members and extends that care outward to the wider society, holding fast to this anthropology is indispensable to eliminating the abuse and dehumanisation of children within Ghanaian society.

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<sup>257</sup> Dillen, "Can Parents and Children Be Friends?" 199–216.

<sup>258</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*.

<sup>259</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>260</sup> Manitza Kotze and Carike Noeth, "Friendship as a Theological Model: Bonhoeffer, Moltmann and the Trinity," *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 53, no. 1 (2019): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v53i1.2333>.

<sup>261</sup> Marcia J. Bunge, "Child, Children," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

### *The Church as a Healing Community for CSA*

A community, minimally defined, is a group bound by shared cultural norms, values, and often geographical proximity. Within Ghana, as elsewhere in Africa, children are characteristically understood in relation to family and community rather than as isolated individuals, and the raising of children is correspondingly conceived as a properly communal task. This orientation toward connectedness and collective unity is expressed across the continent through concepts such as Ubuntu among Zulu-speaking communities of southern Africa and *biakoye* among the Akan of Ghana – both naming an African worldview of humanness inseparable from collective life.<sup>262</sup> Capturing Ubuntu as the idea of living up to the full human potential is a potential this article locates theologically in relationship with the Triune God, in whose image and likeness humanity is created. Mbigbi and Maree similarly describe Ubuntu as “collective unity for survival in the face of deprivation and poverty,”<sup>263</sup> while Mbiti captures the same emphasis when he observes that in traditional African life “the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporate... the community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for the individual to depend on the corporate group.”<sup>264</sup>

A healing community, on this account, is one in which such relational mutuality is fully realised. Lartey situates the pursuit of healthy, dignity-affirming communities within the broader project of postcolonial pastoral care, arguing for creativity, innovation, and improvisation grounded in indigenous African communitarian ethics as the basis for a pastoral care and healing that extends beyond the individual to the whole community, undertaken by the whole community.<sup>265</sup> It should be stressed, however, that communal life in Ghana is not automatically life-affirming; instances of violence and injustice persist within African communities notwithstanding their communal ethos. What determines whether a given community is life-giving is therefore not communalism as such but the specific character and internal structure of that community's relationality – and it is precisely here that a relational Trinity offers a thicker theological foundation for shaping faith communities toward the promotion of healing and well-being for all their members, including children.

A healing community, so conceived, is one in which children and adults inhabit a relational space rooted in the trinitarian primacy of equals rather than the primacy of one member over another – a space in which every member feels safe and at ease in the

<sup>262</sup> Kpalam, “Applying Integrated Theology.”

<sup>263</sup> Lovemore Mbigi and Jenny Maree, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management* (Randburg, South Africa: Knowledge Resources, 1995), 78.

<sup>264</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990).

<sup>265</sup> Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013).

presence of others.<sup>266,267</sup> It is simultaneously a community of mutual care, in which wounded members both receive and extend healing, and in which human dignity is upheld across all its relationships.<sup>268</sup> Structures built along such trinitarian parallels stand in explicit contrast to structures organised around domination and dehumanisation, which Moltmann treats as fundamentally foreign to the participatory life internal to the Trinity. How, then, might the church become such a healing community for children who have survived sexual abuse? Smit describes the faith community as an interpersonal organism committed to the restoration of relationship both with God and among its members, observing that the New Testament contains roughly ninety-six 'one another' texts that give this commitment concrete ethical content.<sup>269</sup> The church, on this reading, is an extension of the covenant of peace accomplished through Christ in the power of the Spirit—a community fashioned, in Pembroke's phrase, on parallels of the relationality that stands at the centre of trinitarian doctrine.<sup>270</sup> The resulting theological structure is triadic: a community (the Trinity) ministers healing through a community (the church) to a community (the world), such that the Triune God brings healing to abused children specifically through the mediating agency of a community of believers living in healthy relationship with one another. This theological logic grounds the practical pastoral care strategies developed in the section that follows.

### **Practical Pastoral Care Strategies for Ghanaian Churches**

Pastoral care, understood as God's caring activity enacted through human communities, can be conceptualised in relation to CSA as comprising both proactive strategies aimed at preventing abuse and reactive strategies aimed at responding once abuse has occurred.<sup>271</sup> On the basis of the preceding theological analysis, six mutually reinforcing strategies are proposed for churches operating within the Ghanaian context. First, churches should adopt contextual, child-centred theological frameworks that explicitly affirm children as bearers of the image of the Triune God. Kpalam rightly observes that without a clear theological vision of children, faith communities cannot reform the spirituality and praxis needed to respond holistically to children's needs; such a

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<sup>266</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

<sup>267</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>268</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>269</sup> Smit, "The One and the Many," 11–12.

<sup>270</sup> Neil Pembroke, *The Art of Listening: Dialogue, Shame, and Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>271</sup> Lartey, *Pastoral Theology*.

framework is a precondition for challenging the socio-cultural and ecclesial practices that dehumanise children and thereby enable abuse.<sup>272</sup>

Second, faith communities should develop and implement formal child protection policies that establish clear safeguarding procedures, accountability mechanisms, and sanctions for perpetrators. The Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560) obliges all institutions to act in the best interests of children and to institute pragmatic protective measures; given the documented prevalence of CSA in Ghana, churches are correspondingly well placed to integrate child protection into pastoral ministry through intercessory prayer with and for children, advocacy against harmful socio-cultural norms, and the deliberate promotion of children's participation in their own protection.

Third, training church leaders in child protection should be an explicit component of pastoral strategy. Leaders require formation not only in the theological conviction that protecting vulnerable children flows directly from belief in the Triune God, but also in the practical scope of child abuse within their communities, in relevant national law and policy, and in appropriate reporting protocols—training that equips them for effective pastoral ministry of protection rather than inadvertent complicity through silence or ignorance.

Fourth, churches should embed advocacy within their pastoral care strategy, extending beyond general awareness-raising to sustained prophetic engagement with the cultural, social, and institutional practices that place children at risk. Sermons, Bible study groups, community forums, and public campaigns can each be deployed to challenge norms that enforce silence around sexual abuse and heighten children's vulnerability, while church leaders can advocate directly for the enforcement of child protection law, support survivors and their families, and collaborate with schools, traditional authorities, and community leaders to build child-safe environments. Fifth, churches should actively empower children as agents in their own protection, equipping them with age-appropriate knowledge and skills to recognise, resist, and report abuse—a strategy consonant with the theological claim, developed above, that children are participants and not merely objects within the pastoral relationship.<sup>273</sup> Sixth, and finally, churches should pursue strategic partnerships with state agencies and specialist child protection organisations—including, in Ghana, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service, the Department of Children, and the Department of Social Welfare—to secure a coordinated, multisectoral response to CSA. Effective ecclesial

<sup>272</sup> Ebenezer T. Kpalam, "A Pastoral Response to Child Sexual Abuse in Ghana: An Interdisciplinary Study Informed by a Relational View of the Trinity" (PhD diss., North-West University, South Africa, 2021).

<sup>273</sup> Annemie Dillen, "Can Parents and Children Be Friends? A Relational-Theological Exploration of the Asymmetry and Mutuality Between Parents and Children," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 24 (2011): 199–216.

safeguarding, in other words, cannot be pursued in isolation from the wider protective architecture of the state.

### **Conclusion and Implications for Pastoral Practice**

This article has argued that a pastoral response to CSA within Ghanaian faith communities should be rooted in the theological conviction that the Trinity ministers healing to sexually abused children through a community of believers living in and through healthy relationship. Relationality, as the central motif of trinitarian doctrine, ought correspondingly to constitute the defining mark of this community; the healthy relationships cultivated within it, and extended outward to a hurting world, become the medium through which the brokenness occasioned by CSA is addressed. Faith communities in Ghana are accordingly invited to understand themselves as healing communities—a new community created by the Father through the Son to live in the power of the Spirit, and thereby drawn into participation in the trinitarian life itself, becoming a community of compassionate believers through whom the Triune God brings healing, restoration, and peace to a hurting world. On this account, the church is not merely an institution but a community of believers called to a mode of life consistent with the nature, will, and purpose of the Trinity.

It is recommended, first, that faith communities in Ghana, working from this relational understanding of the Trinity, develop their own contextual child theologies and child protection policies capable of informing concrete programmes and interventions aimed at bringing healing to children who have suffered abuse and dehumanisation, both within faith communities and in the wider society. Second, further empirical research is recommended into the specific structures, policies, and programmes that different church denominations across diverse Ghanaian communities have developed, or have yet to develop, in response to CSA—research that would allow the theological framework advanced here to be tested against, and refined by, the concrete practice of Ghanaian churches.

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## Christian Discipleship and Workplace Ethics in Ghana: Bridging the Gap between Faith and Professional Practice

Samuel Nana Yaw Agyei, Marius Nel, Michael Kumaglo

### Abstract

Although Christianity is the most widely accepted faith in Ghana, workplace issues such as bribery, favouritism, dishonest reporting, and abuse of power persist. This qualitative descriptive study examined how Christians in Accra apply biblical principles in the workplace, the factors shaping their choices, and the church's role in bridging the gap between belief and practice. During in-person workplace recruitment, forty (40) participants completed an online questionnaire, and ten (10) took part in in-person semi-structured interviews in Adenta, Kwabenya, Dome, and Spintex. A reflexive thematic analysis found that participants viewed faith as a moral compass expressed in courage, honesty, diligence, and accountability. However, peer pressure, economic vulnerability, normalised wrongdoing, and fear of losing one's job can lead to retreat or compromise. Of the sample, 64% were Pentecostal and charismatic Christians. The study establishes a Pentecostal workplace ethic centred on Spirit-empowered character, vocation, communal accountability, and public testimony. It also reveals a discipleship gap arising from the interplay of personal formation, ecclesial support, and workplace norms.

**Keywords:** Christian ethics, Discipleship, Ghanaian Christianity, Pentecostal theology, Workplace ethics

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### Introduction

Ghana presents a striking moral and theological tension. The 2021 Population and Housing Census reports that 71.3% of the population identifies as Christian, yet public debate continues to associate workplaces and public institutions with bribery, favouritism, dishonest reporting and abuse of office.<sup>274</sup> Recent Ghanaian scholarship has

<sup>274</sup> Ghana Statistical Service, *2021 Population and Housing Census: General Report Volume 3C – Background Characteristics* (Accra: Ghana Statistical Service, 2021); I. Norman, "Exploring Work Ethic in Ghana," *European Journal of Development Studies* 3, no. 2 (2023): 23–37, <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejdevelop.2023.3.2.232>; J. Haynes, "Religion, Morality, and Democracy in Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 55, no. 1 (2024): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1570066612340300>.

therefore questioned why a highly visible Christian presence has not consistently produced a correspondingly distinctive public ethic.<sup>275</sup>

The issue is especially important for Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, which constitutes the largest denominational grouping in this study and a major force in Ghanaian public life. Pentecostal theology understands encounter with the Holy Spirit as transformative and expects belief, affection and practice to be held together.<sup>276</sup> Consequently, integrity at work is not an optional application of faith but one arena in which sanctification, Spirit-empowered witness and service to the common good should become visible.

Christian ethical formation is also communal and vocational. Hauerwas argues that Christian character is learned within a community whose practices train people to perceive and act faithfully, while Volf locates work within the creative and renewing activity of the Spirit.<sup>277</sup> These perspectives shift the question from whether Christians know moral rules to whether churches form the character, discernment, and courage required to embody those commitments under institutional pressure.

This study investigates how Christians in Accra interpret and apply biblical ethics in their workplaces, the pressures that shape their decisions, and the role churches play in preparing them for professional life. By placing participant accounts in dialogue with Christian virtue ethics, theology of work, and Pentecostal pneumatology, the paper develops an interpretive account of workplace discipleship and public testimony grounded in this purposive Accra sample.

### **Research Problem and Rationale**

The persistence of unethical workplace practices among professing Christians is more than a sociological inconsistency; it is a theological problem of formation and witness. If discipleship concerns participation in the life of Christ through the Spirit, its fruits should extend beyond worship services into decisions about money, authority, truthfulness, time, and responsibility. The disjunction between religious identity and professional

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<sup>275</sup> J. K. Antwi, "'Kakistocracy': An Ethical Challenge to Christian Character Formation in Ghana," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 10, no. 1 (2024): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.20241011>; A. O. Agbenu, J. K. Opoku, and J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Christian Religiosity and Corruption in Ghana: A Case Study of Selected Churches in Hohoe Municipality," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 6, no. 8 (2025): 1733–45, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20256833>.

<sup>276</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, "Pentecostal Theology," *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, 2023, accessed August 15, 2026, <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/PentecostalTheology>.

<sup>277</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

conduct therefore raises questions about how effectively churches connect Spirit-filled spirituality with public and vocational ethics.

Recent studies sharpen this concern. Antwi describes Ghana's moral crisis as a challenge to Christian character formation. At the same time, Gakpetor identifies a sacred-secular divide and insufficiently intentional disciple-making as impediments to a positive work ethic. Agbenu Opoku and Kuwornu-Adjaottor likewise report a contradictory relationship between high Christian religiosity and corruption.<sup>278</sup> Yet these accounts can become overly individualising if they do not consider the institutional pressures described by workers, including fear of job loss, peer conformity, economic vulnerability and normalised misconduct.

A further gap concerns Pentecostal theological interpretation. Existing Ghanaian discussions often document corruption or criticise prosperity preaching, but give less attention to how Spirit-empowerment, sanctification, ecclesial accountability and *missio Dei* might be brought together as resources for workplace ethics. Empirical attention is also needed to how Christians themselves interpret compromise, resistance and church support. This study addresses these gaps by examining lived accounts from Christians recruited through workplaces in four Accra locations.

## Research Objectives

1. To examine how Ghanaian Christians interpret and apply biblical teachings on ethics in their professional lives.
2. To investigate the ethical challenges Christian professionals encounter in the workplace and how they respond.
3. To identify practical ways churches can strengthen ethical discipleship among working Christians.
4. To develop a contextually grounded Pentecostal account of workplace ethics from the empirical findings.

## Literature Review and Theoretical Context

### *Christian Ethics, Character and Vocation*

Christian workplace ethics cannot be established merely by listing biblical texts. It requires an account of how Scripture is interpreted within the Christian story and embodied through practices that form character. Romans 12:1–2 presents moral transformation as the renewal of the mind; James 1:22 rejects hearing that is detached

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<sup>278</sup> Antwi, "'Kakistocracy,'" 1–13; Samuel Kodzo Gakpetor, "An Evaluation of the Impact of Disciple-Making on the Work Ethic of Ghanaian Christians: A Case Study of the Church of Pentecost-Ghana," *Pentecost Journal of Theology and Mission* 5, no. 2 (2025): 36–46, <https://doi.org/10.62868/pjtm.v5i2.206>; Agbenu, Opoku, and Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Christian Religiosity and Corruption," 1733–45.

from action; Galatians 5:22–25 names virtues associated with life in the Spirit; and Colossians 3:23 frames work as service rendered to the Lord. Read together, these texts connect worship, character and ordinary labour rather than treating professional life as morally neutral.

Hauerwas locates Christian ethics in the formation of a community of character: virtues become durable when they are narrated, practised and sustained communally. Wright similarly situates the ethical life within the mission of God's people, while Volf argues that work participates in the Spirit's renewing activity and should be assessed by its contribution to human flourishing and the new creation.<sup>279</sup> The workplace is therefore a site of vocation, neighbour-love and public responsibility, not simply a place where private morality is tested.

### **Discipleship as Embodied and Spirit-enabled Formation**

Bonhoeffer's account of costly discipleship emphasises obedience that becomes concrete in daily decisions. Contemporary Pentecostal theology adds a pneumatological dimension: experience of the Spirit is expected to move from testimony and affection into Christ-like practice.<sup>280</sup> Sanctification, on this account, includes the Spirit's formation of truthful, just, courageous and accountable persons whose conduct bears public witness to Christ.

This link between spirituality and character is not automatic. Pentecostal practices such as prayer, testimony, prophecy and spiritual gifts can nurture moral discernment, but they may also remain compartmentalised if churches do not connect them to economic, institutional and professional realities. Antwi consequently calls for the reconstruction of Christian character formation in Ghana, arguing that the church's nurturing ministry must prepare believers to respond faithfully to changing political, social and cultural pressures.<sup>281</sup>

### **Faith and Work Integration**

Faith-work scholarship distinguishes simple religious identification from substantive integration. Ewest argues that Christian identity can ground workplace ethics when it shapes decision-making and responsibility, while Volf resists a sacred-secular division that confines Christian vocation to explicitly religious activity.<sup>282</sup> Integration therefore involves more than prayer at work or the use of Christian language; it concerns how faith

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<sup>279</sup> Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*; Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010); Volf, *Work in the Spirit*.

<sup>280</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959); Vondey, "Pentecostal Theology."

<sup>281</sup> Antwi, "'Kakistocracy,'" 1–13.

<sup>282</sup> T. Ewest, "Christian Identity as Primary Foundation to Workplace Ethics," *Religions* 2015, no. 1 (2015): 22–30, <https://doi.org/10.5339/rels.2015.work.12>; Volf, *Work in the Spirit*.

informs professional competence, relationships, the use of power and responses to organisational wrongdoing.

In Ghana, Gakpetor's study of disciple-making and work ethic in the Church of Pentecost identifies a persistent sacred-secular dichotomy, insufficiently intentional discipleship, and the negative effects of some church and cultural practices. The study also points to workplace guilds and mentoring structures as practical resources.<sup>283</sup> This current debate suggests that the key question is not whether churches influence work, but what forms of ecclesial practice help believers convert doctrine and spiritual experience into professional integrity.

### **Ghanaian Pentecostalism and Public Ethics**

Recent Ghanaian studies portray a complex relationship between religion and public morality. Haynes documents continuing debate over Christianity, integrity, and national development, while Agbenu Opoku and Kuwornu-Adjaottor find that high religiosity can coexist with participation in corruption. Boaheng responds constructively by developing a Christological account of servant leadership for Ghana's public life.<sup>284</sup> Together, these studies show that religious visibility alone cannot be treated as evidence of ethical transformation.

Pentecostal and Charismatic churches should not, however, be described only through failure or prosperity excess. Kenin demonstrates how Ghanaian Pentecostal theology and institutions can mobilise resources for sustainable development and the common good. At the same time, Agyinasare shows that charismatic authority requires ethical safeguards, transparency, and accountability if Pentecostal ministry is to retain credibility.<sup>285</sup> The tension between transformative institutional capacity and weak ethical formation is therefore central to the present study.

### **Research Gap and Contribution**

The current literature establishes the Ghanaian paradox of strong religiosity alongside public ethical concern, but three gaps remain. First, workers' accounts of how faith, workplace pressure, and church support interact are still limited. Second, studies of

<sup>283</sup> Gakpetor, "Evaluation of the Impact of Disciple-Making," 36–46.

<sup>284</sup> Haynes, "Religion, Morality, and Democracy," 1–26; Agbenu, Opoku, and Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Christian Religiosity and Corruption," 1733–45; I. Boaheng, "A Political Theology for the Ghanaian Context from Christ's Perspective," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45, no. 1 (2024): a2982, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.2982>.

<sup>285</sup> E. A. Kenin, "'Bring the Whole Tithe into the Storehouse': The Tithe and Sustainable Development in Ghanaian Pentecostalism," *African Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1, no. 1 (2024): a22, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajops.v1i1.22>; C. Agyinasare, "Healing Ministry and Ethical Issues amongst Pentecostal Ministries in Ghana," *African Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3, no. 1 (2025): a115, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajops.v3i1.115>.

workplace ethics rarely develop a specifically Pentecostal theological interpretation, even though Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians form a substantial part of Ghana's Christian population. Third, the 'discipleship gap' is often used descriptively without specifying the formative mechanisms that connect belief to conduct. This article addresses these gaps by combining qualitative evidence from Accra workplaces with a framework of Spirit-enabled character, ecclesial formation, vocational responsibility, and public witness.

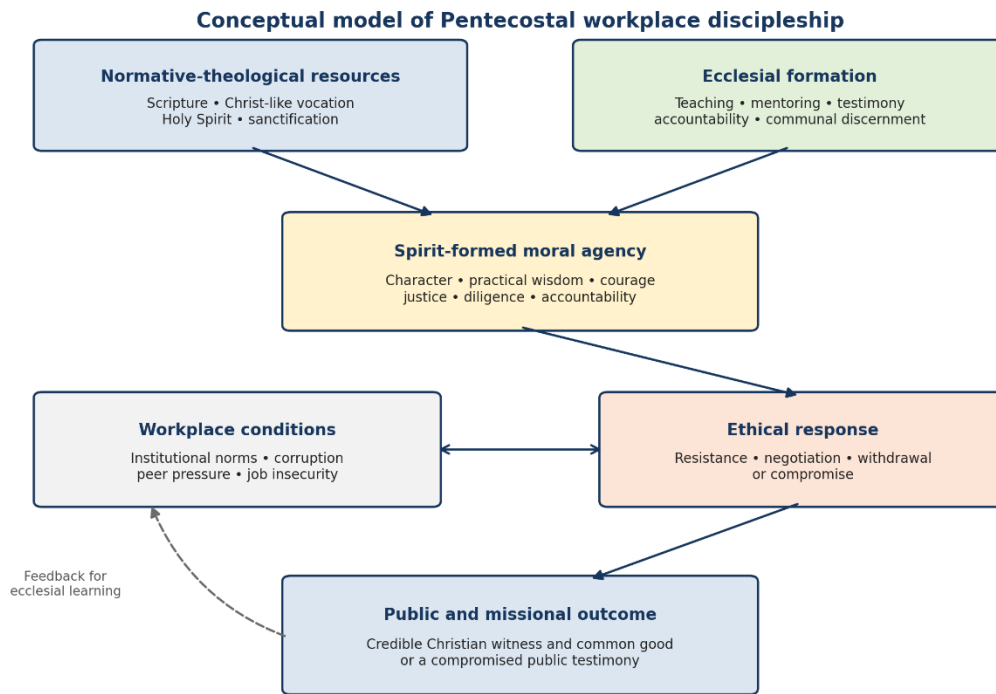
### **Conceptual Framework**

The framework integrates four bodies of thought: Christian virtue and character formation, theology of work and vocation, the missional identity of God's people, and Pentecostal theology as an experiential movement from encounter with the Spirit to embodied practice.<sup>286</sup> Scripture functions here not as an isolated list of moral proof-texts but as the normative Christian narrative through which work, character and public responsibility are interpreted.

As Figure 1 shows, biblical and Pentecostal theological resources work together with ecclesial practices such as teaching, mentoring, testimony and accountability to form moral agency. This agency includes character, practical wisdom, courage, justice, diligence and accountability. Workplace conditions—including institutional norms, corruption, peer pressure and job insecurity—interact with that agency and shape responses ranging from principled resistance and negotiation to withdrawal or compromise. The resulting conduct either strengthens credible Christian witness and the common good or produces a compromised public testimony. Workplace outcomes also provide feedback that churches can use to refine discipleship and support.

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<sup>286</sup> Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*; Volf, *Work in the Spirit*; Wright, *The Mission of God's People*; Vondey, "Pentecostal Theology."



**Figure 1:** *Conceptual Framework for Pentecostal Workplace Discipline.* Source: Authors, 2026

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive design to explore how Ghanaian Christians understand and negotiate workplace ethics. This design was appropriate because the research questions concerned meanings, experiences, and moral reasoning rather than prevalence, causal effects, or statistical generalisation. The study used two complementary sources of qualitative text: an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured individual interviews. Frequencies and percentages are reported only to describe the composition of the sample; they do not constitute a separate quantitative analytic strand.

### Study Setting, Population and Recruitment

Participants were recruited through workplaces in Accra, Ghana, particularly in Adenta, Kwabenya, Dome, and Spintex. These locations include residential, commercial, and mixed-use areas and enabled the study to reach Christians working in education, healthcare, finance, the civil service, business, ministry, and technical fields. Purposive recruitment was used to obtain variation in profession, age, gender, denomination, and church involvement rather than to produce a statistically representative sample.

The final sample comprised 50 participants. Denominationally, 15 were Pentecostal and 17 were Charismatic, giving a combined Pentecostal/Charismatic representation of 32 participants (64%). The remaining participants were Methodist (n=5), Baptist (n=3), Anglican (n=4) and Presbyterian (n=6). Participants also varied in church attendance and length of church membership, as summarised in Table 1.

### *Eligibility and Exclusion Criteria*

To be included, participants had to be at least 18 years old, self-identify as Christian, and provide informed consent. Individuals younger than 18, those who did not identify as Christian, and those who did not consent were excluded. Although recruitment focused on workplaces, the sample included workers and a small number of students. The available records do not establish that every student had prior employment or internship experience; consequently, student accounts cannot automatically be treated as evidence of lived workplace experience and are interpreted cautiously.

### *Data Collection*

Data collection took place in 2025. Forty participants completed an open-ended questionnaire hosted on Google Forms. The questions invited narrative responses concerning the meaning of Christian ethics, experiences of ethical pressure, responses to workplace dilemmas, and perceptions of church teaching and support.

A separate group of ten participants took part in face-to-face semi-structured individual interviews. The interview guide covered the same domains as the questionnaire but allowed follow-up questions, clarification, and fuller accounts of sensitive experiences such as bribery, favouritism, dishonest reporting, and fear of employment consequences. Participants contributed through one method only.

### *Data Analysis*

Google Forms responses were exported as textual data. Interview material was prepared for analysis in a consistent textual form, although the available records do not provide sufficient detail to establish whether every interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Both datasets were retained with source identifiers and analysed together using reflexive thematic analysis. Following Braun and Clarke, the process involved familiarisation, initial coding, developing candidate themes, reviewing themes against the dataset, defining and naming themes, and producing the analytic account.<sup>287</sup> Attention was given to convergence and variation across the two data sources. The final

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<sup>287</sup> Braun, V., and V. Clarke. "Conceptual and Design Thinking for Thematic Analysis." *Qualitative Psychology* 9, no. 1 (2022): 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qap0000196>.

themes included faith as a moral compass, ethical pressure and moral tension, responses to compromise, ecclesial support, and the discipleship gap.

### *Trustworthiness and Reflexivity*

Credibility was supported by drawing on two forms of qualitative data, retaining a clear link between themes and participant extracts, and preserving accounts that complicated the dominant pattern—for example, positive reports of integrity-focused preaching alongside criticism of prosperity-centred teaching. Analytic decisions and theme development were discussed among the authors, and participant codes were used to maintain an audit trail between the interpretation and the underlying accounts. No formal member-checking exercise was conducted.

The research team's familiarity with Christian and theological discourse helped them recognise the significance of participants' scriptural and spiritual language, but it also created a risk of interpreting accounts through prior expectations about discipleship and moral failure. Reflexive attention was therefore given to distinguishing participants' claims from the authors' theological interpretation, considering contradictory cases and avoiding the assumption that religious commitment necessarily produces ethical behaviour.<sup>288</sup>

### *Ethical Considerations*

Formal institutional ethical clearance was not obtained for this independent study. Before participation, each participant received an explanation of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to decline or withdraw, and the intended use of the responses. Informed consent was obtained, participant codes were assigned, and the names of workplaces and churches were omitted from the report. These measures protected consent and confidentiality but do not substitute for independent ethical review; the absence of such review is therefore treated as a procedural limitation.

### *Analysis/Findings*

Table 1 describes the 50 participants; the frequencies and percentages are used only to make the qualitative sample transparent. Twenty-seven participants were male (54%), and 23 were female (46%). Participants were aged 22–60, with the largest group aged 31–40 (n=18; 36%).

Twenty-eight participants (56%) reported more than ten years of church membership, while 39 (78%) attended church at least once each week. These characteristics indicate

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<sup>288</sup> F. M. Olmos-Vega, R. E. Stalmeijer, L. Varpio, and R. Kahlke, "A Practical Guide to Reflexivity in Qualitative Research: AMEE Guide No. 149," *Medical Teacher* 45, no. 3 (2023): 241–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2022.2057287>.

substantial exposure to church life, but they should not be treated as evidence that any participant's account was more credible than another's.

Pentecostal (n=15; 30%) and Charismatic (n=17; 34%) participants together comprised 64% of the sample. Mainline traditions were also represented: Methodist (n=5), Baptist (n=3), Anglican (n=4), and Presbyterian (n=6). The distribution supports a Pentecostal theological interpretation of the findings but not a statistically reliable comparison among denominations.

The sample included participants from education, healthcare, finance, the civil service, business, ministry, and technical fields, alongside a small number of students. Church involvement ranged from regular membership to roles such as youth leader, elder, deacon, pastor, choir member and usher. This variation enabled the study to examine how workplace ethics were narrated across different professional and ecclesial positions, while the students' potentially more limited workplace exposure is treated as a sampling limitation.

*Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants*

| <b>Variable</b>       | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Per cent (%)</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Gender                |                  |                     |
| Male                  | 27               | 54%                 |
| Female                | 23               | 46%                 |
| Age                   |                  |                     |
| 22-30                 | 12               | 24%                 |
| 31-40                 | 18               | 36%                 |
| 41-50                 | 12               | 24%                 |
| 51-60                 | 8                | 16%                 |
| Years in Church       |                  |                     |
| 1-5                   | 10               | 20%                 |
| 6-10                  | 12               | 24%                 |
| 10 and above          | 28               | 56%                 |
| Denomination          |                  |                     |
| Pentecostal           | 15               | 30%                 |
| Methodist             | 5                | 10%                 |
| Charismatic           | 17               | 34%                 |
| Baptist               | 3                | 6%                  |
| Anglican              | 4                | 8%                  |
| Presbyterian          | 6                | 12%                 |
| Church Attendance     |                  |                     |
| More than once a week | 17               | 34%                 |
| Once a week           | 22               | 44%                 |
| Once or twice a month | 7                | 14%                 |
| Occasionally          | 4                | 8%                  |
| Total                 | <b>50</b>        | <b>100</b>          |

*Source: Authors' qualitative fieldwork, 2025.*

The participant profile should be read as contextual information rather than as statistical evidence. The analysis that follows is based on the meanings, experiences, and patterns expressed in the open-ended responses and interviews.

### **How Ghanaian Christians interpret and apply biblical teachings on ethics in their professional lives**

The narratives revealed that for many Ghanaian Christians, faith is not only a personal conviction but also a guiding principle for their professional responsibilities. Respondents consistently emphasised values such as honesty, integrity, hard work, and accountability as the outworking of discipleship in daily life. Several linked their approach to *Colossians 3:23*, which calls believers to work “as unto the Lord.”

One participant, a teacher with over ten years’ experience, remarked:

I see my Christian faith as the foundation of my work life. It reminds me to be honest, punctual, and respectful even when others cut corners. Sometimes colleagues laugh at me for being too strict, but I know I represent Christ. (P12)

For others, faith gave their work a sense of sacred meaning. A banker explained:

For me, work is part of my worship. Whatever I do, I try to do it wholeheartedly, knowing that I serve Christ through my job. Even when the environment is corrupt, I want my work to reflect my faith. (P27)

These voices highlight the centrality of biblical teachings in shaping how believers interpret their responsibilities. Yet this ideal was not always easy to uphold. A civil servant confessed to the tension between faith and workplace culture:

My faith sometimes conflicts with my work environment, especially when colleagues expect me to take shortcuts. If I refuse, they say I am proud or too rigid. But I still try to live differently to show Christ. (P7)

This tension shows that while respondents affirm biblical ethics, applying them consistently requires courage, resilience, and often, a willingness to face ridicule or exclusion. Nevertheless, their testimonies reflect a deep conviction that faith and work are inseparable, and that discipleship must be visible in professional life.

### **The Ethical Challenges Christian Professionals Face in the Workplace and their Responses**

The data revealed a wide range of ethical challenges that Christians confront in their professional lives. The most prominent among these were bribery, nepotism, dishonesty in reporting, misuse of time, and peer pressure.

A nurse lamented the expectation of informal payments in healthcare:

Bribery is a big challenge. Patients and their families expect that if they give 'something small,' they will be attended to quickly. I resist it, but some colleagues see me as foolish for refusing. (P3)

A civil servant highlighted the prevalence of favouritism:

Nepotism is common. At times, I am asked to give favours to relatives of my boss. If I refuse, it may affect my appraisal, but if I agree, I know I have failed my Christian witness. (P18)

Dishonesty in reporting was also identified as a recurring dilemma. A teacher shared:

The most common dilemma is when I am pressured to alter records to favour someone. I usually refuse, even though it makes me unpopular among my superiors. (P32)

Peer pressure, especially among younger workers, emerged strongly. A recent graduate working in the banking sector admitted:

Peer pressure is strong, especially when everyone around me is doing the wrong thing. If I refuse, I feel isolated. Sometimes I pray silently at my desk just to have courage. (P21)

When it came to responses, participants described three dominant strategies: **resisting through prayer and conviction, silent withdrawal from unethical practices, or occasional compromise with guilt.**

One engineer testified:

Financial pressure tempts me to accept bribes, but I resist by praying and remembering that God provides. I remind myself that my integrity is worth more than quick money. (P14)

Yet others admitted moments of weakness. A banker explained:

Yes, I once signed a document I knew was false because I feared losing my job. I could not sleep well afterwards, and I prayed for forgiveness. That moment showed me how fragile my faith can be under pressure. (P25)

These accounts reveal a recurring pattern of moral tension: believers aspire to uphold biblical ethics but often find themselves caught between faithfulness to Christ and the pragmatic demands of workplace survival.

### **Practical Ways the Church can Strengthen Ethical Discipleship among Working Christians**

A striking insight from the study is the perceived gap between church teaching and the ethical realities of the workplace. Some respondents recalled sermons on honesty and

integrity, whereas others described church teaching as too general or insufficiently attentive to professional ethics. The accounts therefore indicate substantial concern about workplace discipleship, but the qualitative design does not support a prevalence claim about what most churches teach.

One participant noted:

Yes, my church sometimes preaches about honesty, but it is usually general. We hear more about sowing seeds and prosperity than about how to live ethically in the office. (P29)

Another participant shared a more positive experience:

In my church, ethical living is preached, and testimonies are given of people who refused bribes or stood for truth. That inspires me to hold on to my values. (P6)

Despite these mixed experiences, participants were clear on what could be done to bridge the gap. They suggested that churches introduce practical discipleship models tailored to the workplace. Key recommendations included: organising seminars and workshops on workplace ethics, creating mentorship programs linking younger professionals with experienced Christians, establishing accountability groups where members share challenges and support one another, and shifting preaching and Bible studies to address practical workplace dilemmas alongside spiritual disciplines.

A youth leader advised:

Churches should organise seminars and workshops on workplace ethics. Preaching should address practical issues, not only spiritual disciplines. If we are taught how to live our faith at work, it will be easier to stand firm. (P11)

Respondents also demonstrated a forward-looking vision by advising younger Christians to hold fast to integrity. One Deacon noted:

I would tell younger Christians to hold onto honesty because it builds trust and honours God. Even if it makes them unpopular, their faith will shine through. (P5)

Another remarked:

They should value hard work and avoid shortcuts, knowing that diligence pays off in the long run. (P22)

These insights emphasise that churches have both the responsibility and opportunity to shape ethical discipleship by equipping Christians to navigate real-world challenges faithfully.

## Discussion

### *Faith, Spirit and Moral Agency*

Participants consistently described faith as a moral compass and interpreted honesty, diligence, respect and accountability as visible expressions of discipleship. Their references to prayer, Scripture and working 'as unto the Lord' support Volf's rejection of a sacred-secular division and Gakpetor's argument that Christian work ethic depends upon holistic disciple-making.<sup>289</sup> The accounts also carry a specifically Pentecostal resonance: spiritual practices were described not merely as private devotion but as sources of courage and moral agency within the workplace.

At the same time, the findings expose a tension within Pentecostal formation. Vondey describes Pentecostal theology as a movement from encounter and testimony to affections and embodied practices.<sup>290</sup> In the present study, that movement was evident but incomplete. Participants could articulate a Spirit-shaped moral ideal, yet some struggled to sustain it when confronted by organisational pressure. Spirit-empowerment should therefore not be reduced to religious intensity or charismatic experience; for workplace ethics, it must include sanctification expressed as truthfulness, courage, justice, competence and accountability.

### **Systemic Pressure and Constrained Ethical Agency**

The prevalence of bribery, favouritism, dishonest reporting, misuse of time, and peer pressure broadly agrees with recent Ghanaian discussions of religion and public morality.<sup>291</sup> However, the participants' accounts complicate an interpretation based only on hypocrisy or weak conviction. Fear of job loss, adverse appraisals, exclusion, and financial pressure show that ethical agency is exercised within unequal institutional relationships. The banker who signed a false document and later experienced guilt illustrates not the absence of moral knowledge but the vulnerability of conviction when resistance carries material risk.

This distinction matters theologically. Hauerwas's emphasis on character formation suggests that isolated moral resolve is rarely sufficient; communities must cultivate habits and forms of support capable of sustaining faithful action.<sup>292</sup> The study therefore extends the Ghanaian literature by showing that the discipleship gap is produced through interaction between personal formation and workplace structures. Churches should form courageous agents, but institutions must also reduce the costs of integrity

<sup>289</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*; Gakpetor, "Evaluation of the Impact of Disciple-Making," 36–46.

<sup>290</sup> Vondey, "Pentecostal Theology."

<sup>291</sup> Haynes, "Religion, Morality, and Democracy," 1–26; Agbenu, Opoku, and Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Christian Religiosity and Corruption," 1733–45.

<sup>292</sup> Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*.

through transparent procedures, protected reporting channels, and credible sanctions for misconduct.

### **The Church as a Community of Workplace Formation**

Participants offered a mixed rather than uniformly negative assessment of churches. Some recalled sermons and testimonies that encouraged ethical resistance, while others experienced teaching as general, prosperity-centred or disconnected from professional dilemmas. This pattern closely aligns with Gakpetor, who identifies insufficiently intentional workplace discipleship while also recognising institutional resources such as professional guilds.<sup>293</sup> The present findings add that participants want case-based teaching, mentoring and confidential accountability spaces in which concrete dilemmas can be discussed before a crisis occurs.

The findings should not be read as evidence that Pentecostal churches are inherently indifferent to public ethics. Kenin demonstrates their capacity to mobilise theology, people and resources for social development. The issue is how that capacity is directed. Churches can connect prayer, testimony and the gifts of the Spirit with practical wisdom, professional competence, whistleblowing support and communal discernment. Agyinasare's emphasis on ethical safeguards and accountable charismatic authority reinforces the need for institutional practices, not only exhortations to individual holiness.<sup>294</sup>

### **The Discipleship Gap and a Pentecostal Theology of Workplace Ethics**

The 'discipleship gap' can now be defined more precisely as a misalignment among professed belief, ecclesial formation and conduct under workplace conditions. It is neither only an individual failure nor only a structural problem. The conceptual model developed in this article shows how normative theological resources and church practices form moral agency, how workplace pressures test that agency, and how the resulting conduct either strengthens or weakens Christian public witness.

The findings support a Pentecostal theology of workplace ethics organised around four connected commitments. First, Spirit-empowerment is interpreted as formation into Christ-like character, not only as power for extraordinary experience. Second, work is understood vocationally as service to God, neighbour, and the common good. Third, the church functions as a community of moral formation through teaching, mentoring, testimony, and accountability. Fourth, public witness includes resistance to unjust organisational practices and participation in institutional reform. Together, these commitments interpret workplace integrity as participation in the *missio Dei*: ordinary

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<sup>293</sup> Gakpetor, "Evaluation of the Impact of Disciple-Making," 36–46.

<sup>294</sup> Kenin, "'Bring the Whole Tithe into the Storehouse,'" a22; Agyinasare, "Healing Ministry and Ethical Issues," a115.

professional conduct makes claims about the Spirit's transforming work publicly visible and accountable.

The sample contained 64% Pentecostal/Charismatic participants, making this theological interpretation appropriate to the journal's focus. Nevertheless, the study was not designed for systematic denominational comparison, and the smaller mainline groups do not support robust claims that one tradition behaves differently from another. The contribution is therefore interpretive rather than comparative; future research should sample traditions more evenly and examine denominational differences directly.

### **Limitations**

The study has several limitations. Participants were purposively recruited from four locations in Accra, so the findings cannot be generalised to all Ghanaian Christians or workplaces. Self-report and social-desirability bias are especially relevant because participants were asked to discuss moral conduct and, in some cases, personal compromise. The use of two data-collection formats may also have produced different levels of narrative depth. The sample was uneven across denominations and included a small number of students, limiting denominational and occupational comparison. No formal member checking was undertaken, and the study did not include workplace observation, managers' accounts or institutional documents. Finally, formal institutional ethical review was not obtained; although informed consent and confidentiality procedures were used, this remains an important procedural limitation.

### **Recommendations**

#### ***For Churches***

- i. Integrate workplace ethics into discipleship curricula through sermons, Bible studies and case-based workshops addressing bribery, favouritism, reporting, time, authority and conflicts of interest.
- ii. Establish professional guilds and mentoring relationships that connect younger workers with mature Christian practitioners who can offer context-specific guidance.
- iii. Create confidential accountability and discernment groups where members can discuss ethical pressure without fear of public exposure or simplistic condemnation.
- iv. Teach Spirit-empowerment as sanctification for truthful, just, courageous, and competent public service, balancing messages of prosperity and breakthrough with vocation, justice, and responsibility.

### ***For Christian Professionals***

- v. Develop advance plans for recurring ethical dilemmas, identify trusted advisers and document improper instructions where it is safe and lawful to do so.
- vi. Cultivate professional communities of practice that combine prayer and spiritual support with ethical reasoning, technical competence and knowledge of workplace policy.

### ***For Institutions and Professional Bodies***

- vii. Strengthen transparent procedures, protected reporting channels, conflict-of-interest rules and credible consequences for misconduct so that integrity does not depend entirely on individual courage.
- viii. Partner with churches and faith-based professional networks on ethics education while ensuring that institutional standards protect employees of every religious or non-religious background.

### **Conclusion**

This study shows that Christian faith provided many participants with a vocabulary of honesty, diligence, courage, and accountability, while their accounts also described strain arising from peer pressure, economic vulnerability, and institutionalised misconduct. Within this purposive Accra sample, the discipleship gap is therefore best interpreted as an interaction among personal formation, ecclesial support, and workplace structures rather than simply as religious hypocrisy.

Theologically, the article argues that Pentecostal workplace discipleship should connect Spirit-empowerment with sanctified character, vocation, communal accountability and public mission. Churches bridge the gap between Sunday worship and professional practice when they prepare believers for concrete dilemmas, sustain them through mentoring and accountability, and support reforms that reduce the cost of ethical resistance. In this way, workplace integrity becomes part of the church's participation in the *missio Dei* and a credible public witness to the transforming work of the Spirit.

### **Note on Copyright**

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## Authors' contributions

Samuel Nana Yaw Agyei. conceptualised the study, designed the methodology, participated in data collection, and led the initial analysis and drafting. Marinus Nel provided supervision and theoretical guidance and contributed to interpretation and critical revision. M.K. assisted with data collection, contributed to editing the manuscript, and served as the corresponding author. All three authors reviewed and approved the revised manuscript.

## Ethical considerations

Formal institutional ethical clearance was not obtained for this independent study. Participants received an explanation of the study and gave informed consent. Participation was voluntary, participant codes were used, and identifying details about individuals, workplaces, and churches were omitted.

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## A Pentecostal Theology of Apostolic Leadership: New Testament Foundations and Criteria for Contemporary Discernment

Johnny Lartey Peprah and Patrick Tetteh Kudadjie

### Abstract

This study examines how New Testament uses of the term apostle may inform Pentecostal discernment of contemporary apostolic leadership. Using biblical exegesis and critical engagement with relevant theological literature, it distinguishes four categories: Jesus Christ as the divine Apostle, the Twelve as foundational apostles, Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles, and other functionally apostolic ministers. It argues that the authority and qualifications associated with these categories should not be treated as identical. Contemporary claims to apostolic ministry should therefore be assessed by divine calling, spiritual gifting, Christ-centred character, missionary effectiveness, sacrificial commitment, accountability, and faithfulness to the gospel, without equating contemporary ministers with the foundational witnesses to Christ's resurrection.

**Keywords:** Apostolic leadership, Authority, New Testament, Spiritual gifts, Pentecostal theology

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### Introduction

Pentecostal discussions of apostolic leadership often appeal to the New Testament while using the term apostle for several different kinds of authority and ministry. The New Testament itself applies apostolic language to Jesus Christ, the Twelve, Paul, and other commissioned ministers, but these uses do not necessarily carry identical qualifications or authority. This creates a theological and ecclesial problem: by what criteria may contemporary churches recognise apostolic ministry without confusing missionary gifting with the foundational authority of the witnesses to the risen Christ? This study addresses that problem by examining the meaning and classifications of apostleship, the discernment of apostolic gifting, and the credentials associated with apostolic ministry. It contends that contemporary claims must be evaluated through a differentiated New

Testament framework centred on Christlike service, missionary fruitfulness, accountability, and fidelity to the gospel.

The central question of this study is how the New Testament's diverse uses of *apostolos* should govern Pentecostal claims about apostolic leadership today. The study argues that the New Testament distinguishes the unique, foundational authority of the Twelve and Paul from a broader missionary function associated with other apostles. Consequently, contemporary apostolic ministry may be affirmed only in a functional and accountable sense, not as a continuation of the revelatory authority exercised by the foundational witnesses. The discussion focuses on selected New Testament texts and their theological interpretation within Pentecostal scholarship.

Methodologically, this study employs theological exegesis of selected New Testament passages in which apostolic identity, authority, gifting, and practice are explicit.<sup>295</sup> The relevant texts are interpreted in their literary and canonical contexts and then brought into dialogue with Pentecostal and wider New Testament scholarship.<sup>296</sup> Particular attention is given to distinctions among the apostleship of Christ, the foundational witness of the Twelve and Paul, and the missionary activity of other persons called apostles. The contemporary application is therefore a theological synthesis rather than a claim that every feature of foundational apostleship continues unchanged.

### Definitions and Meanings of Apostolic Leadership

The word "apostle" comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means "a messenger, envoy, ambassador, or the one sent forth with orders."<sup>297</sup> Duffield and Van Cleave define *apostolos* as one who has a delegated authority by another in a foreign land.<sup>298</sup> Stamps explains the verb *apostellō* to mean sending someone on a special mission as a messenger and personal representative of the sender.<sup>299</sup> According to Addison, the dominant thought is that of someone being sent, with the authority of the sender, so that the sender

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<sup>295</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2017).

<sup>296</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); Stephen E. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009).

<sup>297</sup> F.W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2000), 21-22.

<sup>298</sup> G. P. Duffield and N. M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles, CA: Foursquare Media, 2008), 351.

<sup>299</sup> Donald C. Stamps, ed., "The Ministry Gifts of the Church," in *The Full Life Study Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992).

is represented in the sent one.<sup>300</sup> This dominant thought is stated by Jesus Christ when he said, “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me” (Matt. 10:40; NIV).

Conner states that, the word “apostle” means “a sent one, an ambassador, a delegate, one who is sent forth, one commissioned and authorized by another to represent another and carry out his will and purposes.”<sup>301</sup> The person sent as an agent or envoy is to be considered as one with the principal authority that sent him. Roxburgh posits that the apostles were the first leaders of the church to be commissioned by Jesus.<sup>302</sup> According to Wagner, an apostle assumes and exercises leadership over a number of churches with an extraordinary authority in spiritual matters.<sup>303</sup>

The apostles derived their leadership authority from the Lord Jesus. According to Luke 6:13, after an all-night prayer, Jesus called his disciples and designated twelve of them as apostles. The only qualification was that they were disciples of Jesus and had been with Jesus. The apostles of Jesus Christ used their authority to replace Judas Iscariot with Matthias (Acts 1:21-26; NIV).

### **The Divine Call of Apostles**

Jesus first called Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave everything and to “Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:14-20; Lk. 5:1-11). Mark records that it was Jesus who designated the Twelve as apostles, “that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to cast out demons” (Mk. 3:13-19). Luke records that after a night of prayer, Jesus chose twelve out of his wider band of disciples and designated them apostles (Lk. 6:12-16). So an apostle must be called by the Lord Himself. Jesus Christ appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the way to Damascus and caused him to convert from being a persecutor of the church to becoming an apostle of the Lord. According to Addison, Paul was an apostle in the sense of being an authoritative witness of the risen Christ and a recipient of revelation.<sup>304</sup> As one “untimely born,” he was the last to be included in this office. Yet he was also an apostle

<sup>300</sup> Stephen B. Addison, “A Basis for the Continuing Ministry of The Apostle in the Church’s Mission” (Doctor of Ministry Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1996), 19-52.

<sup>301</sup> Kevin J. Conner, *The Church in the New Testament* (Lancaster: Sovereign World, 1982).

<sup>302</sup> A. Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1997), 62.

<sup>303</sup> C. P. Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1994), 42, 231.

<sup>304</sup> Hywel Jones, “Are There Apostles Today?” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 9 (April 1985): 110.

in the functional sense of being chosen to take the gospel to the Gentiles, to begin new churches and to see them grow to maturity.<sup>305</sup>

Paul qualified as an apostle on the same grounds as did “the Twelve.” Paul too was a directly commissioned witness to the resurrection of Christ and a divinely chosen recipient of revelation from Christ for the nations and the church. Paul considered himself an apostle of Jesus Christ because he was divinely chosen, on equal standing with the Twelve. Moreover, Jesus Christ gave the apostles authority to begin new churches and guide them to maturity. The difference is that while the Twelve apostles of the Lamb were called by the “earthly Jesus,” Paul was called by the “resurrected Jesus.” The divine call of apostles did not cease with the demise of the Twelve. Paul wrote in his epistle to the church in Ephesus that “when he ascended... he gave gifts to his people,” including that of the apostle (Eph. 4:8; NIV).

### **Classification of Apostles**

Stamps groups apostles into four categories. Firstly, the title apostle is used of Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:1). The second class of apostles are the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ (Matt. 10:2). The third class of apostles is Paul (Rom. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1). Finally, there are many other apostles (Acts 14:4, 14; Rom. 16:7; Gal. 1:19; 2:8–9).<sup>306</sup> Paul is placed in a distinct class not because he lacked the marks of the Twelve, but because his call came differently. He was not among the original band of disciples who walked with the earthly Jesus, and his commissioning came directly from the risen Christ on the Damascus Road rather than through the Lord’s pre-resurrection ministry (Acts 9:1–6; Gal. 1:11–17).

Paul defends this standing on the same evidentiary grounds as the Twelve. He argued that he was a witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, a recipient of revelation, and a founder of churches. On these bases, he insisted that he should be recognised as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul added that though his apostleship came later and was differently occasioned, it is not inferior to the apostleship of the Twelve (1 Cor. 15:8–9; 2 Cor. 11:5).

Jesus never referred to himself as an apostle, though the writer of Hebrews gives him that title (Heb. 3:1). While Jesus used other terms to describe his ministry and status, all four Gospels record that Jesus had a strong conviction that he was sent by God the Father. Jesus explains that the reason he was sent was to preach the good news of the kingdom

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<sup>305</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, “Apostles Before and During Paul’s Time,” in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin, trans. Manfred Kwiran (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1970), 287–303.

<sup>306</sup> Donald C. Stamps, “The Ministry Gifts of the Church,” in *The Full Life Study Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 1830.

of God (Lk. 4:43); he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 15:24); he likens himself to the son of the vineyard owner sent to the rebellious tenants (Mk. 12:1-11); and refers to himself as the one whom the only true God has sent (Jn. 17:3).

Addison posits that, as a “sent one,” Jesus did not speak and act on his own authority but under the Father’s authority (Jn. 7:16). As a messenger of God, the works Jesus did confirmed that he was, in fact, sent by God (Jn. 10:37-38). Moreover, as the “sent one,” Jesus represented the Father to the world. His apostolic ministry was a display of God’s character, heart, compassion, and works to the world. Jesus was concerned and acted with compassion for those who were poor, needy, sick, rejected, broken-hearted, demonised, lost, and friendless. He served those in need and also called them to repentance, faith, and a new relationship with their heavenly Father. Jesus, as the Apostle of God, had at the heart of his mission the formation of a people who would one day span the world, so he made stringent demands on his disciples.<sup>307</sup>

Addison explains that, in the Old Testament, there is a progressive reduction in God’s dealings with humanity. God’s dealings reduced from all humanity to Israel, then to the remnant of Israel, and finally to the Messiah. In the New Testament, the expansion of God’s salvation purposes begins with the Messiah, then extends to the disciples, then to the New Israel, and culminates in the Gospel to the whole world. Addison posits that the Father sent Jesus, as an apostle, to heal human hurts in every dimension of life. So apostolic ministry involves participation in the mission of God, which includes sacrificial service, the demonstration of God’s grace and mercy, and the demand on sinners to repent and join the fellowship of disciples.<sup>308</sup>

Jesus confined the focus of his ministry to Israel because he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 15:24). However, he occasionally ventured into Gentile territory. Also, he ministered to some Gentiles he encountered within Israel. In tension with this particularistic focus was a consciousness of the universal significance of his ministry, because he understood the significance of his own life within the context of the Old Testament prophecies of eschatological salvation and the drawing in of the nations.<sup>309</sup> Though Jesus’ immediate focus was on the covenant people, his ultimate concern was for the whole world. The turning point was his death and resurrection. Jesus said, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself” (Jn. 12:32). Jesus gathered around himself disciples who were to form the nucleus of a global missionary movement. Salvation had come, but other sheep must be gathered into God’s fold (Jn. 10:16); so the

<sup>307</sup> Addison, “Ministry of The Apostle,” 19-52.

<sup>308</sup> Addison, “Ministry of The Apostle,” 19-52.

<sup>309</sup> J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1960), 33.

kingdom will now be given to another people (Matt. 21:43) and the gospel preached to all nations (Mk. 13:10).<sup>310</sup>

Banks explains that Jesus' death, resurrection, and the subsequent coming of the Spirit on the church, are the preconditions to be met before the apostolic ministry could begin. Now the progressive reduction of the Old Testament gives way to the progressive expansion of the new age of salvation.<sup>311</sup> As the divine apostle, Jesus was sent into the world as the Father's authoritative representative to bring salvation. Jesus' authority did not derive from himself but from a loving submission to do the Father's will. His authority was that of a servant who came to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus regarded himself as the apostle of God sent into the world to proclaim and inaugurate the kingdom of God.<sup>312</sup> The apostleship of the Twelve had Jesus as its source. Jesus' apostleship continues throughout the age of the church until the end of the world. The Christian church emerged, continues to expand, and owes its existence to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Christian mission and apostleship are dependent for their origin and nature on the life and ministry of Jesus. He is the "Ideal Missionary, the Apostle of God." To the degree an apostolic ministry continues today, it must derive its origin, nature and authority from Jesus Christ. It will reflect to some degree his mission, his character, his heart. Jesus' apostolic ministry found its ultimate fulfilment, not in power and privilege but in sacrificial servanthood for a lost world. Addison concludes that God's purpose is to bring all things under the headship of Jesus Christ.<sup>313</sup>

### **The Twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ**

Jesus first called Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave everything and to "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:14-20; Lk. 5:1-11). Mark records that it was Jesus who designated the Twelve as apostles, "that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to cast out demons" (Mk. 3:13-19). Luke records that after a night of prayer, Jesus chose twelve out of his wider band of disciples and designated them apostles (Lk. 6:12-16). During his ministry, he "gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and heal every disease and sickness" (Matt. 10:1-42; Mk. 6:7-13; Lk. 9:1-6). Jesus sent them out two by two to preach the Good News of the kingdom to Israel and to perform signs and wonders. Jesus gave his apostles authority and expressly taught them that their authority was for servanthood, which he modelled (Mk. 10:35-45). He gave the eleven disciples the Great Commission, following

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<sup>310</sup> Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 173.

<sup>311</sup> Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 183.

<sup>312</sup> Addison, "Ministry of The Apostle," 19-52.

<sup>313</sup> Addison, "Ministry of The Apostle," 19-52.

his resurrection, and also gave them the authority to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. He further promised to be with them to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18–20). Jesus instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were empowered from on high (Lk. 24:49).

John records that Jesus appeared to the disciples following the resurrection and said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” He breathed on them, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn. 20:21–23). Jesus promised the apostles that “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). During his lifetime, Jesus appointed the Twelve to be with him, to learn first-hand from his active engagement in ministry and to share in that ministry. Thus the Twelve are represented in the Gospels as already “incipient missionaries.”<sup>314</sup> Addison posits that to be an apostle means to carry out the pioneering ministry of Jesus Christ as his representative, and to have power and authority to cast out demons, heal the sick and preach the gospel of the kingdom. The apostles are to imitate Jesus’ ministry as well as allow Jesus to personally carry out his ministry through them, as the Spirit mediated his life and power to them.

### **Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles**

Paul was an apostle in the sense of being an authoritative witness of the risen Christ and a recipient of revelation.<sup>315</sup> As one “untimely born” he was the last to be included in this office. Yet he was also an apostle in the functional sense of being chosen to take the gospel to the Gentiles, to begin new churches and to see them grow to maturity.<sup>316</sup> Paul qualified as an apostle on the same grounds as did “the Twelve.” Paul too was a directly commissioned witness to the resurrection of Christ. Secondly, Paul, in common with Barnabas, Silas, and others, shared the call to plant, establish, and grow churches among the Gentiles. He too was a directly commissioned witness to Christ in his resurrection. This second form of apostleship is not necessarily characterised by divine revelation and infallibility in communication. It is this functional expression of apostleship that the risen Christ continues to bestow upon the church through the Spirit today. This second form of apostleship is responsible for pioneering evangelistic and missional activities to plant new churches, and to nurture and establish them.

<sup>314</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Signs of An Apostle* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 33.

<sup>315</sup> Jones, “Are There Apostles Today?” 110.

<sup>316</sup> Schnackenburg, “Apostles Before and During Paul’s Time,” 303.

## Other New Testament Apostles

The New Testament applies the term “apostle” to many other individuals besides Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), James, Jesus’ brother (Gal. 1:19), Apollos (1 Cor. 4:9) and Silas (1 Thess. 2:7), Andronicus and Junias (Rom. 16:7). It is clear that the band of apostles was wider than the Twelve and Paul. Paul recounts how the risen Christ “appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve.... Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:5-7). Paul distinguishes the Twelve from “all the apostles.” Paul regards apostleship as a spiritual gift necessary for the church’s common good and ministry (1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11).

## Discerning the Spiritual Gifts of Apostles

The apostolic office may be recognised by observing the charismatic gifts of spiritual leadership manifesting in a person. According to Kasemann, “the spiritual force of authority manifest as the person authorised performs assigned role functions.”<sup>317</sup> The apostolic authority shows in the concrete acts of ministry (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12 and 14; Eph. 4:7-13; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Paul lists apostleship among the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). Marcus Barth notes that in both passages there is nothing in the context to suggest that the gift of apostle has ceased to be bestowed.<sup>318</sup> So the gift of apostleship is a spiritual power given by the Lord to some people, and it shows as they minister in the power of the Spirit.

According to Onyinah, the signs of an apostle are the gifts of leadership, administration, teaching, faith, miracles, healings and revelation, all for equipping and maturing the body of Christ.<sup>319</sup> They preach the gospel with power, lead with authority, plant, nurture and establish new churches, teach sound Christian doctrine and ensure discipline.

## The Biblical Credentials of an Apostle

The New Testament provides criteria by which claims to apostolic ministry may be evaluated. Such testing is necessary because the early church encountered both genuine and false claims to apostleship: the church at Ephesus was commended for testing those

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<sup>317</sup> Ernst Kasemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 83.

<sup>318</sup> Regarding Ephesians, Marcus Barth writes, “In 4:11 it is assumed that the church at all times needs the witness of ‘apostles’ ‘and prophets’. The author of this epistle did not anticipate that the inspired and enthusiastic ministry was to be absorbed by, and ‘disappear’ into, offices and officers bare of the Holy Spirit and resentful of any reference to spiritual things. Eph 4 does not contain the faintest hint that the charismatic character of all church ministries was restricted to a certain period of church history and was later to die out.” Marcus Barth, *Ephesians 4–6* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 437.

<sup>319</sup> Opoku Onyinah, *Apostles and Prophets: The Ministry of Apostles and Prophets Throughout the Generations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022), 162-177.

who called themselves apostles and finding some to be false (Rev. 2:2). Whether this passage warrants an ongoing apostolic office remains disputed.<sup>320</sup> The criteria considered here therefore distinguish qualifications attached to the foundational apostles from characteristics that may appropriately inform the discernment of contemporary missionary and ecclesial leadership. Addison identifies seven credentials associated with apostolic ministry: (1) witness to the resurrection of Jesus, (2) gifting by God, (3) the founding of churches, (4) signs and wonders, (5) suffering for the gospel, (6) cross-cultural missionary activity, and (7) faithfulness to the gospel.

### *An Apostle is a Witness of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*

Peter stated that to find the successor to Judas' apostolic ministry, "it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning with John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22). Paul defends his apostolic authority against his challengers and poses the rhetorical question: "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). Paul's encounter with Christ established him as an apostle.

### *An Apostle is Gifted by God for Apostolic Ministry*

Paul views the apostle as one with a "charismatic" ministry, sent as a gift to the church from Christ (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11).<sup>321</sup> Luke says it is the Spirit who commands that Paul and Barnabas be set apart for apostolic ministry (Acts 13:1-3). The Lord Jesus continues to raise up apostles by his Spirit, in the same way he sends prophets, teachers, evangelists, and pastors as gifts to the church.

### *An Apostle Must Have Founded (Established) Churches*

Paul contends that, "Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord... Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work

<sup>320</sup> For contrasting positions, see H. Jones, "Are There Apostles Today?," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 9 (April 1985): 110; and Stephen B. Addison, "A Basis for the Continuing Ministry of the Apostle in the Church's Mission" (D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1996).

<sup>321</sup> Schnackenburg, "Apostles Before and During Paul's Time," 300.

already done in another man's territory" (1 Cor. 9:1-2; 2 Cor. 10:13-16). Apostles start new churches (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 3:6, 10).<sup>322</sup>

### *An Apostle Has the Grace to Perform Signs and Wonders*

Paul pointed out to the Corinthians, "The things that mark an apostle – signs, wonders and miracles – were done among you with great perseverance" (2 Cor. 12:12). This is the only occasion that signs are mentioned by Paul in relation to authenticating apostolic ministry.<sup>323</sup> Paul's opponents regarded signs and wonders as the signs of an apostle. Paul responds by pointing out that he too performed signs and wonders, but the true sign of an apostle is that of faithful suffering for the sake of Christ (2 Cor. 11:16-33, 6:3-10; Gal. 6:17; 1 Cor. 4:8-13).

### *An Apostle is Called to Suffer for the Sake of the Gospel*

Paul wrote saying, "Let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus," then he listed the hardships and indignities apostles suffer for Christ's sake (Gal. 6:17; 1 Cor. 4:9-13). Some of the sufferings of apostles are that God displays them in last place, like people condemned to die: they are a spectacle to the world and to angels, fools for Christ, weak, dishonoured, hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, treated roughly, homeless, working hard, reviled, persecuted, slandered, and cast away like garbage by the world. For Paul, the genuine apostle is the one who shares in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. By the nature of their ministry in pioneering new churches in potentially hostile areas, apostles may pay a heavier price for carrying out their calling. Paul says, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well" (1 Thess. 2:8).

### *An Apostle is a Cross-Cultural Missionary*

Apostles are those who are involved in cross-cultural evangelism and church planting. Apostles commit to the Great Commission. It may look wrong to designate individuals as apostles where there is no real cross-cultural activity in their ministry. Church planting in a cross-cultural situation is the primary mark of the missionary apostle. The apostle has a longing for unreached peoples to be won and gathered into new churches (Rom. 10:14-15).<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed., Black's New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1971), 201.

<sup>323</sup> Kevin J. Conner, *The Church in the New Testament* (Lancaster: Sovereign World, 1982), 151.

<sup>324</sup> Addison, "Ministry of The Apostle," 19–52.

### *An Apostle is Always Faithful to the Gospel*

Addison noted that planting and establishing new churches is at the heart of an apostle's ministry, but it is not enough to qualify an individual as an apostle. Paul fought for his apostolic authority and gospel against those he calls "super" or "false" apostles. They preached a different Jesus and ministered a different spirit and another gospel (2 Cor. 11:4). Even an angel from heaven deserved eternal condemnation, should he proclaim a different gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). Every true apostle of Christ will be faithful to the gospel.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the meanings and classifications of apostolic leadership, the discernment of apostolic gifting, and the credentials associated with apostolic ministry. Jesus Christ is presented in Hebrews as the divine Apostle; he called and trained the Twelve, and Matthias replaced Judas Iscariot. Paul received a distinctive commission as apostle to the Gentiles, while the New Testament also applies apostolic language more broadly to other commissioned ministers. These categories should not be conflated. Eyewitness encounter with the risen Christ belongs to the foundational apostleship of the Twelve and Paul, whereas contemporary claims to apostolic ministry, must be understood functionally and tested by spiritual gifting, the founding and strengthening of churches, missionary service, sacrificial endurance, accountability, and faithfulness to the gospel.

This study contributes a differentiated framework for evaluating claims to apostolic ministry in Pentecostal, charismatic, neo-charismatic, and related communities in Ghana, including The Church of Pentecost. Its principal contribution is to distinguish the non-repeatable, foundational role of the Twelve and Paul from contemporary missionary and church-founding functions. This distinction offers churches a practical basis for testing the use of the title apostle against New Testament patterns of Christ-centred service, spiritual gifting, missionary fruitfulness, accountability, and fidelity to the gospel.

By integrating biblical exegesis with Pentecostal theological perspectives, the study advances scholarly discussions on spiritual gifts, leadership authority, and ecclesial mission. It offers a criteria-based approach for discerning genuine apostolic ministry and provides practical guidance for churches in recognising, developing, and evaluating apostolic leaders. The study further contributes to Pentecostal leadership studies by emphasising Christ-centredness, spiritual gifting, accountability, and faithfulness to apostolic doctrine as foundations of authentic leadership.

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## Rivalry, Fertility, and Favouritism among Jacob's Wives: An Akan Reading of Genesis 29–30

Abraham Nortey

### Abstract

This article investigates the underlying causes of conflict among Jacob's wives and analyses these dynamics within the context of Akan socio-cultural experiences of polygyny. Although previous scholarship on the Jacob narrative has primarily addressed themes such as barrenness, fertility, and divine intervention, it has paid limited attention to interpreting the rivalry among Jacob's wives through an Akan inculturation perspective. Utilising narrative criticism and inculturation hermeneutics, this study situates the experiences of Jacob's household in conversation with Akan conceptions of marriage, fertility, favouritism, and co-wife relationships. The analysis contends that rivalry among Jacob's wives arose from three interconnected factors: the violation of the marriage arrangement that favoured Rachel over Leah, competition regarding fertility and childbearing, and unequal access to Jacob's affection. The findings suggest that these dynamics closely parallel tensions in Akan polygynous households, where fertility, marital preference, and competition among co-wives often shape family relationships. Furthermore, the Jacob narrative critiques practices that marginalise less-favoured wives and questions the assumption that childbearing necessarily secures a husband's affection. This article advances African biblical hermeneutics by demonstrating how an Akan inculturation approach yields new insights into the conflict dynamics present in the narrative of Jacob's family.

**Keywords:** Polygyny, Akan, Inculturation Hermeneutics, Favouritism, Family Conflict, Fertility Competition

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### Introduction

The subject of conflict is a common phenomenon in most polygynous family relationships. The polygamous institution comes with certain practices that involve psycho-traumatic experiences, disrespect for the unloved wife and her children, deprivation, and depression that affect the behaviour of family members who experience such tendencies in that institution.<sup>325</sup> Those affected are known to behave in ways that run counter to social norms, thereby becoming the key architects of the troubles,

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<sup>325</sup> Julius Arhin-Asamoah, "Breaking Boundaries: Exploring Polygamous Marriage from an African Woman's Perspective in Ama Ataa Adoo's *Changes: A Love Story*," *Asian J. Lang. Literary and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (2023): 368.

confusion, and chaos in the family and the broader society. Those who respond negatively to these daily experiences are seen as unfriendly, rude, and troublemakers toward anyone they perceive as a threat to their status in their families.

In the Hebrew Bible, it is easy to identify certain men who married or entered into an affair with more than one woman and ended up having issues with their wives (Gen. 21:8-21; 1 Sam. 1:2-6). Notable figures such as Abraham, David, and Solomon are recorded as having married several women at some point in their lives and experiencing familial troubles (Gen. 21; 2 Sam. 13 and 1 Kgs 11). Among these accounts, the conflict involving Jacob's wives offers a particularly useful case for the present study.

While previous studies on Genesis 29–30 have examined themes such as polygyny, barrenness, fertility, divine intervention, and family conflict, little attention has been given to the specific socio-cultural factors that generated rivalry between Jacob's wives and how these conflict dynamics may be interpreted within African cultural contexts. In particular, there is a scarcity of studies that place the narrative in dialogue with Akan socio-cultural understandings of polygyny, favouritism, fertility competition, and co-wife relations. This study addresses that gap by employing an Akan inculturation hermeneutic to examine how the conflict indicators in Jacob's household resonate with, critique, and illuminate similar experiences in Akan polygynous families.

The Akan, on the other hand, though have several distinct ethnic groups, share common familial, social and political institutions, including polygamy.<sup>326</sup> This makes studying the Akan together possible. In recent times, the institution of polygamy appears to be waning from public view since some non-Muslim men, especially, keep other concubines hidden from the first wife.<sup>327</sup> However, there are a select few who make their polygamous relationship known. Mostly, behaviours the husband and some wives put up with, or key decisions they make, have generated a lot of conflict in such families, either while the man is alive or posthumously.

Comparing the two worldviews, the conflict indices identified in the Hebrew narrative of Jacob's family and the Akan context indicate that, although the contexts differ, they share much in common. The paper identifies the root cause of these conflicts as responses exhibited by Jacob's wives, shaped by their daily experiences with their husband and with one another as women married to the same man. An Akan re-reading of Jacob's narrative would easily recognise rich evidence for the Akan context, where Rachel and

<sup>326</sup> Omar H. Ali, "Akan," in *Native Peoples of the World: An Encyclopedia of Groups, Cultures and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Steven Danver (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 12.

<sup>327</sup> Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen, *Polygamy: Across Cultural Analysis* (Bloomsbury: Berg Publishers, 2008), 161.

Leah's responses to their situations share much with the conduct of rival wives who generate chaotic homes.

In juxtaposing their experiences with the Akan context, the study realises that although the two contexts differ, the responses the women exhibited due to the issues of the beloved wife monopolisation of the husband, instances of neglect, denial, sidelining, and stigmatisation that women in polygynous families occasionally faced are similar to what an Akan polygynous wife would equally exhibit when faced with similar circumstances. The research presents Jacob as a polygynous husband who was supposed to unify his wives but saw no need to do anything to bring about this unity, and ended up playing favouritism between them, thus creating disharmony. Rachel is also presented as the beloved wife in a polygynous home who has no affection for Leah, the first wife she met, and uses her privileged position to dominate her husband's affection.

In an effort to understand wives' and husbands' behaviours that create conflict, the paper investigates how people who feel their privileged positions are threatened or subverted behave in a polygynous family by exploring the experiences of Jacob and his wives. It then evaluates the variables that shape the behaviour of Jacob and his wives in the biblical narrative, in the context of Akan polygynous families, to understand how the Akan can equally appreciate the biblical narrative through inculturation hermeneutics.

The study offers a thorough assessment of how the Jacob narrative throws light on the conflicting scenes experienced in polygynous families in both contexts and thus attempts to understand the responses exhibited by the characters in both contexts. This reading will deepen understanding of Jacob's wives' behaviours and offer a richer appreciation of similar responses that wives may exhibit in Akan polygynous family set-ups. This will reveal how the various issues that emerged among his wives resonate with the Akan context. Isaac bidding Jacob to marry from his uncle, thus encouraging cross-cousin marriage (Gen. 28:1), the envy of Rachel towards Leah in the birth tussle, the fight against Jacob's sexual rotation, and the conflict over the mandrake that emerged in his family relate so perfectly to the Akan socio-cultural practices that prompt the need for a comparative discourse.

The work seeks to reread Jacob's polygynous family relationships by re-examining the issues that created conflict among his wives through an Akan socio-cultural lens. The goal is to show how an Akan polygynous wife would respond to the same conditions Jacob's wives experienced. This effort requires dialogue around key thematic issues in Jacob's narrative from Akan socio-cultural perspectives.

This article argues that rivalry between Jacob's wives emerged from three interrelated factors: the breach of the marriage arrangement that privileged Rachel over Leah,

competition over fertility and childbearing, and unequal access to Jacob's affection. Through an Akan inculturation reading, the article shows that these conflict dynamics closely resemble tensions in Akan polygynous households while also challenging cultural assumptions about fertility and marital affection.

### **Interpretive Framework: Narrative Criticism and Akan Inculturation Hermeneutics**

The work employs a bipolar approach to read Jacob's family conflict in the Akan context. Taking a cue from Otto Eckart's advice that recent biblical scholarship ought to apply dual approaches to read the Bible diachronically and synchronically, the research uses a dual methodology to read the Bible.<sup>328</sup> It adopted the narrative-critical lens that pays attention to characterisation, repetitive motifs, plot, type-scenes, among others, to analyse the key issues in Jacob's family narrative and expose certain dynamics of the conflict that would be much appreciated within the Akan context.<sup>329</sup> In addition, it used inculturation hermeneutics, which allow the researcher to use the socio-cultural conditions of a specific people group to engage in a dialogue with issues discovered in the biblical narrative.<sup>330</sup> This, in a way, made the narrative meaningful to the socio-cultural conditions of the Akan practising polygamy in the Ghanaian geo-political world.

### **Exchange of betrothed wife (Gen. 28-30; 35:16-23)**

The rudimentary cause of the rivalry between Jacob and his wives can be traced to a breach of the marital contract between Jacob and Laban. Jacob's father directed him to take a wife from one of the daughters of Laban (Gen. 28:1-2). The core of the instruction, according to the text, is Isaac's command (*tsavveh*) to Jacob to take a woman/ wife (*'iššah*) from among the daughters of Laban. Thus, Jacob, when ready to choose a wife, clearly informed Laban of his interest in Rachel, and an agreement was reached that he would work for seven years to have his request granted according to the plot of the narrative. Per that agreement, Rachel would be Jacob's betrothed wife until the contract was formalised. Unless the seven years are up, Jacob has no right to have carnal knowledge of Rachel. He has to fully fulfil the marital processes. In ancient Israel, betrothal (*'aras*) is the promise of marriage of a maiden to a man made over a period of time before the main

<sup>328</sup> Eckart Otto, *The Pentateuch in Synchronical and Diachronical Perspectives Protorabinic Scribal Erudition Mediation between Deuteronomy and Priestly Code* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2004), 472.

<sup>329</sup> Menahem Perry and Meir Stenberg, "The King Through Ironic Eyes: The Narrator's Devices in the Biblical Story of David and Bathsheba and Two Excuses on the Theory of Narrative Text," *Hasifrut/Literature* 1, no. 2 (1968): 632; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 116-117; Jan Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>330</sup> Eric Anum, *Comparative Readings of the Bible in Africa: Some concerns* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 468.; Justin S. Ukpog, "Development in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *Bible in Africa, Translations, Trajectories and Trends*, ed. by G.O. West and M.W. Dube (Brill: Leiden, 2001), 12.

wedding. The supposed lady is promised to the groom-to-be as his would-be wife.<sup>331</sup> It appears that full payment of the bride wealth concretizes that arrangement.<sup>332</sup> The expected amount that should have been paid to Laban was fifty shekels (Dt. 22:29). According to Driver and Miles, one's monthly wage is between one and one and a half shekels.<sup>333</sup> Jacob offering to serve seven years to pay for Rachel's bride price was thus a substantial payment. His bid was far above the normal wage.<sup>334</sup> The deal Jacob had with Laban is therefore an arranged marriage between cousins to fulfil his father's request.<sup>335</sup>

Ancient Israel treated betrothed wives as actual wives (or daughter-in-law), and any unfaithfulness on their part before the wedding took place was equal to adultery, and the Mosaic Law prescribes the death penalty for such offences (Deut. 22:23-24; cf. Lev. 20:10). For a woman to be considered as a wife, bride wealth, *mōhar*, has to be paid to the family.<sup>336</sup> A man, however, could be made to pay *mōhar* not only in monetary form but through service requested by the father-in-law, as Jacob did (Gen.29:15-30). Laban, however, breached the contract and replaced Rachel with Leah. In this regard, neither Jacob nor Rachel was guilty of the infraction of the marital process.

On the other hand, Laban was. His excuse that it was not customary for the younger sister to marry before the elder sister was a discussion that Jacob needed to be privy to. Keeping this information secret from Jacob is a great form of mockery.<sup>337</sup> Laban's deception created an unhealthy relationship between Jacob and Leah. Jacob's replacement of Rachel with Leah created family friction that later led to several conflicts. Laban thus outwitted Jacob, forcing him to serve for fourteen years to marry his two daughters.<sup>338</sup>

The Akan, on the other hand, would see the arrangement between Jacob and Laban as both a betrothal, a cousin marriage, or an arranged marriage. Traditionally, the Akan marital process begins with mate selection. Choosing a wife remains the preserve of the man.<sup>339</sup> Just as no one knows of Rachel's affection for Jacob, it is unthinkable for a woman

<sup>331</sup> Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1961), 29.

<sup>332</sup> Victor H. Matthews, "Marriage and Family in the Ancient Near East," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>333</sup> Godfrey R. Driver and John C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 470-471.

<sup>334</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary* vol 2, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1994), 451.

<sup>335</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, "Marriage", *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York/London: Dell Publishing Group, 1992), 5637.

<sup>336</sup> Tracy M. Lemos, *Marriage Gifts and Social Change in Ancient Palestine 1200 BCE to 200 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 61.

<sup>337</sup> Jo Ann Skousen, *Matriarchs of the Messiah: Valiant Women in the Lineage of Jesus Christ* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort Publishing, 2026), 28.

<sup>338</sup> Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 439.

<sup>339</sup> Dorothy Dee Vellenga, "The Widow Among the Matrilineal Akan of Southern Ghana," in *Widows in African Societies*, ed. Betty Potash (Stanford: Stanford University Press Library, 1986), 222.

to propose to a man she secretly admires, since she will be taken as an immoral woman and may lose her respect.<sup>340</sup> This restriction on women is supported by the popular Akan adage “it is the dog that searches for bone and not the inverse.” This is just to say that a lady proposing to a man is an aberration. In the olden days, biological fathers played little role in their sons' mate selection because the Akan practised matrilineal inheritance. The maternal uncle usually helps with such a decision.<sup>341</sup> He takes the initiative to secure a wife for his nephew if the latter is unmarried. Laban, as the lead figure in his daughter's proposed marriage to his nephew, would have been seen as appropriate by the Akan. In all these negotiations, the standard form of Akan marriage requires consent from both families, as well as from the individuals involved.<sup>342</sup>

When a young man's uncle wants to help choose a wife for his nephew, blood-related rules are observed. The blood link determines who gets married to whom, no matter the love. As a norm, the Akan consider it unacceptable for blood-related people to marry. Though one is not allowed to marry one's direct brother or sister, the Akan encourage cousin marriage, that is to say, a woman could marry her father's nephew.<sup>343</sup> As a norm, most marriages in Akan communities are arranged between families, yet some aspects are based on friendship between the groom and bride.<sup>344</sup> For young people who seek to marry within the Akan community, marriage usually begins with a young man and a woman falling in love. Observing courtship among the Ashanti group of the Akan, Rattray noted that the two young people first become attracted to each other and begin a friendship.<sup>345</sup>

Usually, a young man who wanted to marry a lady would frequent her family's household and be ready to do a few odd jobs for her parents, just as Jacob did. At the first opportunity, he would propose in the popular formula: “I want you to be my wife.”<sup>346</sup> This implies that young people take the initiative in choosing a partner, and for it to be valid, parents must consent and due process must be followed. The Akan believe that people who marry as good friends experience a lovely union. Aidoo notes: “if dating and

<sup>340</sup> Read the same view from Baffour K. Takyi, “Tradition and Change in Family and Marital Processes: Selecting a Marital Partner in Ghana,” in *Mate Selection Across Cultures*, ed. Raenn R. Hamon and Brom B. Ingoldsby (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 85.

<sup>341</sup> Confidence Gbolo Sanka, et al, “Ama Ata Aidoo and the Akan Culture: A Critique of the Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa”, in *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research*, 2, no 9 (September, 2013), 92.

<sup>342</sup> Vellenga, “The Widow Among the Matrilineal Akan of Southern Ghana,” 222.

<sup>343</sup> Martha Donkor, “Women, Gender, Sex and the Church,” in *Gender and Sexuality in Ghanaian Societies*, ed. Martha Donkor and Amoaba Gooden (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022), 1.

<sup>344</sup> Mark S. Aidoo, *Friendship in the Book of Job: Art, Context and Theology from an African Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2024), 168.

<sup>345</sup> Robert Sutherland Rattray, *Ashanti and Constitution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 76.

<sup>346</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti and Constitution*, 76.

courtship become a time to see each other as a friend, then the real discoveries and virtues that grow in a relationship should not die off when the two become married".<sup>347</sup> In this regard, the Akan would have seen Jacob's close relationship and later love story with Rachel as normal. Their love union is closely linked to the earlier friendship (Gen. 29:6-12). This is different for Leah, who had little contact with Jacob, let alone a friendly relationship. Thus, Jacob's disinterest in Leah would not surprise the Akan. Alter's depiction of the 'type scene' in Hebrew Narratives, where a young maiden meets a young man at a well and falls in love, sheds light on the foundation of the Jacob-Rachel love saga.<sup>348</sup>

Beyond the similarities in mate selection, the Akan would see the form of betrothal practised in ancient Israel differently. Usually, ancient Israel had betrothal as the first stage of marriage between two adults. This is then accompanied by (at least the promise of) *mohar* [a marriage gift]; later the marriage itself, signified by the wife's move from her father's house to that of her husband, consummation, and very often a feast."<sup>349</sup> The Akan, by contrast, understand betrothal marriage differently from what ensued between Jacob and Rachel. Betrothal is a popular ancient Akan marital practice.<sup>350</sup> This marriage is arranged when the woman is very young, and her elders or parents contract the marriage on her behalf until she becomes an adult.<sup>351</sup> In other forms, parents could even promise two unborn children in marriage if one was born male and the other female.<sup>352</sup> Mair also wrote that among the Akan, even two children can be betrothed to each other in infancy.<sup>353</sup>

Several reasons are given to encourage the practice. The young lady might be pledged to an elderly man whom the family owes to offset family debt.<sup>354</sup> The young man's parents may see the woman as a potential wife and make early arrangements to marry her to their younger son when both reach marriageable age.<sup>355</sup> The young boy's parents make such an arrangement to develop family ties with the young girl's family.<sup>356</sup> Under such

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<sup>347</sup> Aidoo, *Friendship in the Book of Job*, 168.

<sup>348</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 83.

<sup>349</sup> Bernard Jackson, *Wisdom-Laws: A Study of the Mishpatim of Exodus 21: 1-22:16* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 372.

<sup>350</sup> Lucy Mair, *African Marriage and Social Change* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1969), 4.

<sup>351</sup> Kwame Arhin, "The Political and Military Roles of Akan Women, in *Female and Male in West Africa*, ed. Christine Oppong (New York: Routledge Revivals, 2023), 45.

<sup>352</sup> Vellenga, "The Widow among the Matrilineal Akan of Southern Ghana," 222.

<sup>353</sup> Mair, *African Marriage and Social Change*, 4.

<sup>354</sup> Mair, *African Marriage and Social Change*, 4.

<sup>355</sup> Baffour K. Takyi, "Tradition and Change in Family and Marital Processes: Selecting a Marital Partner in Ghana," in *Mate Selection Across Cultures*, ed. Raenn R. Hamon and Brom B. Ingoldsby (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 83.

<sup>356</sup> Takyi, "Tradition and Change in Family and Marital Processes: Selecting a Marital Partner in Ghana," 83.

circumstances, the young man's family is free to give token gifts or money to their bride-to-be with the understanding that, in the future, their son would become the husband of the woman with whom the alliance was sought.<sup>357</sup> If the girl's father breached the contract and gave her to another man when she came of age, it could result in a court suit.<sup>358</sup> Jacob's choice of Rachel is driven by his love for her. This is confirmed by serving fourteen years to marry Rachel. They first met at the well and exchanged pleasantries (Gen. 29:6-12). Laban's decision to take Rachel, Jacob's betrothed wife, from him and replace her with his elder sister would be tantamount to a breach of contract. Among the Akan, Jacob would be embittered by the Laban household, and all of Jacob's family members would also dislike Laban and his family. The Akan would therefore have seen Jacob as justified in hating Leah and loving Rachel. This is because a breach of a betrothal contract is not taken lightly. The Akan would therefore see Jacob's behaviour in the narrative as satirising the challenges of imposing a woman on a man, creating detachment and resentment in that relationship when the man finally meets the woman he loves in a polygynous context.

#### **Envy among co-wives due to barrenness (Gen. 29: 31-30:24; 35:16-23)**

In the Jacob narrative, barrenness created envy among the two legal wives. The narrator presents God as actively involved in the birth process. Jacob married four women, two sisters and their slaves. According to the narrator, the legal wives both had God open (*pātāh*) their wombs before they could conceive and give birth (Gen. 29:31; 30:22). In the case of Leah, Yahweh saw (*rā'āh*) her condition and opened (*pātāh*) her womb. Rachel, on the other hand, is presented by the narrator as having Elohim (God) remember (*zākhār*) her, hear (*šāma'*) her cry, and open (*pātāh*) her womb after a long period of battling barrenness before she could give birth (Gen. 30:22).

Many works address barren wives in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>359</sup> The ability to conceive is presented as an act of divine intervention.<sup>360</sup> This presents God as having absolute power over reproduction in the womb. Likewise, it takes God's intervention for Jacob's legal wives to conceive. A broader reading of the Hebrew Bible reveals other avenues for conception. Some adopted surrogates to intervene in giving birth, although such an approach gives temporary satisfaction. Three cases are Sarah (Gen. 16), Leah (Gen. 30:9-

<sup>357</sup> Takyi, "Tradition and Change in Family and Marital Processes: Selecting a Marital Partner in Ghana," 83.

<sup>358</sup> Vallenga, "The Widow among Matrilineal Akan of Southern Ghana," 205-208.

<sup>359</sup> Mary Callaway, "Sing O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash", *SBL Dissertation Series* 91 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 231; James G. Williams, "The Beautiful and the Barren: Conventions in Biblical Type Scenes," *JSOT* 17 (1980), 107-119.

<sup>360</sup> Esther Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics* (Leiden/New York: Koln/Brill, 1997), 87.

13), and Rachel (Gen. 30:3-8), who involved their maidservants to overcome their inability to give birth. It is difficult to disagree with scholars who see Rachel and Leah's intervention to conceive through their maidservants as the rape of enslaved women.<sup>361</sup> Such a perspective is unwarranted in the practices of the ancient Near Eastern cultural milieu.<sup>362</sup> However, viewed through a modern lens, such judgment may not be far from the truth.

From another perspective, birth is conceived when persistent prayer is offered, and God finally answers (Gen. 25:21; 1 Sam. 1:10-17). The husband's role in going into the wife for conception has never been neglected (Gen. 4:1; 38:2, 18). When the husband is not mentioned in the conception process, it does not rule out the fact that the couple had conjugal engagement. In Leah's sixth birth, it was explicitly mentioned that her husband went into her and Yahweh gave her conception (Gen. 30:16-17). In Rachel's case, God remembered her, opened her womb, and gave her conception (Gen. 30:22). Even though Jacob is not mentioned as going into Leah before she conceived, this does not rule out the fact that the couple might have had sexual intercourse with their husband for this to take place. What could be deduced is that, as husband and wife, they might be having such intimate sexual encounters, but at the point Rachel conceived, the omniscient narrator informed readers that it was the divine who intervened.

It has been recognised that, in pronatalist societies, a woman's happiness is complete only through childbirth.<sup>363</sup> In a polygynous household, a rival wife who has the advantage of giving birth could cause pain to the other wife who lacks it. In the birth tussle, Rachel's happiness was not complete at the early stage of her marriage when she kept struggling to give birth. Rachel was the beloved (*āhaḥāh*) of her husband, but Leah, the fertile woman who bore the most children, was the unloved (*śenû'āh*). This left Leah unhappy with the turn of events, setting the stage for envy. Observing such daily disregard and sidelining by her husband caused her a lot of pain and frustration (Gen. 29:31-34).

To balance the scales of happiness, the narrator presents God as intervening to bless Leah with fruitfulness, giving her a reason to be content in her marriage. This gives Rachel her husband's love, while Leah, denied marital love, receives the love of her children as compensation. Rachel gains her self-worth through her husband, and Leah through her children.<sup>364</sup> In a patriarchal world, having sons mattered, so the two women initially

<sup>361</sup> Susanne Shulz, *The Bible as Political Artifact: On the Feminist Study of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 83.

<sup>362</sup> Susan Niditch, "Genesis," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 20.

<sup>363</sup> Elyse Goldstein, *Revisions: Seeing Torah Through a Feminist Lens* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1998), 65.

<sup>364</sup> Goldstein, *Revisions*, 65.

competed with each other. This explains why Rachel, who was childless, expressed intense jealousy toward Leah (Gen. 30:1).

Rachel realised that she had less power in the marriage and desperately needed assistance to achieve this; that is why she says to her husband: "Give me sons, and if not, I die."<sup>365</sup> When Jacob sees himself as incapable of helping Rachel, she uses other means to conceive.<sup>366</sup> That is, she adopts Bilhah to intervene and remedy her frustration. Nahman takes up on Rachel's statement that she will die without sons by emphasizing that "Rachel would have mortified herself because of grief and died of grief".<sup>367</sup> Von Rad sees Rachel's cry as a request for a child.<sup>368</sup> Rachel's next action was to give Bilhah to Jacob to give birth on her behalf since Jacob claimed to be incapable of helping her. Jacob's compliance in sleeping with Bilhah saves Rachel from her fear of dying from the grief of childlessness. Her statement: "I have asked my maidservant to give birth on my knees that I may build my children by her (Gen. 30:3)," affirms that Rachel owes both Bilhah and her child yet to be born. Rachel's statement made to Jacob: "give birth on my knees" and "I may build my children by her" indicate that she owes both Bilhah and her child to be born. However, Rachel sees them not as mere slaves, but as part of her own family.<sup>369</sup> Boom reiterates that the expression is a legal term, which means Rachel acknowledges the child as legally belonging to her.<sup>370</sup> Even though Rachel resolved to use Bilhah to solve her barrenness, Levinson thinks her problem was only temporarily resolved. It would only be permanently resolved after Rachel gave birth to her own son.<sup>371</sup> Later, Leah, demanding her husband's attention, adopted Rachel's strategy by using Zilpah to bear two children for her husband (Gen. 30:11, 13). In all, Leah raised seven children, and her maid raised two more children for Jacob; Rachel had two sons, and her maid had two more sons. After having two biological sons, Rachel had attained fullness.

Similarly, the Akan see barrenness as one key cause of friction and envy among co-wives. Arhin-Asamoah maintained that barrenness remains the greatest single conflict-

<sup>365</sup> Hanne L. Levinson, *The Death Wish in the Hebrew Bible: Rhetorical Strategies for Survival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 31.

<sup>366</sup> Sehrish Farooq, Farah Malik and Sabila Naseer, "Causes and Consequences of Polygamy: An understanding of Coping Strategies by Co-wives in Polygamous Marriage," in *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry* 22, no. 9 (2021): 31.

<sup>367</sup> Moses ben Nehman. *Commentary on the Torah Beraishis* (Brooklyn: Shilo Publishing House, 2018), 367

<sup>368</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: Old Testament Library Series* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1973), 158.

<sup>369</sup> This would be more intriguing when, later in Genesis 33:2, Jacob would separate the slave children from those of the legal wives. Once each of the four women have their own children, the slaves' families were detached from the families of the legal wives. Jacob thus would recognize these women differently.

<sup>370</sup> Corie T. Boom, "Genesis," in *NKJV: The Woman's Study Bible: Receiving Truth for Balance, Hope, and Transformation*, ed. Dorothy Kelly Petterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 56.

<sup>371</sup> Hanne Loland Levinson, *The Death Wish in the Hebrew Bible: Rhetorical Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 21.

generating issue in any form of marriage, both within the traditional and modern systems. He maintains that the vexed issue of a wife's barrenness affects the psychic peace of such women, as some people who have children look down on them.<sup>372</sup> From an Akan perspective, Rachel's jealousy of Leah because of her fruitfulness would have been seen as justified. Among the Akan, if a man does not love his barren wife, he may end up divorcing her.<sup>373</sup> An Akan man may take a second wife because his first wife is barren.<sup>374</sup> Barrenness is therefore seen as a major problem. They believe that marriage is not just a mere social institution that brings two people together, but that its main purpose is for childbearing. That is why Mbiti states that "marriage and procreation in African communities are united: without procreation, marriage is incomplete."<sup>375</sup> This explains why, after just a year, the absence of babies in a marriage sparks worry among the couple, their family, and the entire community. Every Akan woman dreads being called barren and yearns to have her own children. She therefore tries all she can to find out whether it is her supposed barrenness that is the explanation for the absence of children in their marriage, or there is something else to it."<sup>376</sup>

When pregnancy is delayed, family members will make several attempts to remedy the situation, including seeing a herbalist, just like Rachel sought the mandrakes for fertility (Gen. 30:15). The Akan see children as so important that when a woman is infertile, she ends up losing her peace due to sarcastic remarks people will rain on her. Barrenness is so serious that the Akan associate it with a curse. Wright quotes the Akan proverb, "The barren have no face in the other world," to express the customary consequences of childlessness.<sup>377</sup> It is therefore considered unfruitful to marry a barren woman among the Akan since children are considered the most valuable thing in marriage and in society.

That is why the barren wife goes to great lengths to also give birth for her husband. Competition for the fruit of the womb among polygamous wives is, therefore, a common

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<sup>372</sup> John Mbiti, *S. African religions and Philosophy* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 255; Rose, Acholonu, "Igbo Women and the Tradition of Peace: The Dynamics of Change and Continuity," in *Conflict Resolution and Peace Education in Africa* edited by Ernest E. Uwazie (New York: Lexington books, 2003), 96.

<sup>373</sup> Janice P. De-Whyte, "Wom(b)man: A Cultural-Narrative Reading of the Hebrew Bible Barrenness Narrative" in *Biblical Interpretation Series* vol 162, ed. Paul Anderson and Jennifer Koosed (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 67.

<sup>374</sup> Brigitte Khoury and Yasmine Fayad, "Defining Partner Relational Problems in the Arab Region," in *Family Problems and Family Violence: Reliable Assessment and the KD-11*, ed. Heather M. Foran, Steven R.H. Beach, Amy M. Smith and Richard E. Heyman (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2013), 89.

<sup>375</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 107.

<sup>376</sup> Sanka et al, "Ama Ata Aidoo and the Akan Culture: A Critique of the Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa," in *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research*, 2, no. 9 (September 2013): 93.

<sup>377</sup> Derek Wright, "Ayi Kwei Armah's Africa: The Sources of His Fiction," in *New Perspectives on African Literature*, ed. Eldred Jones (Munich: Hans Del Publishers, 1989), 140.

practice.<sup>378</sup> When the fertile wife gives birth to a son to succeed the man as heir apparent, the man's fondness for her is supposed to increase, not decrease, as we encounter in the treatment of Leah. Barren wives are the ones who are humiliated because of their condition.<sup>379</sup> Leah's ability to give birth to six sons and a daughter without obtaining the husband's fondness would seem very surprising to the Akan. If anyone is to suffer ridicule or dejection, it must be Rachel. The Akan would therefore understand Rachel when she confronted Jacob to give her a son, or she would die. The Akan would appreciate Rachel's statement very much. Having the husband's love is not enough to survive the social stigma, invectives, and sarcasm that barren wives face daily from mothers-in-law and co-wives who have children. Such a challenge could literally and emotionally kill her. The Hebrew narrative thus causes the Akan reader to rethink how the weaponisation of fertility and childbirth in polygynous marriages to win a man's love could sometimes fail in polygynous marriage. Childbirth is seen in the Hebrew narrative as not always winning the love of a polygynous man. The unquestioned acceptance of Bilhah and Zilpah in the birth tussle in the Hebrew narrative reflects how an Akan polygynous man sometimes has to dance to the rhythm of his wives, even when the request is negative, to ensure peace in the family.

### **Co-wives conflict due to monopolisation of the husband's love by one wife (Gen. 30: 15)**

The quarrel between Rachel and Leah, a related scene involving the mandrakes, shows how rival wives often quarrel when one feels the other has taken all their husband's attention. Leah's response is replete with her feelings about Rachel: "Is it a little thing that you have taken my husband, that you want to take also my sons' mandrakes too?" (Gen. 30:15, trans. mine). By letting the women exchange words about their thoughts of each other, the narrator shows how heated the struggle has become. According to Boom, Leah's statement implies that Rachel had taken her place as firstborn, first wife, and has absolute possession of most of the sexual engagement with Jacob.<sup>380</sup> Rachel clearly dominates this love affair, and Leah's statement is a way to balance the scales. Leah's speech implicates Rachel in doing nothing about what her husband has been putting her through.

The issues that brought about the rivalry between Leah and Rachel have much to share with the Akan context. In the Akan context, a man who desires to take a second wife is

<sup>378</sup> Mwangi J. Macharia, "From Polygamy to Multiple Monogamies to *Mipango ya Kando!*" in *Polygamous Ways of Life Past and Present in Africa and Europe* (Zürich: Literatur Verlag, 2020), 379.

<sup>379</sup> Stan Chu Ilo, *The Face of Africa: Looking Beyond the Shadows* (Eugene, Oregon: Wpf & Stock, 2012), 257.

<sup>380</sup> Corrie T. Boom, "Genesis," in *NKJV: The Women's Study Bible; Receiving Truth for Balance, Hope and Transformation*, ed. Dorothy Petterson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 56.

obliged to discuss the subject with the first wife to get her consent before carrying on.<sup>381</sup> The goal is to ensure a peaceful relationship between the two women. A woman could even ask the husband to take an additional wife to help with the domestic chores.<sup>382</sup> Usually, after the contraction of a second marriage, first wives receive more respect and recognition than junior wives. Broude observes that “the senior wife is the manager of the household, overseeing the work and other activities of the remaining wives and the distribution of supplies. In another society, the senior wife arranges and consents to the husband’s next marriage.”<sup>383</sup> First wives who have such privileged opportunities, if proper checks and balances are not placed on their role, could use their privileged opportunity to abuse the other wives.

Like Jacob’s love for Rachel, strong love and care that husbands developed for younger wives have also been identified. The Akan have the adage that “a new marriage is like a new cocoa farm that has started bearing fruit and must be kept well.” This implies that if much attention is not given to the young wife, the marriage will not survive.<sup>384</sup> Second wives are usually married out of genuine love. A husband may sometimes blindly give all his attention to his second wife, who may usually be much younger. First wives who end up being neglected by their husbands experience mental health issues due to the husband’s favouritism among his numerous wives. These women develop hatred for the beloved wife, become dissatisfied with their marital conditions, see the rival wife as a competitor, and distrust the husband for bringing in another woman to share her position as a wife.<sup>385</sup>

Open quarrels, dislike, and hatred begin to surface between the two wives when the husband openly shows genuine love toward one wife and less affection for his elderly wife.<sup>386</sup> The first wife realises her value is declining when she is treated with less respect and her husband stops paying attention to her pressing needs. Unloved women may instinctively fight for their husbands’ love. This is demonstrated in quarrelling, jealousy, and hatred among co-wives. Hillman states that these conditions can hinder peace in the

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<sup>381</sup> Mwangi J. Macharia. “From Polygamy to Multiple Monogamies to *Mipango ya Kando!*” in *Polygamous Ways of Life Past and Present in Africa and Europe* (Zurich: Literature Verlag, 2020), 379; Robert S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 95.

<sup>382</sup> Godwin K. Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 2003), 56.

<sup>383</sup> Gwen J. Broude, *Marriage, Family and Relationships: A Cross-cultural Encyclopedia* (Denver: ABC-CLIO, 1994), 208-209.

<sup>384</sup> Kofi Agyekum, “Akan Proverbs and Aphorisms about Marriage,” in *Institute of African Studies Research* 27 (2012): 15.

<sup>385</sup> Tsoaledi D. Thobajane and Flora Takayindisa, “An Exploration of Polygamous Marriages: A Worldview,” *Mediterranean Journal of Social Science* 27 (2014): 158.

<sup>386</sup> Sehrish Farooq, Farah Malik and Sabila Naseer, “Causes and Consequences of Polygamy: An understanding of Coping Strategies by Co-wives in Polygamous Marriage”, In *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry* 22, 9 (2021): 5.

house and may cause the unloved woman/women to look down on themselves.<sup>387</sup> First wives who experience such unfavourable conditions have low self-esteem and poor relationships with their husbands. In effect, they show signs of loneliness, somatisation, depression, fear, nervousness, hostility, distrustful ideation, and cause family friction.<sup>388</sup>

Leah's request that Rachel release her husband in exchange for her sons' mandrakes would have been seen as usurping her place as first wife. Among the Akan, younger wives usually cannot control a man's sexual rota. However, it is expected of the husband to maintain a fair sexual rotation among his wives. Giving Rachel absolute control over whom to sleep with and when would have offended Leah, the first wife, deeply. In the Akan context, if a man gives such allowance to any of his wives, it could also generate conflict. A polygynous husband is expected to set timetables so each wife has her "cooking and sleeping schedule" with the husband.<sup>389</sup> Each woman would be given her visiting week during which she was expected to have sexual access to her husband. During her weeklong meeting time, the wife on duty was scheduled to meet her husband, cook for him, and sleep in his room, often using bedding she would take with her when her week ended. Such an arrangement did not exclude the man from interacting with his other wives; it simply meant that at any given time, a particular woman had the right to sleep in their respective natal home. It would, therefore, be difficult for the wife on duty to claim exclusive sexual rights even during the week of such rights.<sup>390</sup>

Leah's open confrontation, in which she asked Rachel whether it was not enough to take her husband that she wanted to take her son's mandrakes (Gen. 30:15), indicates Rachel's breach of the rota in an unfair manner. Akansor reports on selected cases where polygamous wives openly engage in violent fights that ended in the Accra Circuit Court for settlement.<sup>391</sup> These mannerisms indicate a quest for change and the frustrations these women face in their households.<sup>392</sup>

## Conclusion

The issues that provoked tension between Jacob's co-wives are not new to Akan readers. When the Akan read the narrative with deeper consciousness and reflect on their own

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<sup>387</sup> Eugene Hillman, *Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Churches* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1975), 182.

<sup>388</sup> Alean Al-Krenawi, "Women of Polygamous Marriages in Primary Health Care Centres". *Contemporary Family Therapy* 21, 3 (1999), 423.

<sup>389</sup> Martha Donkor and Amoaba Gooden, *Gender and Sexuality in Ghanaian Societies*, ed. Martha Donkor and Amoaba Gooden (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022), xix

<sup>390</sup> Donkor and Gooden, *Gender and Sexuality in Ghanaian Societies*, xix.

<sup>391</sup> Justina Akansor, "Polygamic Lifestyle in Twentieth Century Ghana", in *Polygamous Ways of Life Past and Present in Africa and Europe*, ed. Henry Kam Kah and Bea Lundt (Zürich: Literatur Verlag, 2020), 382-383.

<sup>392</sup> See Titus K. Nnabugwu, "Marriage in African Society and Culture: Challenges to Polygamy as a Juridical Matrimonial Model in Nigeria," *Journal of Customary and Religious Law* 1, no. 1 (2024): 83.

background, they gain a better understanding of why the breach of the marital contract made Jacob have problems with Leah and love Rachel more. In addition, the Akan would better understand the envy between Rachel and Leah and Jacob's monopolisation of them by examining how favouritism and special attention are given to the most loved woman over the others. Thus, the conflicts among Jacob's co-wives could be seen as a prototype of what an Akan polygynous family could easily experience if the husband does not handle his wives tactfully. The Hebrew narrative about Jacob, on the other hand, offers Akan readers a chance to reflect on polygynous practices that stratify wives into the loved and the marginalised, warning polygynous men in both contexts about the gravity of differential affection for their wives. It also defies the Akan fertile wives' weaponisation of childbirth to win their husbands' affection. In other words, procreation that the Akan husband cherishes so much is presented in the Hebrew narrative not as a guarantee to win a husband's love in an instance when two wives are competing for their husband's affection.

Jacob's passive behaviour in allowing his legal wives to push their maidservants on him depicts similar instances in which an Akan polygynous man yields to his wives' whims and caprices to ensure peace in polygynous households. This reduces the possible trauma the man could be subjected to if he fails to yield to their wives' schemes.

Finally, the study contributes to African biblical hermeneutics by demonstrating how Akan cultural experience provides a fruitful interpretive lens for understanding the conflict dynamics of Genesis 29–30. At the same time, the Jacob narrative functions as a critique of marital favouritism, fertility-based status competition, and the marginalisation of less-favoured wives in both ancient Israelite and Akan polygynous contexts.

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## **African Pentecostalism and Diasporic Mission in Southeast Asia: Reinterpreting Spirituality, Cultural Relativism and Historical Consciousness**

Fred Cudjoe Adadey

### **Abstract**

The complex nature of spirituality within church missions continues to shape theological understandings of faith, identity, and culture. The Church of Pentecost in the Global South provides a significant context for reassessing how spirituality, cultural relativism, and historical consciousness intersect in diasporic mission in Thailand. However, insufficient research has examined how African Pentecostals create religious spaces and engage with Thai host culture. Drawing on an ethnographic case study conducted in 2018 and revisited in 2024, this study uses focus-group discussions and participant observation. The findings indicate that African expressions of spirituality foster cultural reproduction and preservation but offer limited evidence of mutual engagement with the host culture. The study therefore contributes to discussions of the tensions among cultural influence, interpretation, and the preservation of spiritual identity in diasporic church mission.

**Keywords:** Spirituality, African Pentecostal, Cultural Relativism, Historical Consciousness, Diasporic Mission, Southeast Asia

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### **Introduction**

Southeast Asia, and Thailand in particular, is predominantly shaped by a Buddhist religious landscape. Culturally, Thailand is a community-oriented society with a hierarchical structure and deep respect for tradition. Rather than outright resisting change, most Thais tend to be more open and receptive when there is a genuine appreciation for their culture and language. Thailand also hosts a notable presence of Christian missionaries, with headquarters located in major cities such as Chiang Mai and Bangkok. Despite this, Christians comprise a relatively small minority, representing about 1.1% of the population. In 2021, approximately 1.2% of Thais identified as

Christian, making Christianity the third-largest religion after Buddhism (92.5%) and Islam (5.4%).<sup>393</sup>

Given the deep cultural and religious ties among the Thai people, Christianity faces considerable challenges in establishing a foothold. Based on my eight years of missionary experience in Thailand, I observed that converting a Thai individual often involves significant personal sacrifice, frequently requiring them to sever family ties, a burden that places considerable responsibility on the missionary.

In contrast, Ghana's religious landscape is predominantly Christian, with approximately 71.4% of the population identifying as followers of Christianity. Islam is the second-largest religious group at 19.9%, while indigenous religious practices account for about 3.3%, non-religion about 4.5%, and other religions 1.1% of the population.<sup>394</sup> A defining feature of Ghanaian Christianity is the growing prominence of Pentecostalism, which has become the dominant Christian movement in the country. Characterized by its vibrant spirituality, experiential worship, and strong missionary zeal, Pentecostalism has played a pivotal role in shaping Ghana's religious identity and global outreach, most notably through what has come to be termed the 'diasporic mission.'<sup>395</sup>

Although Ghana and Thailand have no direct correlation in religious demographics, certain distinctive features shape the missional contexts of both settings. These include shared dynamics of 'cultural relativism,'<sup>396</sup> 'historical consciousness,'<sup>397</sup> and the concept

<sup>393</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Report on International Religious Freedom: Thailand," (December 2021 estimate: 92.5% Buddhist, 5.4% Muslim, 1.2% Christian, 2022), 1.

<sup>394</sup> Ghana Statistical Service, *2021 Population and Housing Census: General Report, Volume 3C (Religion)* (Accra: Ghana Statistical Service, 2023), 40. [Census2021\\_Summary\\_report\\_of\\_final\\_results.pdf](#) -Adobe Reader (Accessed on February 28, 2025).

<sup>395</sup> In Pentecostalism, borrowing from Afe Adogame and James Spickard's approach, diasporic mission as operationalised in this article, instead of treating mission and migration as distinct concepts, I present diasporic religious activity as fundamentally missionary in a broad sense. African immigrant churches not only preserve traditions from their homelands but also actively proclaim and practice their faith in new environments. This fosters religious growth, community formation, and outreach within host societies, encompassing evangelism, church planting, and social engagement that transcend ethnic boundaries. See, Adogame, Afe and James V. Spickard, eds. *Religion Crossing Boundaries: Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics in Africa and the New African Diaspora* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 15.

<sup>396</sup> Here, cultural relativism is operationalised as an anthropological principle asserting that an individual's beliefs, values, and practices should be understood in the context of their own culture, rather than being judged by the standards of another. This concept emphasizes that no culture is inherently superior to another, and that moral or religious systems are both culturally specific and context-dependent. See, Melville J. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism: Perspectives in Cultural Pluralism* (New York: Random House, 1972), 26.

<sup>397</sup> According to Rusen, historical consciousness encompasses an awareness and interpretation of the past that informs one's understanding of the present and influences expectations for the future. It involves recognizing that historical events, traditions, and cultural narratives shape contemporary identity, belief systems, and social development. In theological and missiological contexts, historical consciousness fosters engagement with the past, allowing for a contextualization of faith and practice within specific cultural and

of 'spirituality.'<sup>398</sup> Existing scholarship has explored African Pentecostalism in relation to contextualization, spirituality, development, identity, and transnational migration.<sup>399</sup> However, there has been less focus on how African Pentecostal migrants create religious spaces through their everyday cultural and spiritual practices in non-African host societies. In particular, the literature has paid limited empirical attention to Ghanaian Pentecostal communities in Thailand. The research aims to explore how the Church of Pentecost, through its diasporic mission, represents its culture and influences the host culture in its mission activities in Thailand.

### *Conceptual Framework*

I will examine the diasporic mission framework developed by Adogame and Spickard alongside Kwame Bediako's contextualization framework. Highlighting diverse forms of African diaspora communities, Adogame and Spickard's framework argues that the intersection of religions, identity, migration and social networks is a form of faith formation.<sup>400</sup> However, Bediako's 'perspective'<sup>401</sup> integrates spirituality with historical consciousness and cultural identity in mission. Here, cultural negotiation acts as a strategy for intercultural hermeneutics, allowing theological meaning to be translated across various symbolic systems.<sup>402</sup> Together, this translation inevitably alters both the message and the messenger. However, the preservation of spiritual identity, particularly a self-understanding rooted in pneumatology serves as a boundary-marking mechanism that ensures communal coherence. This resulting tension, I observe is not only practical but also theological; it addresses how the 'Spirit is discerned' within 'new cultural

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temporal frameworks. Jörn Rüsen, *Historical Consciousness: Narrative Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenetic Development* (Washington, DC: The Council of Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), 13.

<sup>398</sup> For the purposes of this study, I refer to Spirituality as the closeness to one's culture, informing one's consciousness. See Jehu J. Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 12-18; Thomas P. Maxwell, "Integral Spirituality, Deep Science, and Ecological Awareness," *Zygon* 38, no. 2 (2003): 258.

<sup>399</sup> Anderson, Allan H. *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; Anderson, Allan. *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena. *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. Studies in Religion in Africa 27. Leiden: Brill, 2005; Fred Cudjoe Adadey and Yisa Barnabas, "Pentecostalism and Current Development in West Africa: Reimagining the Pentecostal Landscape, Politics and Vision," *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (2024): 99-115.

<sup>400</sup> Adogame and Spickard, *Religion Crossing Boundaries*, 15.

<sup>401</sup> Thus, Bediako's contextualization provides both a hermeneutical tool and a missiological guide, encouraging African Pentecostals engaged in reverse mission to root their theology in African spiritual heritage while remaining responsive to the socio-religious contexts, for instance, Southeast Asia. This approach transforms reverse mission from mere evangelistic exportation into a reciprocal process of cultural and spiritual exchange. See Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 225-227.

<sup>402</sup> Nomatter Sande and Silas Nyadzo, "Spirit-Led Missions: An African Pentecostal Missions Theology in Diasporic Contexts," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 31, no. 2 (2022): 215-232.

contexts' without falling into syncretistic accommodation or cultural isolationism.<sup>403</sup> Consequently, diasporic mission becomes an ongoing negotiation between 'continuity and change,' embodiment and translation, and rootedness and mobility.<sup>404</sup>

Bediako's model of contextualization, meanwhile, encourages critical reflection and remains significant as contemporary spirituality strives to balance historical foundations with cultural relevance.<sup>405</sup> This quest for harmony between faith and culture in diasporic mission underscores the importance of Adogame and Spickard's insights, alongside Bediako's perspective on African spirituality, in this study. This article argues that although African cultural and spiritual roots significantly shape the spiritual vitality of African Pentecostal communities within transnational contexts, their deliberate or inadvertent interactions with the host culture present important missiological challenges for the long-term sustainability of their missions in Thailand. This argument will be elaborated upon in the subsequent sections of the article.

This article is structured in three parts. The first section introduces the study and reviews key literature, mapping both the African and Thai religious landscapes and highlighting the growing importance of identity and African culture as integral to church growth. The second section presents the ethnographic data, while the final section discusses the findings and their missiological implications for diasporic mission.

### **African Pentecostal Religious Space and Spirituality**

The African Pentecostal religious space is best understood not merely as a physical church location but as a multifaceted social, cultural, and spiritual environment where believers engage with, negotiate, and express their faith.<sup>406</sup> Fred Adadey and Yisa Barnabas conceptualize Pentecostalism as an "imaginary social space with practical ramifications,"<sup>407</sup> underscoring its potential to foster social transformation. Afe Adogame highlights the transnational nature of African Christian space, illustrating how migrants navigate global influences while preserving their local cultural identities.<sup>408</sup> These perspectives intersect in emphasizing that Pentecostal spirituality transcends worship and permeates everyday relationships, identity construction, and communal practices that are crucial for church growth. By implication, both perspectives depict

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<sup>403</sup> Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 42.

<sup>404</sup> Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit*, 42-45.

<sup>405</sup> Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 227-231.

<sup>406</sup> Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*; Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*; Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*; Adadey and Barnabas, "Pentecostalism and Current Development in West Africa," 99-115.

<sup>407</sup> Adadey and Barnabas, "Pentecostalism and Current Development in West Africa," 101.

<sup>408</sup> Afe Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 101.

Pentecostalism as a phenomenon that extends beyond institutional and religious boundaries.

Similarly, within African Pentecostal contexts, elements such as prayer, healing, prophecy, music, dance, and collective participation can transform ordinary spaces into arenas of perceived divine encounter,<sup>409</sup> thereby blurring the lines between sacred and secular spaces. This supports Johnson Asamoah-Gyadu's assertion that African Pentecostal spirituality is deeply experiential and oriented towards the tangible workings of the Holy Spirit in daily life.<sup>410</sup> Likewise, Ogbu Kalu illustrates that African Pentecostalism embraces cultural forms, such as music, dance, symbolism, and communal practices, while reinterpreting them through a Christian lens.<sup>411</sup>

These approaches show that Pentecostal religious space is both spiritual and cultural, fostering an environment where believers encounter God while negotiating identity, belonging, and social relationships. In a diaspora context, this significance is amplified, as the church serves as a transnational space where African cultural practices are both preserved and transformed alongside Pentecostal spirituality.<sup>412</sup> However, these new opportunities in mission also suggest that African Pentecostals face challenges in negotiating their host cultures in Southeast Asia, as the data will demonstrate later.

### **Pentecostalism and the Thai Religious Space**

The religious landscape in Thailand is often primarily associated with the prominence of Theravada Buddhist temples (wat).<sup>413</sup> Unlike the Church as a place of worship, Thai temples serve as 'social, economic, and communal hubs'<sup>414</sup> where ritual, exchange, consultation, and daily activities intersect. This spatial production takes place within a religious environment strongly influenced by Buddhism and established ideas about sacred places.<sup>415</sup> This suggests that Pentecostal churches can serve as alternative spaces where Thai Christians negotiate belonging and religious difference.

Piyawit Moonkham and Michael Chladek's recent scholarship challenges the rigid separation between sacred and secular spaces, demonstrating that Thai temples function as socially integrated and relatively open environments. Similarly, James Taylor contends

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<sup>409</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena. "Signs of the Spirit: Worship as Experience in African Pentecostalism." *Journal of African Christian Thought* 8, no. 2 (2005): 17-24

<sup>410</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 45.

<sup>411</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>412</sup> Adadey and Barnabas, "Pentecostalism and Current Development in West Africa," 106; Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 45; Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 45.

<sup>413</sup> James Taylor, "Urban Buddhism in the Thai Postmetropolis," in *Handbook of Religion and the Asian City*, ed. Peter van der Veer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 219-34.

<sup>414</sup> Taylor, "Urban Buddhism in the Thai Postmetropolis," 219-28.

<sup>415</sup> Taylor, "Urban Buddhism in the Thai Postmetropolis," 219-25.

that Bangkok's religious landscape is increasingly influenced by urbanization, mobility, and various forms of religious modernity, rather than by a simple decline in sacred spaces. This space argued as an 'imaginary social space with practical ramification,'<sup>416</sup> is what Pentecostals sought to occupy and extend their mission. As suggested, Pentecostalism may hold significant relevance within this context, as it introduces a distinct spatial and experiential framework.<sup>417</sup>

However, this notion has been challenged. James Hosack notes the fragile nature of Pentecostalism in Thailand, while cautioning about the increasingly diverse and locally governed nature of Pentecostal and Charismatic congregational settings and their perceived immediate transformation.<sup>418</sup> For instance, Robert Hefner's argues the 'cultural foreignness' of Christian conversion in Thailand.<sup>419</sup> Additionally, more contemporary ethnographic work indicates that Thai converts actively reinterpret Christian concepts through pre-existing notions of spiritual experience.<sup>420</sup> As Felicity Aulino's work highlights, Thai neo-Pentecostal Christians may reject the idea of Buddhist karma while still retaining elements of a karmic understanding of contingency.<sup>421</sup> Thus, conversion should be understood not as a straightforward replacement of one worldview with another, but rather as a reorganization of existing religious categories and relationships,<sup>422</sup> which is a fundamental characteristic of the Pentecostal community. However, how Pentecostals have leveraged these notions and relationships in the host culture in Thailand is obscured, raising a significant spatial question: whether African Pentecostals effectively navigate this relationship.

Pentecostal churches may create distinct environments that separate believers from Buddhist ritual practices; however, they also integrate into their neighbourhoods, family networks, and urban infrastructures.<sup>423</sup> As a result, the spatial boundaries between Christianity and Buddhism may remain porous, even when theological divisions are firmly asserted.<sup>424</sup> Research on Thai Pentecostalism further indicates that the

<sup>416</sup> Adadey and Barnabas, "Pentecostalism and Current Development in West Africa," 101.

<sup>417</sup> Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*; Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*.

<sup>418</sup> James Hosack and Jason Morris, "Pentecostalism in Thailand and Vietnam," in *Asia Pacific Pentecostalism*, ed. Denise A. Austin, Jacqueline Grey, and Paul W. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 150–73.

<sup>419</sup> Charles F. Keyes, "Why the Thai Are Not Christians: Buddhist and Christian Conversion in Thailand," in *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 259–84.

<sup>420</sup> Felicity Aulino, "From Karma to Sin: A Kaleidoscopic Theory of Mind and Christian Experience in Northern Thailand." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 26, no. 4 (2020): 823–840.

<sup>421</sup> Aulino, "From Karma to Sin," 823.

<sup>422</sup> Keyes, "Why the Thai Are Not Christians," 259–284.

<sup>423</sup> Hosack and Morris, "Pentecostalism in Thailand and Vietnam," 161.

<sup>424</sup> Hosack and Morris, "Pentecostalism in Thailand and Vietnam," 161.

classifications of “Pentecostal,” “charismatic,” and “Protestant” are inherently unstable, as independent churches and local movements often transcend denominational lines.<sup>425</sup>

This evidence suggests that the most insightful critical perspective is to view Thai religious space as contested, relational, and continually evolving, rather than as a static geography consisting of Buddhist temples, juxtaposed with Christian churches for African Pentecostals to inhabit as an ‘imaginary social space,’<sup>426</sup> experiencing the divine, organizing community, and negotiating what it means to be culturally Thai.

### *Challenges of Integration*

Primarily focusing on Europe, Afe Adogame<sup>427</sup> and the collaborative work of Adogame and Spickard<sup>428</sup> provide a vital framework for understanding the mission of African Pentecostal churches within the diaspora. Adogame challenges conventional Western-centric models of evangelism, linking it to “reverse mission.” Adogame and Spickard, instead, place African Pentecostal movements within transnational religious networks influenced by migration, globalization, and cross-border social connections. Collectively, this evidence shows that African Pentecostal churches not only function as support systems for migrants but also act as proactive agents of evangelism in their host societies.<sup>429</sup> This framework suggests how evangelism and public engagement contribute to effective and sustained African Pentecostal diasporic mission.

On the Contrary, Sande Nomatter and Silas Nyadzo’s work on diasporic mission in Europe provides evidence of challenges in negotiation. They note that while the church’s strategy encompasses several elements, such as spontaneous outreach, the involvement of all believers, auxiliary support structures, and organizational planning, these approaches have not led to significant growth within the broader British population.<sup>430</sup> The authors contend that mission cannot depend exclusively on traditional methods based on ethnic or cultural familiarity. Instead, they propose that mission theology must navigate cultural and colonial boundaries and foster deeper engagement.<sup>431</sup>

As demonstrated, Adogame and Spickard, Sande and Nyadzo’s work suggest contextual and missional tension. This also creates a gap in literature on Pentecostal missional negotiation. Existing research instead highlights African religious practices in the diaspora, creating a broader understanding of African spirituality as a lived experience,

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<sup>425</sup> Hosack and Morris, “Pentecostalism in Thailand and Vietnam,” 161.

<sup>426</sup> Adadey and Barnabas, “Pentecostalism and Current Development in West Africa,” 101.

<sup>427</sup> Adogame, “African Christian Diaspora,” 34.

<sup>428</sup> Adogame and Spickard, *Religion Crossing Boundaries*, 112-15.

<sup>429</sup> Adogame, “African Christian Diaspora,” 34; Adogame and Spickard, *Religion Crossing Boundaries*, 112-15.

<sup>430</sup> Sande and Nyadzo, “Spirit-Led Missions,” 220-23.

<sup>431</sup> Sande and Nyadzo, “Spirit-Led Missions,” 220.

one that is deeply embedded in communal relationships, family cohesion, and collective identity, rather than negotiation.<sup>432</sup> However, these values, while not only central to African Pentecostal spirituality, may not align seamlessly with the needs or expectations of host cultures in Southeast Asia, creating contextual and missional tensions.

Consequently, this also raises the discourse on the significance and/or insignificance of 'transfer' and 'adaptation,'<sup>433</sup> in the relationship between the diasporic mission and the host culture. Transfer and adaptation, I observe, are not unidirectional or passive processes; they must arise from ongoing negotiations between African Pentecostal churches and local congregations in diasporic contexts. I argue that this negotiation must facilitate the selective transfer, reshaping, and adaptation of religious practices, identities, and authority, reflecting a dynamic of mutual adjustment rather than mere imposition. However, as the data will show, CoP in Thailand only reinforces the reproduction of identity, rather than mutual adjustment in mission.

### **African Culture as a Significant Aspect of Pentecostal Church Growth**

A substantial body of literature highlights that integrating historical and cultural knowledge to develop a localized theology remains a major challenge for theologians,<sup>434</sup> particularly within African contexts and the diaspora. One key issue underlying this difficulty is how local churches form religious identity, often at the expense of their surrounding cultural environment. This has fostered a longstanding hesitation, even suspicion, toward engaging with historical and cultural dimensions in theological reflection.<sup>435</sup>

Here, Kwame Bediako therefore calls for a critical re-engagement with culture through the dual lenses of the gospel and tradition, positioning this dialogue as foundational to constructing an authentically African theology.<sup>436</sup> This approach suggests that a holistic understanding of faith, both past and present, requires theological reflection that is conscious of time, place, and context. While this underscores the significance of

<sup>432</sup> Adogame and Spickard, *Religion Crossing Boundaries*, 15; Kgatle, Mookgo Solomon. *African Pentecostals in the Diaspora: A Pneumatological Missional Imagination*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2023; Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena. *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. Leiden: Brill, 2005; Kalu, Ogbu. "African Pentecostalism in Diaspora." *PentecoStudies* 9, no. 1 (2010): 45–66.

<sup>433</sup> Tracy Kuperus, "Democratization, Religious Actors, and Political Influence: A Comparison of Christian Councils in Ghana and South Africa," *Africa Today* 64, no. 3 (2018): 29–51.

<sup>434</sup> Alan Thomson, *Culture in a Post-Secular Context: Theological Possibilities in Milbank, Barth and Bediako* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2014), 12–14; Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. and expanded ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 25–27.

<sup>435</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 25–27.

<sup>436</sup> Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 415.

‘contextual theology,’<sup>437</sup> it also exposes tensions surrounding identity and negotiation within the framework of diasporic mission and Bediako’s contextualization framework, which the data will evidence later.

As some scholars observe, for culture to effectively align with church mission, the notion of identity must remain anchored in its social location,<sup>438</sup> an aspect that challenges Bediako’s contextualization, largely linked to existing models of African Pentecostal mission influenced by European experience. By inference, such limitations may have contributed to gaps in contemporary African Pentecostal missionary engagement and the church’s contextualisation approach, particularly in Thailand.

### *Understanding the Cultural Context*

There has been a growing movement toward the indigenization of the local church, aimed at fostering historical consciousness through traditional cultures.<sup>439</sup> This approach resonates with transfer and negotiation with host cultures into the incarnational reality of Christ and aligns with Bediako’s framework of contextualization, which echoes Niebuhr’s typology of the “Christ of culture.”<sup>440</sup> However, this approach has also faced criticism from those who argue that Christian ethics should take precedence over cultural values within the church’s mission.<sup>441</sup> Yet it remains questionable whether discussions surrounding cultural values have been sufficiently addressed, or whether their enduring significance continues to be underestimated within the framework of diasporic mission.

Consequently, there is an urgent need to critically engage with culture and self-identity, appreciating the ‘work of the Holy Spirit,’ to fully articulate the essence of spirituality within the Pentecostal experience of diasporic mission, while carefully negotiating host cultures, which the CoP sought to do.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 3-15.

<sup>438</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*; John M. Prior, “Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century,” *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies* 31, no. 3 (2014): 458–59.

<sup>439</sup> Andrew Thomson, “Learning from the African Experience: Bediako and Critical Contextualisation,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 30, no. 1 (2006), 35.

<sup>440</sup> Takashi Haraguchi, “Reflections on H. Richard Niebuhr’s Theoretical Model Concerning the Relationship between Christianity and Culture: Its Applicability to the Japanese Context,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 21, no. 2 (2007): 228–41.

<sup>441</sup> Haraguchi, Reflections on H. Richard Niebuhr’s Theoretical Model Concerning the Relationship between Christianity and Culture, 229.

<sup>442</sup> Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit*, 45.

## Methodology

This study adopted an ‘ethnographic case study’<sup>443</sup> approach, incorporating both focus group discussions and participant observations as primary data collection methods. The focus group method, a qualitative approach, enables the collection of rich, in-depth insights through structured discussions among participants who share relevant experiences or characteristics.<sup>444</sup> By employing this method, the study sought to explore participants’ perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and motivations concerning cultural transfer<sup>445</sup> and church growth within the context of diasporic mission in Thailand. The ethics committee granted ethical approval, and participants provided informed consent.

The target population consisted of Ghanaian Christian migrants residing in Thailand and a smaller number of Thai nationals, with particular attention to Bangkok. The study focused on the Church of Pentecost (CoP), Thailand Chapter, because of its substantial Ghanaian membership and participation in transnational Pentecostal networks. During the initial fieldwork in 2018, the congregation had approximately 50 members: 90% Ghanaian, 5% Thai, and 5% from other African countries. Follow-up research in 2024 found membership remained at approximately 50, with a similar distribution: 90% Ghanaian, 6% Thai, and 4% from other African countries. Approximately 60% of the members were men aged 35–65, while 40% were women aged 35–45. Although some members had relocated or returned to their home countries since the COVID-19 pandemic, new arrivals largely balanced their departures. This relative demographic stability provided a consistent basis for comparing the congregation’s experiences and practices in 2018 and 2024.

The researcher used purposive sampling to recruit participants based on their knowledge of and involvement in church activities related to the research problem. Consistent with David Morgan’s recommendations, each focus group comprised six to ten participants, providing diverse perspectives while remaining manageable.<sup>446</sup> The researcher conducted four focus-group sessions, each lasting 60 to 90 minutes. The researcher facilitated the discussions using a semi-structured guide<sup>447</sup> that combined predetermined prompts with flexibility to pursue emerging themes. Each session took place in a neutral

<sup>443</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018), 45.

<sup>444</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2015), 141–42.

<sup>445</sup> Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2015), 5.

<sup>446</sup> David L. Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997), 2.

<sup>447</sup> John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 158–59.

and comfortable setting to encourage open dialogue.<sup>448</sup> All discussions were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. The data were analyzed thematically, following the procedures outlined by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, to identify recurring patterns and themes in participants' responses.<sup>449</sup>

In addition to focus group discussions, the study used participant observation to deepen understanding of participants' lived experiences within their local church context.<sup>450</sup> Observations focused on worship practices, leadership dynamics, and congregational interactions to identify cultural and spiritual elements shaping their collective spirituality. This method provided contextual grounding for the data, allowing for the triangulation of the findings and fostering a holistic understanding of how African Pentecostal spirituality operates within the Thai cultural environment. Through this combined methodological approach, the study captured both the subjective meanings and practical expressions of spirituality, and how the CoP community and the host culture negotiate them.

As a missionary in Thailand, I understand that my cultural, religious, and personal background influences my interactions with the local community. My role as a foreign Christian worker comes with assumptions and power dynamics that can affect my relationships and interpretations. Therefore, I strove to be aware of my biases, especially when my cultural expectations differ from Thai practices. By engaging in self-reflection, listening actively, and remaining open to feedback from locals, I sought to approach my work with humility, cultural sensitivity, and respect for local knowledge.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

This study used thematic analysis to support transparency in interpreting the interviews and observations, treating the complex and subjective nature of spirituality as a test case for understanding mission negotiation. Two major themes were identified: (1) African expressions of spirituality and (2) expressions of culture and religious belief. Their associated subthemes were then analysed. Overall, these themes demonstrated cultural reproduction and preservation rather than mutual engagement between the CoP in Thailand and the host culture.

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<sup>448</sup> David W. Stewart and Prem N. Shamdasani, *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 3.

<sup>449</sup> Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

<sup>450</sup> Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 141–42.

## African Expression of Spirituality

The first theme was the African expression of spirituality. It is relevant because the commonalities and sub-themes extracted from the dataset preceded the common components identified as cultural values.

### *Cultural values*

Here, some participants, mostly Ghanaians, shared how they maintain their cultural values while Thais look on. These values are expressed through good morals, family values and sharing. Men were tasked with responsibility as heads. Before and after the service, newcomers were well cared for. Crucially, participants needed to understand why there was special attention to newcomers and men as heads. Some of the participants responded that:

We always welcome new members as a family. We believe that anyone who walks in here is God's divine purpose, so we treat you like an angel visitation (Int. 15, M).<sup>451</sup>

Nobody is a stranger in the house of God, and so you are in a family. We make sure we assign someone to new members to be in constant communication as a sign of caregiving and bond as a family (Int.18. L).

We have breakfast together before service as a family with new members before the morning service begins. We believe that it encourages them to feel a sense of belonging (Int. 21 M).

For other participants, moral values were key to church growth, as the immediate communities they live in attest that they are good Christians with a sense of responsibility. As other participants noted:

We encourage everyone to be well dressed. And most of us here work as teachers. So it is fair that we carry ourselves in a way that tells others who we are in church and our workplace. These moral values uplift others around us (Int. 22. L).

Coming here, nobody needs to tell me how to look. Because I know that if I dress inappropriately, my subconscious will judge me. In the house of God, cleanliness is next to Godliness (Int. 23. M)

Our elders and presiding elder here are very supportive of our moral values in our communities so that we can evangelise to them. They make sure our young ones are supported and prayed for so that they grow up responsibly (Int. 25.M).

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<sup>451</sup> This is a participant response. "Int." means interview, "M" represents church member and "L" represents church leader respectively. ("Int. 15. M" is a response from a member of the church).

Other participants also said that sharing responsibility is a crucial part of their cultural values, as it fosters unity and strengthens family cohesion in the church. While the male pastor preached, ladies led worship and praise. As some noted:

We share responsibility. We make sure that everybody in the service plays a role. We are a small community, so sharing that love should not be difficult (Int. 45. L).

We encourage women to lead worship and praise. They are able to cause sober reflection in worship. Once everybody feels they belong, they give their best (Int. 47. L).

My wife and I sometimes teach Sunday school children. For me it's a family bond, and we try to instil love and responsibility into these young ones (Int. 48. M).

As an usher, my role is to make sure when people come to service, they feel comfortable where they sit (Int. 49. L)

We have men's and women's groups led by our leaders who make sure we meet to discuss our stories and support each other (Int. 50. M).

We see our elders here as the head of the family. And we are able to share our challenges with them for support (Int. 24. L).

The subthemes of moral values, family, and sharing identified in this study highlight fundamental cultural principles that underpin spiritual engagement within the CoP in Thailand. The findings present a nuanced challenge to Kwame Bediako's model of Christian contextualization, particularly his assertion that Christianity should engage with and become meaningfully rooted in the cultural context in which it is expressed.<sup>452</sup> Participants' accounts reveal considerable engagement with the host society, including moral conduct, communal responsibility, hospitality, and care for young people, suggesting that the church aims to establish a credible Christian presence in its surrounding community.

However, these practices are primarily mediated through Ghanaian cultural understandings of family and communal life, rather than through negotiating and adopting host-cultural forms. For instance, welcoming newcomers "as a family," sharing meals, assigning members to care for new arrivals, considering elders as family heads, and promoting collective responsibility all reflect some Ghanaian patterns of kinship and reciprocity within the diaspora congregation. Similarly, expectations related to appropriate dress, cleanliness, responsibility, and the moral formation of children serve

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<sup>452</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995); Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

as mechanisms through which members construct a recognisable Christian identity within the host society.

Consequently, the findings complicate Bediako's thesis on contextualization: rather than demonstrating straightforward cultural integration, the congregation appears to engage in a selective and negotiated contextualization, participating in the host society while simultaneously preserving and reproducing Ghanaian cultural values. This suggests that within diaspora Pentecostalism, contextualization may operate not merely as cultural assimilation, but rather as the transnational reconstruction of Christian and cultural identity, wherein the church becomes a space for reproducing Ghanaian identity, Christian faith, and participation in the broader host society.<sup>453</sup> Crucially, the data suggest that cultural preservation can unintentionally become cultural isolation in diasporic contexts, revealing an ongoing dialogue between inherited African values and the realities of the CoP in Thailand.

### **Expression of Culture and Religious Belief**

For this theme, I will offer my observations during the fieldwork and participants' responses. Under this theme, subthemes such as self-identification and religious belief emerged. One of those was self-identification. This subtheme was expressed through the understanding that how one expresses him/herself, and the medium used, is important for connecting to the divine nature of God. For instance, some participants noted that:

Our worship songs are mostly in either Akan, Ewe, or Ga. We believe that there is a better connection when we express ourselves in languages that we are familiar with. And also, the majority of us are Ghanaian, even though we sing in English sometimes (Int. 10. L).

When we conduct our praise in our local languages, it encourages people to join in singing and dancing. Most people miss this back home. So this brings lots of joy (Int. 3. L).

I feel something when our local songs are sung in foreign lands. It makes me appreciate God more (Int.2.M).

Praise and worship in our local languages makes me enjoy the atmosphere. I feel the presence more with the praise in the local language (Int. 5. M).

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<sup>453</sup> Bediako, Kwame. *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995; Bediako, Kwame. "Understanding African Theology in the Twentieth Century: The Task and Relevance of a Critical Historical Reflection." *Studies in World Christianity* 10, no. 1 (2004): 1-21; Afe Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

Mostly, when we meet after service, we speak our local languages. So for me, anything in our local language is more appropriate (Int. 8. M).

Additionally, another subtheme that emerged was religious belief. This is crucial because participants' perspectives highlighted how these beliefs are imparted and shape religious constructs in their everyday lives. A few participants noted that:

We usually have intercession prayers for our families, leaders and our country. We repeat these prayers so that everybody is part of the prayer service (Int. 6. L).

We believe that when we pray for our leaders and the nation, there will be peace and development. The nation flourishes, and here in Thailand, we will also flourish (Int.9. M).

Mostly, we reserve some seats for our elders in the service as a way of tradition (Int. 51. M).

For some participants, religious belief was expressed as an extension of their culture. In this observation, I highlight the diversity of the local church's members and their cultural awareness. This was particularly evident during their dance performances. This is as follows:

They engaged in dances such as "Agbadza," traditionally associated with the Ewe ethnic group, and "Adowa," typical of the Ashanti, during moments of praise. Notably, the rhythms guiding these dances did not stem from traditional drums that dictate dance sequences; rather, they were influenced by local African songs. Many of these songs centred on themes of Christ's victory and reign, which naturally led to the incorporation of the "Adowa" dance moves.<sup>454</sup>

Equally significant was the communal meal shared after the service. This is as follows:

Despite the church being located in Thailand, the leaders deemed it essential to serve traditional Ghanaian dishes. The local foods prepared included "Banku" made from cassava dough and corn dough and "Kenkey," made from fermented corn dough mixed with cassava dough. Due to the scarcity of cassava, they opted to use what they referred to as "Sugi." While observing the representation of various Ghanaian ethnic groups within the church, I noticed that this diversity did not lead to any conflict in how they expressed their culture through music and dance. Instead, it showcased the richness and variety of their ethnic backgrounds, emphasizing themes of family and community sharing.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Participant observation report (2018).

<sup>455</sup> Participant observation report (2018).

During my observations related to the subtheme of religious belief, I noted that there were a few Thais present in the church. This is reported as follows:

After attending several services, it became evident that the church members were eager to engage in friendly exchanges with the Thais. In their culture, Thais greet one another by performing a 'WAI,' which involves bringing both hands together close to their head. This practice contrasts with how Ghanaians typically extend greetings. While the Thais offered the WAI, some church members extended their hands for handshakes, a gesture they used with other congregants as well. This interaction highlights cultural misalignment.<sup>456</sup>

The participants' narratives, strongly support Adogame and Spickard's concept of African diasporic religion, as a transnational practice that enables migrants to preserve cultural and religious ties to their homeland. Additionally, Adadey and Barnabas's concept of Pentecostalism as an "imaginary social space with practical ramifications" offers a valuable lens for interpreting these findings. The interviews reveal that the Ghanaian Pentecostal congregation in Thailand functions not just as a place of worship, but as a dynamic social and cultural space where identity and community values are nurtured. The use of Akan, Ewe, and Ga in worship enhances emotional connection, while participants' joy and heightened awareness of God, highlight, how language and music express their faith in a foreign setting (Ints. 2, 3, 5, 8, 10).

Intercessory prayers for families and the preservation of cultural practices, such as reserving seats for elders, along with the sharing of Ghanaian foods like Banku and kenkey, further transform the church into a "home away from home." These practices illustrate how religious belief is embodied in everyday cultural expressions and social relationships. Importantly, the findings indicate that Pentecostal space in Thailand fosters cultural reproduction, allowing Ghanaian migrants to maintain their Christian faith while preserving aspects of their cultural heritage in the host society.<sup>457</sup>

Consequently, these findings enrich Adogame and Spickard's framework by revealing that transnational religious identity is sustained not solely through institutional networks and ties to the homeland, but also through embodied and emotionally resonant experiences in worship, music, language, and collective memory. In this regard, Ghanaian-language Pentecostal worship, emerges as a crucial mechanism for reproducing belongingness and preserving cultural continuity within the migrant context.<sup>458</sup>

<sup>456</sup> Participant observation report (2018).

<sup>457</sup> Adadey and Barnabas, "Pentecostalism and Current Development in West Africa," 101.

<sup>458</sup> Adogame and Spickard, *Religion Crossing Boundaries*, 112-15.

The findings indicated that there is no definitive point of convergence between the cultural identity of the CoP and the host context. Instead, they suggest a continual process of cultural reproduction, where preserving cultural identity must be carefully balanced with awareness of the local context. In this dynamic space, it is suggested that cultural relativism can be viewed not just as an abstract concept, but as a practical framework for navigating missions in cross-cultural settings.

This finding exposes limitations in Kwame Bediako's contextualization framework. Bediako argued that similarities between African traditional religion and Christianity made it possible to meaningfully reinterpret the Christian message within African contexts. Central to his model is the idea that culture and theology must inform one another through an interpretive process.<sup>459</sup> However, while Bediako acknowledged these cultural parallels, this study's findings indicate that in diaspora settings, such as Thailand, the encounter between African culture and host culture may result in a more 'conservative church posture', a phenomenon also noted by Andrew Thomson.<sup>460</sup> In addition, the findings suggest that when African-initiated churches migrate, they often find themselves as religious minorities in socially vulnerable contexts. In response, these churches tend to reinforce their moral boundaries by emphasizing discipline, establishing clear authority structures, and adhering to traditional teachings to maintain their identity and cohesion at the expense of the host culture, as evidenced in the study.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, both subthemes, family values and cultural expression, emerge as relational and transferable components within African Pentecostal spirituality, linking cultural relativism and historical consciousness. They not only define the internal life of the CoP in Thailand, but also influence its capacity to grow and adapt in new cultural environments when engaged carefully. However, a notable gap remains: the findings do not clearly identify the role of the host culture in shaping or influencing the development of the CoP. The findings suggest an area for further research: how interaction with Thai cultural norms, values, and religious sensitivities may affect both the spiritual formation and missional strategies of African Pentecostal communities in Thailand.

## ***Missiological Implications***

This research highlights the importance of engaging with the African expression of spirituality, particularly through the lens of family structures and cultural practices, as a

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<sup>459</sup> K. D. Amanor, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in Ghana and the African Culture: Confrontation or Compromise," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18, no. 1 (2009): 123-129; Thomson, "Learning from the African Experience," 35.

<sup>460</sup> Thomson, "Learning from the African Experience," 35.

viable path for missional development. The study advances that African spirituality is deeply rooted in cultural reproduction, where elements such as drumming and dancing are not merely cultural expressions but carry spiritual significance, often serving as non-verbal theological narratives within worship and praise. Recognizing and cultivating these expressions can enable the local church in diaspora to foster a spirituality that is both contextually grounded and theologically rich, effectively making the gospel feel “at home,” while communally inviting the host culture.

In light of this, the study identified cultural reproduction and preservation as missiological tools in diasporic mission in Thailand, whereby churches can intentionally identify cultural links that support spiritual formation without merely migrating or imitating foreign models. This approach emphasizes the preservation and contextual integration of authentic cultural values, offering a constructive way to navigate tensions between traditions of host culture and contemporary mission. As such, this contribution provides a framework for a paradigm shift in African Christian leadership, equipping the church to engage more effectively with both indigenous cultures and cross-cultural mission fields.

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